

Daniel Miller, 'Tobias Buche, Neil Campbell, Ulrike Heise & Dan Peterman',
Frieze, January 2009

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Tobias Buche, Neil Campbell, Ulrike Heise & Dan Peterman

KLOSTERFELDE, BERLIN, GERMANY



Klosterfelde, exhibition view, 2009. Photographs: Nick Ash

'Less is more', said Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. 'Less is a bore', said Robert Venturi. Less provokes startling interpretative overreach, says the press release for Klosterfelde's untitled new exhibition. Tasked with describing a strikingly stark four-person group show, the document charts an 'overwhelming effect' in one case, a 'constant raising of questions' in another, and an undeniable 'sense of cruelty' in a third. Not unimpressive achievements!



The artists in question are Neil Campbell, Tobias Buche and Ulrike Heise. The silent fourth part belongs to Dan Peterman, who contributes the first work that visitors see. His minimalist sculpture (pictured above) – a quadratic column of vertical stakes – stands in the gallery atrium like a sentry, cutting off the view of the room, and threatening vague violence. The press release reports that 'the present arrangement of the tower, the artist insists, is not a supposed representation of its final form or purpose, but rather a reference to continuing (possibilities of) transformation.' The idea seems simple, if not simplistic: what stands for the moment as a tower of power might be easily reassembled into some more benign form.

Peterman's stakes are made from recycled plastic, a fact which grants the press release leave to discern in them natural themes. A more direct treatment of this misunderstood topic is given by Ulrike Heise's unblinkingly viscous video documentation of a slug slowly killing and eating an earthworm. Partly squamous, partly rugose, the ooze that this operation produces recalls H.P. Lovecraft in its forensic depiction of alien substances. The intermittent sound of children laughing on the audio track dryly emphasize horror.

The overwhelming effect claimed by the press release belongs to Neil Campbell's two massive black circles. Painted directly onto the walls of the gallery, the shapes are, admittedly, oddly unsettling. Reminiscent in some sense of an oversized pair of speakers, the shapes harbour a peculiar relationship to the space around them, for mathematical reasons remaining unclear.

Tobias Buche's work seems to me the most interesting of the quartet. Sharing the second room of the gallery with Campbell's wall-mural ghetto blaster, his contribution consists of four chipboards of scrappy found images, mixed with his own photos. Mainly black-and-white and printed on paper, the images seem like remainders, concerned less with depicting something than in marking a moment, or perhaps pressing a button. The stress is on portraiture, but applied from the side: individual subjects tend to be off-guard and unbalanced, going somewhere, involved in other things, lacking a clear or direct relationship to the camera. A leg comes through a ceiling in one case, in another, a man face down on a desk bears a cheek covered in pen scrawls. Elsewhere, more surreal and political and satirical images jostle, pursuing some cause of elusive significance in a world of contingent and tattered connections.

Buche's low-key presentation recalls Wolfgang Tillmans, but is less sentimental, and I think less contrived. Whereas Tillmans retains the figure of the heroic photographer, recording the vanishing summer of a still-meaningful world, Buche's agenda is colder, more realist, and in some ways, more moving.

Daniel Miller