

Myers, Julian. Dave Muller. Frieze, January/February 2005, pgs. 113-114



Dave Muller  
*Ann's Top Fourteen (I Can't Count)* (detail)  
 2004 Acrylic on paper 213x91cm

## Dave Muller

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, USA

Half-way through his essay 'The Curves of the Needle' (1927) Theodor Adorno discusses one of the most familiar advertising images of the 20th century. 'The dog on records listening to his master's voice', he writes, 'is the right emblem for the primordial effect stimulated by the gramophone. What the gramophone listener actually wants to listen to, and what the recorded artist offers, is a substitute image of his own person, which he would like to guard and possess. Records', he continues, 'are virtual photographs of their owners, flattering photographs – ideologies.'

Dave Muller's recent exhibition, 'I Like Your Music', is about records and how they mediate relationships. The show comprises almost 50 paintings and is a development of Muller's wall installation at the 2004 Whitney Biennial. It includes new versions of that show's centrepiece, a lovely epic flow chart of rock history reproduced from Reebee Garofalo and Steve Chapple's *Rock and Roll Is Here To Pay* (1977).

Where the Biennial presented this work as an altarpiece, however, with painted panels and a drawn predella, here it forms part of an illustrated landscape. A painted horizon, *Old Growth* (2004), extends around the walls of the first gallery with squat palm trees and paintings punctuating an Arcadian skyline; placed in this diorama, the chart takes on a geological appearance only implied in the Whitney version. Above the horizon line the chart has the look of a land formation, while below it reads as swamp or cesspool, fossilized band names floating in a genre tar pit. Stylized grass grows from the pit's loam while vines wriggle across the hill's edge; pudgy cacti flower beneath the gallery's fluorescent lighting.

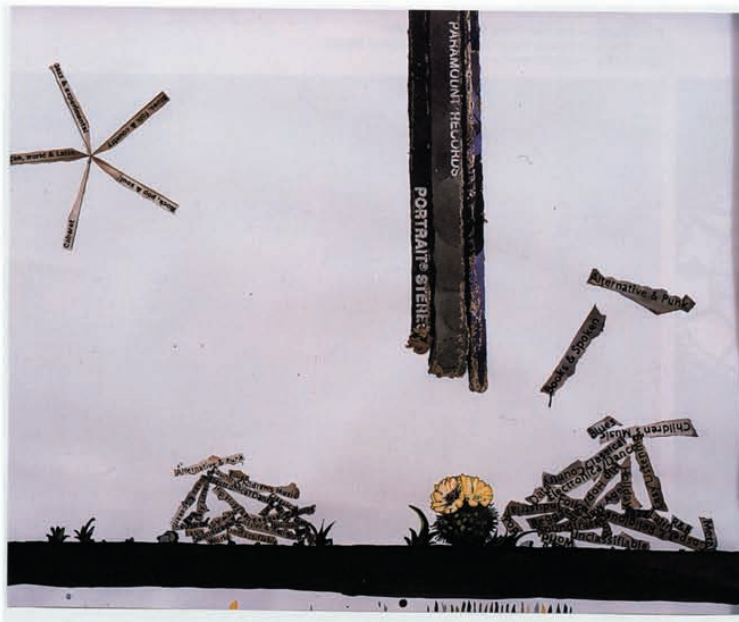
The sun, in this case, is represented by Sun Ra, whose radiant face hangs high in the sky, surrounded by a bold-faced query: 'What would Sun Ra do?' Riffing on the evangelical credo 'What would Jesus do?', it casts Ra as the source of light and life, as both saint and martyr. Other heavenly bodies traverse this sky as well: pinwheel constellations of pulverized musical genre headings, including adult alternative, grime, electro, crunk and so on. Muller's landscape is, *pace* Adorno, primordial, but comic as well. Viewers are cast into it as rock 'n' roll dinosaurs, lumbering haplessly through a reified terrain of picks, lists and charts.

The gallery's second room features a more domestic tableau, enlarged and unfamiliar. Several tall acrylic paintings, painted in Muller's characteristic light, loose style, render the spines of LPs leaning against invisible shelves. The titles of these works reveal that they are portraits, of a kind, of his friends' favourite records: *Ann's Top Fourteen*, *Jeff's Top Ten* (for the last month I was single), *Matthew's Top Ten* (1979-83) (all 2004). The paintings are engrossing in their naturalism and attention to detail. Muller lovingly describes their marks of age; a water-damaged copy of Kraftwerk's *Autobahn* (1974) is warped, and cracks crawl along the worn printed-paper edge of Joni Mitchell's *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975).

But the paintings are also absorbing for their exploration of connoisseurship and self-presentation, although the pleasures on offer indulge what is probably one of my own more shameful characteristics: an abject enjoyment at riffling through other people's collections. 'The Boss' makes Ann's top 14, as does the

Beat (known as the English Beat in the US: this must be a UK pressing). Jeff foregoes Fleetwood Mac's popular 1977 album *Rumours* for the knottier *Tusk* (1979). Matt's got a vinyl copy of Lizzy Mercier Descloux's contemporaneous *Press Colour*.

It is to Muller's credit that he estranges this fetishistic compulsion even as he indulges it. This happens primarily through the form of the work, which is rendered with a material devotion worthy of Gustave Courbet. All the cracked sleeves and damaged vinyl mark these objects as the kind of commodities that critiques of mass culture don't quite make room for, the side of reification that Adorno couldn't get his head round: these are objects that accrue aura and value even as they fall apart, artefacts reorganized into systems of meaning that are anything but given or lifeless. What's more, Muller has enlarged their proportions to suggest the basic dimensions of the human body; the paintings present themselves as surrogate people, 'substitute images', life portraits in an honest sense of the term. This, I suppose, is what Adorno calls the record's primordial effect, the moment of (self-)recognition built into the phrase 'I like your music'. Julian Myers



Dave Muller  
*A Landscape of Piles and Looming Etcetera*  
 2004 Acrylic on paper 81x102cm