
Milch, 2000*

CARSTEN NICOLAI

Linienstr. 154, D-10115, Berlin, Germany

Milch is taken from Nicolai's first solo exhibition in the UK (shown in 2001) and is a special commission for Milch's industrial space. The minimal installation is a repetition of the same groups of objects four times over. There is a CD and amplifier connected to four 9" speaker cones by thick coils of black cable. A shallow 2 × 1 m tray containing water is placed on top of the speaker cones and sonic frequencies constantly stretch and bend the water's molecules. The surface shifts from absolute flatness through spirographic swirls to geometric grids, effects which are recorded in a series of photographs hung around the gallery.

Like much of his other sound and art work, this piece encompasses test-tone experiments but also recontextualises early C20th scientific experiments dealing with electricity. With minimal intervention, Nicolai emphasises the modular readymade qualities of the experiments and objects he uses in 'an attempt to erase the signature of the artist.' However, as is often the case with science, philosophy, and other forms of objective process, there is an exquisitely abstract level at which the phenomenon is set adrift from its own logic. This not dependent on a great expressive flourish, but by creating the conditions for these possibilities to reveal themselves. Beyond the physical science of the experiment, the installation echoes the painterly qualities so central to Donald Judd's modular sculpture. Furthermore, each module's tonal output randomly interacts with the others, at times drifting distinctly, and occasionally resonating with each other to create dense test-tone harmonics.

Ben Borthwick

Ben Borthwick is a regular curator and regular contributor to *The Wire* magazine. He will be publishing further work on Carsten Nicolai and Raster Noton (www.raster-noton.de) in the future. Original work: Cibachrome mounted on aluminium, 680 × 550 mm.

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