

Even as a child, Marion Eichmann saw more of the world than most people ever do. Her parents – her father an architect, her mother a fashion designer – took her and her brother with them on their travels around the world, through Asia and Africa. She recalls that when she was just three years old, she decided to become an artist, and describes drawing as her strategy to make these very different worlds her own: “When I was a child, I spent a lot of time drawing. Even at pre-school, I always had crayons in my hand. Later, at school, the lessons didn’t really interest me. Instead of paying attention, I would redesign the rooms in my head: I’d colour the walls red, the floors blue, the chairs yellow.” On the family’s travels



Marion Eichmann at her studio working on HM 10 P (lift truck and riser), 2021, paper collage in eight parts, 205 × 290 × 4 cm

to remote parts of the world, she kept diaries in which she captured on paper the vibrant hues of India, Afghanistan, Iran, China, Namibia and South Africa. Observe – draw – understand. Deconstructing and reassembling, line by line, form by form, creating a picture all her own, to gain familiarity, look behind the façade, and comprehend.

Both the colours and the motivation have been her constant companions since then: Marion Eichmann’s works gleam and shimmer in contrasting hues. Capturing unfamiliar places, creating familiarity from unknown terrain, bringing a sense of order to diversity through her drawings – these have been the leitmotifs of her work as an artist ever since. The major cycles of her work

centre on three of the world’s cosmopolitan cities, which she visited after completing her studies.

Her first journey took her to Tokyo in 2002, initially at the invitation of the Japanese designer Issey Miyake after his enthusiastic response to her final-year project at Berlin’s Weissensee Academy of Art. Marion Eichmann accepted the invitation but then decided that she would prefer to work alone. Surprised and fascinated by the strangeness of this Asian city, the hustle and bustle, the dense yet diverse urban architecture so different from Europe’s, the simultaneous proximity of temples and manga culture, tea ceremony and cutting-edge technology, she spent two months producing drawings in the streets of Tokyo. She later

turned her impressions into an installation, Tokyo mono. It consists of 50 low stools embellished with glued-on subway maps, pictograms, photographs, paper cups, adverts, ingredients lists, sweet wrappers and other packaging. The stools, both individually and especially when viewed together, depict in microcosm the flood of stimuli that so intrigued the artist – not just because they overwhelm the senses but also because they provide spaces of opportunity.

New York followed a year later. Here, it was the street canyons of Manhattan which caught Marion Eichmann’s interest – she would spend days at one and the same location in order to capture on paper the serried ranks of buildings,

crowded together in a small space, and the life pulsating within them. As with Tokyo, it was not just the familiar views and perspectives that interested her here in New York. On the contrary, the oversized artworks inspired by the US metropolis became picture puzzles in which the imposing façades, replicated in intricate detail, jostle alongside cranes, scaffolding, ladders, pails, air conditioning units and garbage, all telling a story of countless people’s daily routines and working lives. In her Berlin studio, she produced larger-format works, incorporating found objects whose colours harmonise with those of the surrounding surfaces and reflect the real lives of the people who occupy the buildings.



Traffic lights (in the Parliamentary District), 2021, paper collage in three parts, 157 × 72.5 × 4 cm

**Cover:** Sightseeing (tourist bus in front of the Reichstag building), 2022, paper collage, graphite, paper, 150 × 130 × 3 cm

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Camera (transmission camera from the plenary hall in the Reichstag building), 2022, paper collage in two parts, 42.5 × 72.5 × 4 cm

## The World in Paper: Drawing to Capture the Unfamiliar

Marion Eichmann recreates the world in paper and makes it her own

In New York, Marion Eichmann began to develop the method which characterises her artistic practice to this day. She begins by producing sketches at the scene, measuring spaces in-between, distances and dimensions, taking note of distinctive features and colours. Back in her studio, she converts the sketches into meticulously detailed drawings which incorporate all her observations. Then in a third step, she applies scraps of coloured paper or produces objects with three-dimensional depth, like a relief.

After New York came the third stage in her measuring of the world – this time located right on the boundary where East meets West. In 2009, Istanbul – the cosmopolitan hub and place of origin of two world cultures – inspired

more than 500 coloured drawings on paper, produced while she explored the city on foot. The street views and open spaces depicted in these drawings are as vibrant as the city itself, captured in rapid strokes and splashes of colour, expressionist in a very literal sense. Later, she turned the drawings into paper reliefs in which awnings, banners, shop windows, façades and power lines protrude from the paper like pop-up books and convey the impression of a real-life space in microcosm – one where the onlooker might go for a gentle stroll. After some time, Eichmann created large-format scenes, similar to the New York artworks, in which the mood of transient chaos is superseded by precise compositions of great tranquillity and beauty.



There is a fourth city which has come to symbolise the cycles in the artist's oeuvre: Berlin, where Marion Eichmann has lived since 1993. Although home is not an unfamiliar place, the face of this city is ever-changing, a constant source of inspiration for her work. Here too, she is interested in façades and streetscapes, but much of her work in Berlin consists of detail views, sometimes even still lifes with plants, and portraits. But often, she devotes her attention to mundane objects, mainly vending machines, whose form and purpose seem to hold a particular fascination for her – their technical transience bearing witness to the rapid pace of life in our civilisation. Machines and devices that

once embodied modernity and progress quickly fall out of fashion: cigarette machines and bubble gum dispensers, for example, were a part of everyday life that we took for granted only a few years ago, yet in Eichmann's detailed paper reconstructions, they seem like relics of a bygone era. An entire installation was devoted to laundromats – the self-service laundries that are increasingly vanishing from the urban space. Marion Eichmann reconstructed the machines in such faithful detail that some visitors to her exhibition arrived with bags full of laundry (and went away disappointed).

The detailed observations of Berlin's urban transformation attest to the artist's familiarity with the city. That familiarity, however, did not previously extend to the German Bundestag, which has its seat here in the Reichstag Building – even though the Art Council acquired two works by Marion Eichmann for the parliamentary Art Collection in 2015. Schellack I and Schellack II depict two shelves with spray cans, shellac and acrylic paints, fixatives, oils and other necessities used by artists to create their paintings and every other type of colour work. The bottles and packages are jumbled together, some poised on top of others, and show clear signs of use. It is, as it were, a glance behind the scenes of the creative process: these are the materials from which art can be produced. In themselves, these objects



would not be worthy of being recreated; that is reserved for the products – the paintings, drawings or murals – created with their assistance. But that is precisely what makes Marion Eichmann's work so distinctive: the objects that she portrays symbolise something greater than themselves; they are material emblems of processes, ideas and concepts, witnesses to life lived, and sometimes (as in this case), promises or predictions of things to come. And always, her works convey a sense of understatement rather than pathos, the everyday rather than the extraordinary.

In November 2020, we started a conversation with the artist about a possible commission. Marion Eichmann's response was cautious as much as curious. Like most Berliners, she was familiar with the parliamentary quarter from outside and from the media,

but otherwise, it was largely unknown territory to her. Clearly, these were precisely the conditions that were sure to pique her interest: strangeness and unfamiliarity at once. From spring 2021 to March 2022, Marion Eichmann came to the Bundestag many times to work at its premises. She visited the buildings and learned about the functions of the various sites, worked in conference rooms, on the plenary level, at the foot of the dome of the Reichstag Building and in the spacious hall of the Paul Löbe Building, and discovered the sports hall, the service areas and the libraries. In May 2021, we invited her to showcase her work at an open studio event in the restaurant – known as the Lampenladen – in the Paul Löbe Building and answer questions from visitors. It soon became apparent that her initial hesitancy, which

**left:** Reichstag, 2021, graphite on paper, 84.5 × 152 cm

**right:** Silver eagle (Bundestag Eagle by Ludwig Gies in the plenary hall in the Reichstag building), 2022, paper collage, 40 × 50 × 1.5 cm

she explained was due to her respect for Parliament, had given way to an unbridled enthusiasm for working there as much and as often as possible. The sketches and collages that she produced during her visits were then taken back to her studio and transformed into complex views of façades and interior spaces or meticulously detailed reconstructions of individual elements such as fire alarms, warning signs and pallet trucks.

Over the course of those many months, an extraordinary body of work emerged in which large-scale views and tiny details are finely balanced. Here too, the artist has taken something that was strange to her and made it her own, making it accessible to herself – and us – through her work in paper.



## Marion Eichmann Sight.Seeing Bundestag

