

Train of Thought

Discovering a shared European identity on the railway

by Diane Pernet

'United in Diversity—European Attitudes' is a project for the French railway company Thalys. Initiated by independent curator Caroline Siobhan Ryan, the project is led by Dutch artists Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek, who work under the label Exactitudes—a contraction of 'exact' and 'attitude.' For the project, the pair worked with French scenographer Olivier Boisson. The actual shoot began on Bastille Day in the public-private space of Rotterdam Central Station. After three weeks, the makeshift studio moved to Paris' Gare du Nord. During each three-week period, Versluis and Uyttenbroek observed the public. They watched and waited for certain similar dress codes to emerge. A lot of water and coffee was consumed.

The gist of the project is to show common identities in Europe that go well beyond national frontiers. During their stay in both Rotterdam and Paris, travelers and other members of the public were invited into a makeshift studio to be photographed. When the subjects arrive in the studio, they find a wall of photographs showing people that are basically dressed in the same manner as they are. What is interesting is that the people are never offended by this discovery.

Versluis and Uyttenbroek acted almost like anthropologists as they made an enduring document of our times. The project records people's attempts to distinguish themselves from others by assuming a group identity. This idea is taken to extremes in the objectivity by which Exactitudes stylistically analyzes the people placed in front of their camera. At the end, Exactitudes came up with six photographic series that reveal those common identities that make up European citizenship. Once documented, the images were superimposed outside the carriages of various Thalys trains. Through this traveling medium, the idea of a shared European identity becomes concrete and alive.



Rotterdam-based photographer Ari Versluis and stylist Ellie Uyttenbroek have worked together since 1994. Inspired by a shared interest in the striking dress codes of various social groups, they have systematically documented numerous identities over the last eight years. Although Rotterdam has proven to be a rich source of inspiration, the two have worked in cities abroad since 1990.



The mobile exhibition can be seen on Thalys trains traveling between Paris, Rotterdam, Brussels and Cologne until the end of this year.

www.exactitudes.com

100. Cocktail & Dreams—Rotterdam 2008
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