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design processes*

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THE DESIGN OF EURO BANKNOTES

Drafts and decision processes

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We are familiar the final result: euro banknotes with windows and gateways on the front and bridges on the back. Windows and gateways symbolize the European spirit of openness and cooperation. The twelve stars of the European Union represent the dynamism and harmony of contemporary Europe. Bridges symbolize communication among the people of Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world. Austrian banknote designer Robert Kalina created the new European paper money. But what were the alternatives?



Fig. 1. A view at the exhibition in the Bundesbank's Money Museum (Geldmuseum der Deutschen Bundesbank) at Frankfurt/Main.

The drafts of the new euro banknotes were put on public view for the first time at the Money Museum of the Deutsche Bundesbank between 8 October 2003 and 23 January 2004. The public viewing was set up by the European Central Bank

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(ECB) as a touring exhibition to be displayed by national central banks in various European countries. The 44 draft designs were presented in illuminated stand-alone display cases (100 cm × 100 cm). Reproductions of each of the 44 proposals for the seven denominations – both front and back – were displayed along with a description of the design ideas. Uniform presentation was necessary to achieve equal treatment of every draft (**Fig. 1**).

This article traces the historical background, the competition and decision procedures, and it presents a small selection of the proposals. It is a cross-section through contemporary banknote design as part of applied graphic design.

A. Background

The planning for the design of the euro banknotes took place during the preparatory stage of the European Monetary Union (EMU), from 1994 onwards. It was handled by the European Monetary Institute (EMI), which was in charge of technical preparation for the EMU. In November 1994, the Council of the EMI determined that the seven denominations of the banknotes would be 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros.

Creating a supranational series of banknotes for a maximum of 15 different nations was a historic first. This was a very sensitive matter because, up to that point, banknote designs had been inseparably linked with national self-image. Traditionally, portraits of real people and historical figures were found on banknotes. To avoid disputes among the nations participating in the European Monetary Union, it was obvious that portraits of famous European people were not an option because they would each have a national identity. Therefore, in June 1995, the EMI Council chose two themes for the banknote design: *ages and styles of Europe* and an *abstract/modern* design. It decided that the only words to appear on banknotes should be the name of the currency and the initials of the issuing authority. Further written remarks – for example, the denomination written in words – would have been too complicated because of the large number of languages this would have involved.

Deciding on the name of the new currency was a question of a more political nature. It was therefore up to the European Council to make the decision. In December 1995, at their meeting in Madrid, the government heads of the twelve member countries (before the accession of Austria, Sweden and Finland) adopted the name “*euro*” for the uniform currency. (It has been proposed by Theo Waigel, the then German Minister of Finance.)

At the beginning of February 1996, the Banknote Working Group, consisting of cash experts from the EU national central banks, submitted design briefs for the two themes.

B. Competition

The design competition was launched on 12 February 1996. The entrants had to be proposed by the national central banks of the EU, each being eligible to name up to three designers. Only fourteen EU central banks took part, as Denmark's National Bank decided not to participate. Altogether, 29 individuals or teams were nominated, all of which had experience in banknote design. In some cases, they were employees of the national central banks, as banknote design is sometimes handled in-house.

The design brief, comprising various parts, initially set forth two general preconditions of a political nature:

- “All designs must ensure gender equality and avoid any national bias”.
- “The banknotes must be clearly identifiable as European and should embody a cultural and political message that is ready acceptable to all European citizens”.

To have consistent criteria for judging the drafts, it was stipulated for both themes (i.e., both *ages and styles of Europe* and *abstract/modern*) that the banknote design should successfully combine security features with artistic creativity. The banknotes should be easy to recognize, secure against counterfeiting and visually attractive. The technical features required for the banknotes were the following.

Words and numbers

The name of the currency – euro – should to be shown on the banknotes in both the Latin (*EURO*) and Greek (*ΕΥΡΩ*) alphabets, and the denomination should appear at least twice on each side of the banknotes.

- The initials of the European Central Bank in the five language variants – BCE, ECB, EZB, EKT and EKP – should appear on the front of the banknotes.
- The signature of the ECB President should be positioned close to the ECB initials.
- The twelve stars of the European Union should be included in the design on the front of the banknotes, but could also appear on the back.

Size and colour

- € 5 120 mm × 62 mm, grey
- € 10 127 mm × 66 mm, red

- € 20 133 mm × 70 mm, blue
- € 50 140 mm × 74 mm, orange
- € 100 147 mm × 78 mm, green
- € 200 153 mm × 78 mm, yellow/brown
- € 500 160 mm × 78 mm, purple

Design features of both themes

Ages and styles of Europe: Each banknote had to depict a particular historical period (“age”) and architectural feature (“style”) from the period, to illustrate the theme. The denominations and their respective “ages” are as follows:

- € 5 Classical
- € 10 Romanesque
- € 20 Gothic
- € 50 Renaissance
- € 100 Baroque and Rococo
- € 200 Age of iron and glass
- € 500 Modern 20th century architecture

abstract/modern: Each banknote should show a contemporary or modern depiction of abstract and figurative elements.

The participants had to base their designs on the theme *ages and styles of Europe* and/or use the *abstract/modern* design. By 13 September 1996, a total of 44 entries had been submitted, 27 “traditional” and 17 “abstract/modern”. An identification code was assigned to each proposal, to ensure that the selection procedure would be anonymous and impartial.

C. The drafts (examples, in alphabetical order of the countries)

1. Austria: Robert Kalina (Oesterreichische Nationalbank), Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. The concept focuses on three key elements of the new banknotes: the twelve stars of the EU, the denomination and security features, and computer artwork as an abstract-figurative element.

(c) European Central Bank.

3. Belgium and Luxembourg: Brigitte Matoul, Benoit Grégoire, and Véronique Boland (Nationale Bank van België/Banque Nationale de Belgique), Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern

4. Belgium and Luxembourg: John Stevenson, Ages and styles of Europe, Stuart Rost (both De la Rue Currency) abstract/modern (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3. The overall theme is the idea of “from many comes one” (*E pluribus Unum*), based on a key idea underlying the EU – Front: light – colour spectrum – paint and ink.
Back: sound – music – tones.

(c) European Central Bank.

4. Belgium and Luxembourg: Maryke Degryse, abstract/modern
5. Belgium and Luxembourg: Kenneth Ponsaers and Nathalie Paquot, Ages and styles of Europe
6. Belgium and Luxembourg: Patricia Vouez and Monique Golaire (all Nationale Bank van België/Banque Nationale de Belgique), abstract/modern (Fig. 4)



Fig. 4. The series is based on the concepts of motion, geometric harmony, natural forces and time. Front: vortex line, cats and tree bark. Back: a fob watch, magnetism and the workings of a modern wristwatch.

(c) European Central Bank.

7. Finland: Johanna and Daniel Bruun, Ages and styles of Europe, Erik Bruun, abstract/modern (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5. Front: nature conservation, a woodcock. Back: solar energy.
(c) European Central Bank.

8. France: Alain Guérault, Ages and styles of Europe
9. France: Pierrette Lambert, Ages and styles of Europe
10. France: Roger Pfund, Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern (Fig. 6)

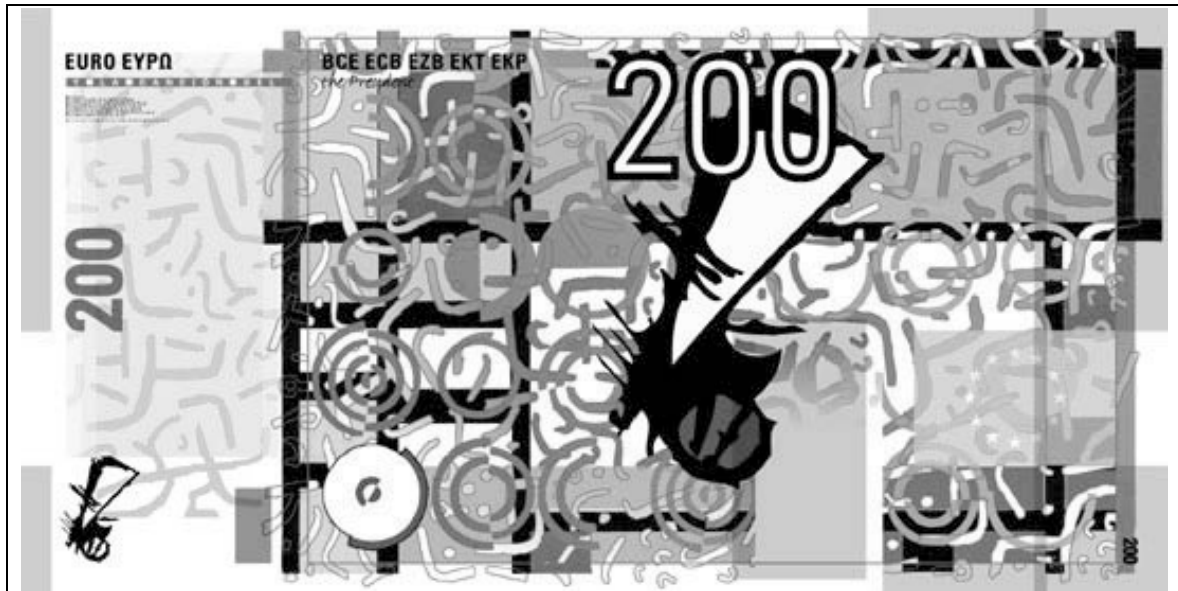


Fig. 6. The series is inspired by some of the most prominent trends in 20th century abstract art: the search for abstraction, fragmentation, etc.
(c) European Central Bank

11. **Germany: Reinhold Gerstetter (Bundesdruckerei GmbH)**, Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern
 12. **Germany: Johann Müller (Giesecke & Devrient GmbH)**, Ages and styles of Europe
 13. **Germany: Ernst and Lorli Jünger**, Ages and styles of Europe (**Fig. 7**)



Fig. 7. Baroque – Front: painting, wall relief, and scallop shell.
 Back: arcade with column, hall with archway.
 (c) European Central Bank

Klaus Michel and Sanne Jünger (Jünger + Michel, Corporate Culture), abstract/modern (Fig. 8)

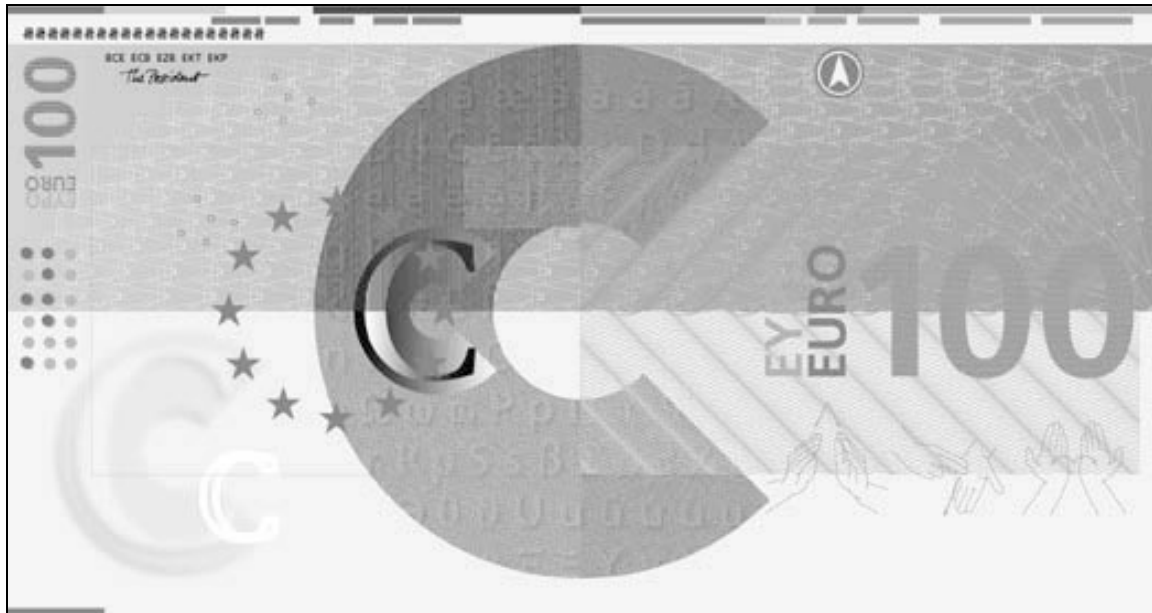


Fig. 8. Language and communication.
(c) European Central Bank

14. Greece: A team of designers from the Bank of Greece: Maria Antonatou, Areti Michelioudaki, Nikos Nikolaou, Ioannis Pipinis, Pericles Sotiriou, Ages and styles of Europe (Fig. 9)



Fig. 9. Modern 20th century architecture – Front: *Mr Clergyman* (photo by August Sander, 1876–1964), interior of Villa Savoye in Poissy-sur-Seine, near Paris (1928–1931 by Le Corbusier, 1887–1965). Back: part of the Schröder House in Utrecht (1923/1924 by De Stijl architect Gerrit Thomas Rietveld, 1888–1964), part of Villa Savoye. (c) European Central Bank.

15. Ireland: Robert Ballagh, Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern (Fig. 10)

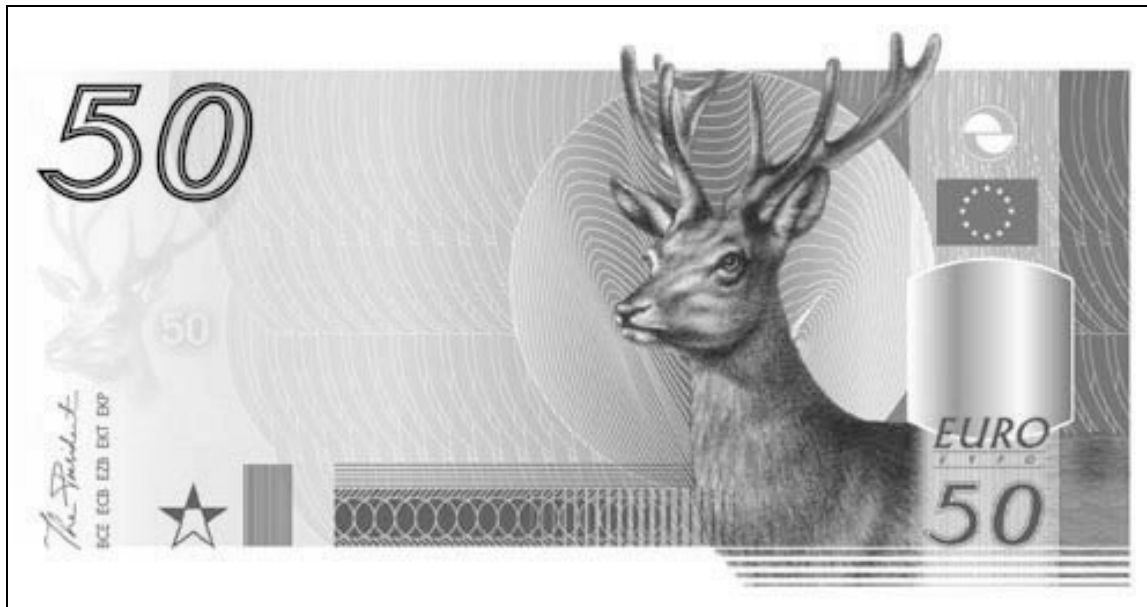


Fig. 10. Front: a stag, the Roman symbol of hunting, representing prudence. Back: progress in “written” communication, from European cave paintings of hunting scenes, via Roman letters inscribed in stone, to moveable type. (c) European Central Bank.

16. Italy: Giovanni Pino (Banca d'Italia), Ages and styles of Europe
17. Italy: Guglielmo Savini (Banca d'Italia), Ages and styles of Europe
18. Italy: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato S. p. A.,
Ages and styles of Europe (Fig. 11)



Fig. 11. Renaissance – Front: portrait of a Renaissance woman.
Back: view of a Renaissance palace.
(c) European Central Bank.

19. Netherlands: Robert Deodaat Emile (Ootje) Oxenaar, abstract/modern
 20. Netherlands: Jaap Drupsteen, Ages and styles of Europe (Fig. 12)
 21. Netherlands: Inge Madlé (Joh. Enschedé Security Printing BV),
 Ages and styles of Europe

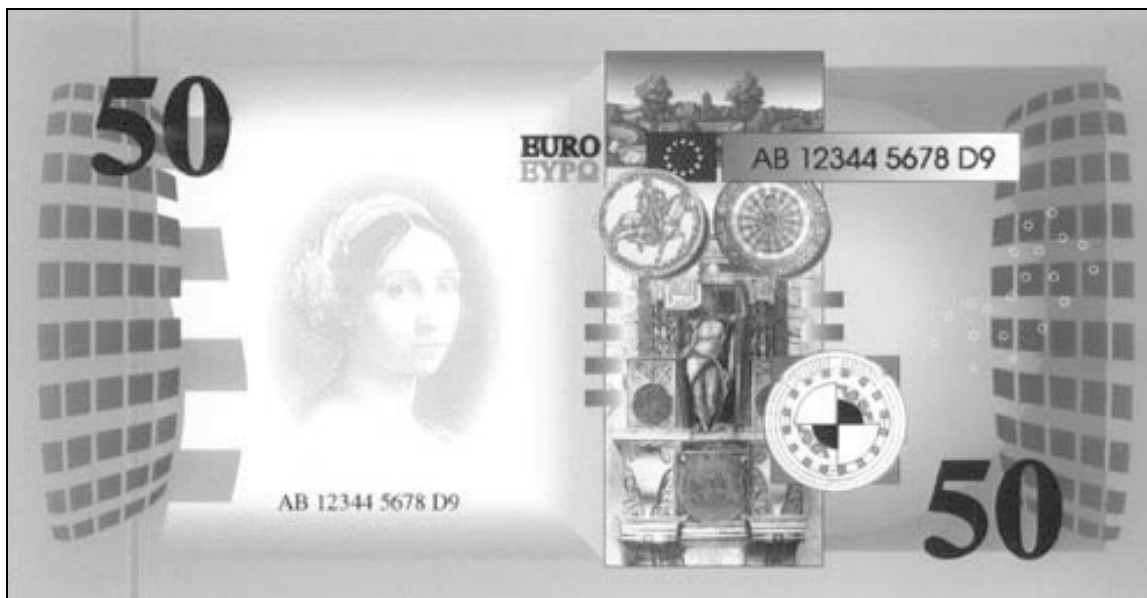


Fig. 12. All denominations show a collage of the ages and styles of Europe, as well as structural and ornamental features. The gradients and solid-colour parts contain the latest security features against counterfeiting.

(c) European Central Bank.

22. Portugal: Luís Filipe de Abreu, Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern
 23. Portugal: Renato Manfredi, Ages and styles of Europe (Fig. 13), Sandrine-Ludmilla Jung (both KBA-Giori S. A., De La Rue Giori S. A.), abstract/modern



Fig. 13. Romanesque – Front: the monastic age (a copying monk, inspired by antique illuminated manuscripts) and Romanesque architectural elements.

Back: again a copying monk, part of an illuminated manuscript; archway inspired by Northern Italian architecture.

(c) European Central Bank.

24. Spain: Miguel Angel Plaza (Real Casa de la Moneda, Fábrica Nacional de Moneda y Timbre), Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern

25. Spain: Enric Satué Llop, Ages and styles of Europe, abstract/modern (Fig. 14)

26. Spain: Yves Zimmermann and Ana Alavedra, Ages and styles of Europe



Fig. 14. Transport symbols.
(c) European Central Bank.

27. Sweden: Hannu Järviö and Karin Mörck-Hamilton (Crane AB, Tumba Bruk AB), Ages and styles of Europe (Fig. 15)



Fig. 15. Classical – Front: portrait inspired by the Belvedere Apollo, an Ionic capital and a Roman mosaic. Back: Doric temple in Corinth and amphitheatre in Epidaurus. (c) European Central Bank.

28. United Kingdom: Colin Braun, Ages and styles of Europe, Terry Thorn (both De La Rue Currency, Harrisons & Sons Ltd), abstract/modern (Fig. 16)



Fig. 16.

[No description and interpretation by the artist available.]
(c) European Central Bank.

29. United Kingdom: Andrew Ward (Bank of England Printing Works), Ages and styles of Europe

30. United Kingdom: Mark Scovell (Komori Currency Technology), Ages and styles of Europe (Fig. 17)

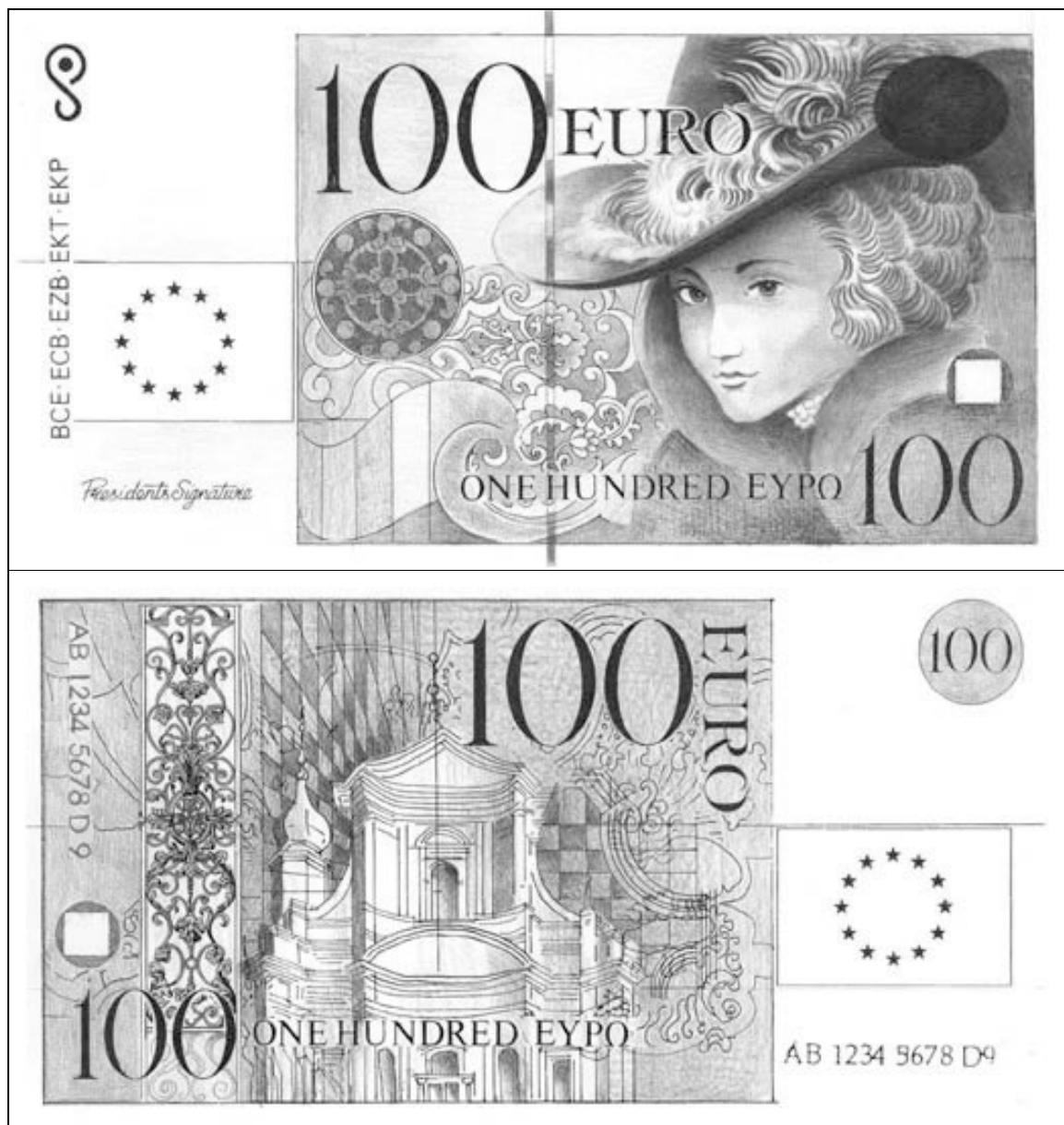


Fig. 17. Baroque and Rococo – Front: portrait of a woman, which alludes to paintings by Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), and Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), plus Baroque patterns. Back: church with tile patterns, an iron lattice and a Baroque ceiling. English-Greek language mix for the denomination. (c) European Central Bank.

C. Decision procedure

In September 1996, a jury made up of 14 independent experts in marketing, design and art history judged the entries. The jury members were completely independent of any national central bank or printing works involved in the competition. The designs were sent to a notary, who assigned a number to each series to render them anonymous.

The five best design series for each theme were short-listed. A public survey concerning the ten short-listed designs was carried out among 2,000 people from all over Europe (except Denmark), to find out what they thought of these designs. EOS (European Omnibus Survey) Gallup Europe, which has considerable experience in Europe-wide public opinion surveys, was asked to conduct the survey. Two groups – professional cash handlers and representatives of the public – were interviewed using a detailed questionnaire. They examined all ten design series.

In December 1996, the Council of the European Monetary Institute, based on the jury's suggestions and the survey results, selected the winning design series: euro banknotes with windows and gateways on the front and bridges on the back.

They represent the reality and spirit of what European integration has created today – a Europe promising opportunity and interchange. They illustrate very graphically why yet more countries will wish to become part of this euro area (Wim Duisenberg, 30 August 2001).

For further reading:

European Central Bank (ed.): Euro Banknote Design Exhibition, Frankfurt/Main 2003.

Europäische Zentralbank and Deutsche Bundesbank (edd.): Der Euro im Entwurf. Auch so hätten unsere Banknoten aussehen können, Frankfurt/Main 2003.

Kalina, R.: Designing the euro banknotes, in: **Liebscher, K. and Seipel, W. (edd.):** From the Schilling to the Euro. Continuity and Stability, Vienna 2002, pp. 214–218.