

# ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2005

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## VIENNA

## KATYA SANDER

MUSEUM MODERNER KUNST  
STIFTUNG LUDWIG WIEN

Changes brought on by the gradual dismantling of Western Europe's welfare states are giving new urgency to questions about the function of public space and its potential uses: How are surveillance and control structured? In what ways does the hierarchical organization of public space become apparent? How is "the public" produced, and what roles do its participants play? Such questions came to the fore in the three video installations by Danish artist Katya Sander shown together under the title "The Most Complicated Machines Are Made of Words." *What Is Capitalism?*, 2003, shows the artist conducting a curious kind of man-in-the-street poll. She stands not in a crowded downtown pedestrian zone but rather in a bleak wasteland outside Copenhagen—she can be seen crossing the field in the background. Nonetheless a few people walk by. In the mirrored exhibition space, which extends the projection into infinity, the passersby come out of nothingness and disappear back into it, uncanny and otherworldly apparitions. But then Sander looks directly into the camera to make sure the equipment is still working, saying "Do we have an image?" and so breaks the illusion. She approaches her pedestrians with the question "What is capitalism?" They give vague, awkward responses: "A principle of expansion." "Like a big bubble that can only implode." "A system of representation. The way money represents a given value." "An economic system, a system of exploitation."

*Double Cinema*, 2000, stages a favorite tool of consumer capitalism: a focus group. Two videos projected on opposite walls show a consumer poll being conducted as researchers watch from behind a two-way mirror. It is a textbook situation that goes awry because the questions posed by the nervous woman moderating the discussion remain curiously vague, leaving the consumers confused. The work was displayed in a room arranged with opposite banks of tribunal seating for viewers, continuing Sander's critique of the surveillance apparatus of the focus group into the exhibition space.

Sander shows capitalism in various moments of failure. In *Exterior City*, 2005, the social system of the welfare state is revealed as a capitalistic pretext or a quasi-utopia. A young woman wends her way through the labyrinthine outdoor passages



Katya Sander, *Exterior City*, 2005, still from a color video, 24 minutes.



View of "Kris Martin," 2005.

of various apartment buildings, identified by a voice-over as social housing in Vienna and Malmö. This urban activist puts up posters, a few fleetingly recognizable lines of text addressing her DEAR FELLOW RESIDENTS OR DEAR CO-OP MEMBERS—an attempt, surely in vain, to find fellow agitators for an undefined cause. Architecture is presented as a carrier of social desires, in this case the fantasy that collective residential architecture will make for happiness despite neglecting the needs of individuals. Corresponding to the claustrophobic residential buildings, the closer you get to the screen, the narrower the exhibition space and the smaller the benches.

In all three works, some ideological conception of space (or lack thereof in the case of the wasteland of *What Is Capitalism?*) is borrowed from the video content and transposed to the architecture of the viewing room. This sustains the Foucauldian assumption that each of us participates in existing power structures, even in opposing them. Staging the interruptions and failures of utopian projects, the contradictoriness of systems, and disorientation in attempts to put these processes into words, Sander's works become paradoxically exhilarating.

—Nina Möntmann

Translated from German by Sara Ogger.

## DÜSSELDORF

## KRIS MARTIN

SIES + HÖKE

I'm rarely won over to a new artist by a single work, but it happened during the recent art fair in Cologne. When I entered the Sies + Höke booth, my gaze was unexpectedly

drawn to a gold-plated steel ball, sitting like an afterthought on the carpeting in the corner of the space. This work, by the young Belgian artist Kris Martin, immediately brought to mind images of golden orbs by James Lee Byars, the beauty of their spherical forms intensified by the brilliance of gold—but something more was going on here. I soon learned that this aesthetically perfect object, *100 years, 2004*, purportedly contains ten bombs set to explode in one hundred years. And suddenly everything was different: Unlike most artworks, meant to exist enduringly, the meaning of this orb's existence lay in its predicted obliteration, however far off.

But will the promised explosion really take place? Who can guarantee its fate in one hundred years? In any case, the work awoke in me an impatient curiosity to see more by this artist. In good time I was rewarded with this show of thirteen pieces—Martin's first substantial solo. A Chinese vase, over seven feet tall, stood in the space. *Untitled (vase)*, 2005, had already undergone the first stage of its gradual destruction, having aged over twenty years. Before it was installed in the gallery, however, the artist tipped it over, letting it break into a thousand pieces. He then reassembled it, piece by piece, and set it up again. At each new venue, it will be smashed by the artist and again glued back together. And so its owner faces a dilemma: Should he want to keep his artwork as whole as possible, he won't be able to loan it for further exhibition—but in so doing, he would be robbing the artwork of its *raison d'être*, which of course lies in its gradual destruction. The vase has been sold to a collector; we'll have to see whether it ever turns up again.

A small sheet of wall in a Baroque-style room also deals with themes of preservation. The piece, with a ballpoint pen, has been observed, the straight lines of text written by another still readily discernible in his own hand, had been taken from Kafka's story "The Metamorphosis" and lends the 2004 work a sense of mystery. The entire content of the work is printed into this single page, which it remains closed to the viewer, though right in front of them. It exists. Another series of text, also dedicated to the same theme, a text ceases to exist, leaving nothing. Martin painted the text in a period out of several years. Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is glued each one onto a separate sheet of paper. When the work is shown with this full stop, it is a work, *End-Point of a Sentence (Thomas Mann)*, 2004, and so art propagation and life—as does my current work, the next destructive-crime.

Translated

## BERLIN

## AYŞE ERKMEK

BARBARA WEISS

"Possessions" simply falls into the range of meanings of "Habseligkeiten," th