

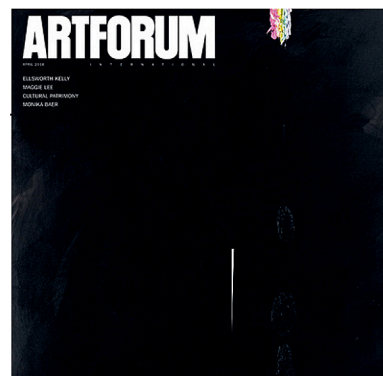
Larissa Fassler

GALERIE JÉRÔME POGGI

Writing about “pickpockets and paranoia in France” for the *New Yorker* in 2014, Adam Gopnik described Paris’s Gare du Nord as a place where tourists, “looking for a week’s pleasure, mingled with travellers recently arrived from Bulgaria and Romania, looking for a job or a new life.” This same crossroads—the French capital’s oldest and, notoriously, unruliest train station—became the focus of Larissa Fassler’s attention while on a residency in Paris in 2014. Over the course of three months, the Berlin-based Canadian artist spent hundreds of hours, day and night, surveying and documenting the Gare du Nord’s physical space and goings-on. The resulting five paintings (all 2015), which resemble obsessively annotated architectural blueprints, are assiduous observations of the station’s design, infrastructure, and diverse transient population. Installed against a backdrop of enlarged black-and-white photos of the station’s neoclassical facade of allegorical female statues representing various cities in Europe, Fassler’s latest series describes contemporary modes of migration, exchange, and regulation.

Similar to Fassler’s previous mappings of urban spaces, such as London’s Regent Street and Berlin’s Alexanderplatz, which were concurrently on view in a retrospective at Paris’s Centre Culturel Canadien, the Gare du Nord schemas are scaled to the artist’s body. Counting her footsteps across the station’s main hall, up and down each train platform, and around coffee kiosks and ticket-vending machines, Fassler personally charted every publicly accessible area. She also recorded notes about what she heard, saw, and smelled. Whereas earlier works were digitally processed—her sketches and notes scanned, manipulated on the computer, then printed—Fassler made the Gare du Nord paintings directly on canvas. Pencil smudges, layers of paint, and overlapping pen lines heighten the immediacy and intimacy of the artist’s patently crude cartography.

Gare du Nord I, a bird’s-eye view of the station’s main hall, regional and international terminals, and connecting local metro platforms, is the most straightforward in the series. Rows of horizontal lines signify



stairwells, circled numbers indicate metro lines, and small black rectangles represent security cameras. Dotted lines radiating from each camera approximate the scope of surveillance. The sense of scrutiny is even more acute in *Gare du Nord II–V*, which are annotated with observations in blue, black, and red pen. In *Gare du Nord III*, for instance, pithy but evocative descriptions of noises and odors range from BANG! MAN LOSES HIS GRIP ON HEAVY SUITCASE TO CONSTANT SMELL OF WAFTING URINE. Meanwhile, x’s representing people are accompanied by arrows indicating movement, or are identified with captions such as COUPLE STANDS HUGGING AND KISSING AND HUGGING, THREE POLICE, OF 2 MEN CROUCHING, QUIETLY WHISPERING. Census-type data about Gare du Nord’s transient population, including race, sex, and age, is indicated with tally marks. Perhaps to keep herself entertained during long, watchful periods, Fassler also took absurd tallies, for instance counting Apple EarPods (four), men wearing sunglasses inside (eighteen), and pink items of clothing (twenty-two).

Dress styles and colors are represented in *Gare du Nord IV* and *V* as vibrant abstract backgrounds based on Dutch wax-print fabrics often worn by African men and women in Paris. In addition to referencing the station’s dynamic energy and demographics, these more painterly works emphasize a connection to nineteenth-century Impressionist depictions of Parisian train stations. Recalling Monet’s 1877 Gare Saint-Lazare paintings, which underline the lively transitional nature of the place with agitated brushwork, Fassler’s diagrammatic works uphold the train station as a symbol of modern life: a noisy, colorful, smelly intersection where worlds collide.

—Mara Hoberman

View of “Larissa Fassler,” 2016. Photo: Nicolas Brasseur.