

J u l i a n R o s e f e l d t

M I D W E S T

## MIDWEST

A total installation with containers, cars, and tyres, film, sound and light as well as popcorn, concrete and a lot more by Julian Rosefeldt. Realized at Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg as central part of the exhibition *Wolfsburg Unlimited – A City as World Laboratory*.

Edited by Ralf Beil

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A vintage neon sign for 'MIDWEST Drive in' is mounted on a building facade. The sign features the word 'MIDWEST' in large, glowing yellow neon letters. Below it, the words 'Drive in' are written in a smaller, cursive script. At the bottom of the sign, the text 'open 24 hours' is displayed in a simple, sans-serif font. The sign is framed by a dark border with small, round lights along the top and sides. The background is a dark, textured wall, possibly corrugated metal or wood siding.

MIDWEST

*Drive in*

open 24 hours

RXUJ22998  
2261

CMA

12/15/16

IC 81

Small black sign with illegible text.



Snacks  
Pease's Peanut 2.6  
Pease's Peas 1.95  
Horsley's Milk Shake 2.50  
Horsley's Mlt 2.50  
Gardner 1.00  
Biscotti 1.00  
Dr Pepper Soft 3.00  
Lemonhead Candy 1.00  
Getränk 1.00  
4.2







... landscapes  
like packets of cigarettes, on  
which you have to step, close up<sup>1</sup>

A concealed door. Behind this: nocturnal darkness. A wooden hut, containers, stacked three on top of each other, in the corner a broken bicycle. Sand and gravel crunch under the soles of shoes. The dull light of a lantern reflects dimly on metal louvers. Crickets chirp through the summer night.

COSCO, GESeaCo, Hapag-Lloyd, Hamburg Süd and Cronos can be read in large letters on the standardized brown, blue and orange freight containers that tower into the blackness of the night. Otherwise underway on all of the world's seven seas, they seem to have been deposited here for some time now. Grass is already growing out of the used tire that lies between the stacks of containers on the side of a narrow corridor. In the distance a train, the rattle of wheels as the chant of railroad sleepers.

... changing tires, one is  
left behind ...

In a quad of containers, palely lit by the light of the facility yard, discarded palettes, plastic waste, shards of glass, crumpled newspapers. A bunch of leftovers. In one half-opened container, a mattress lies on the floor. The barking of dogs somewhere. Dirty plastic bags from a discount supermarket, blankets, a flashlight on a cord. Torn-open grocery cartons, emptied food cans. A collection of old clothes pours out of the suitcase at the bottom end of the makeshift bed; empty bottles of alcohol and an old transistor radio at the head. When was the man—betrayed by the black men's shoe—here the last time? An hour ago? The day before yesterday? Two weeks ago? The newspaper a few meters away is from July 2015: The headline over one of the columns reads "Nazi Gold in the Greenery," the photo next to it depicts an ape. *Daily News*, grotesquely blown away.

Here, the containers, otherwise at all times receptive carriers of the "basic logistical order of the world,"<sup>2</sup> are more than anything else the signature mark of standstill or even backlog. Dynamism is somewhere else. The container terminal, nucleus and juncture of the global mobility of goods par excellence, reveals itself in this bleak industrial landscape scenery as a precarious ruins of free trade with a camp for the homeless, which bears witness to the downsides of a crisis-ridden present. It is no coincidence that the banana boxes are from Panama.

... sometimes life is a  
short cheap film which you  
don't need to dub ...

Sounds of maneuvering, streaks of light, car horns. At the end of the gorge of containers, a kiosk comes into view. "24 hours open" stands under the name "Midwest," surrounded by red light bulbs. They have popcorn, Coke, and high tables made of old Shell oil barrels. Somewhere in the semidarkness, hubcaps lean against garbage cans. Between concrete slabs and weeds are cigarette butts, an old Alfa Romeo, an Audi, an Opel... And in front of the nocturnal horizon of the landscape panorama, a giant screen. About a dozen cars stand here in the grid of loudspeakers, with windows rolled down and glowing interior lights, exponentiated into infinity by the floor-to-ceiling mirrors on both sides of the space.

"Drive-in cinemas are located on the periphery, where the streets and the stories end; they are border stations, where reality and illusion, confinement and expanse merge together. The motors die off, yet the images begin to flow and burn the fuel of dreams. People sit here behind their windscreens, while stories take place in front of their eyes: on the screen as well as in the play of shadows in their rear-view mirrors. And they suspect: The things you see are closer than you think."<sup>3</sup>

Julian Rosefeldt's drive-in cinema is a nostalgic and at the same time sobering reminiscence of this heyday of emotionally charged automobility in the era of postwar modernism, when capitalism was still a synonym for consumer happiness. The idleness of the automobiles in front of the moving images united mass culture with individual entertainment, collective longing and personal desire, and thus soon became the myth of the constantly growing leisure and automobile industries.<sup>4</sup>

That this was not only the case in the Midwest of the United States, but also in the midwest of Germany is evidenced by signs of the "American Way of Life," as well as by license plates from the Wolfsburg region. Barking dogs and the traces of sound from a nearby autobahn accompany the film projection in the "Midwest" drive-in cinema.

... woke up with  
the smell of diesel ...