

Nina Könnemann's new video, "*What's New*" mainly shows a street-level billboard up close. In German, it's called a Plakat. It's apparently called a "poster" in the world of OOH (out-of-home) advertising, but not like one you'd hang on your wall. It's about as big as a wall. We watch as different guys step behind it to piss or take drugs or whatever, but we only see them before or after they go behind it. We don't actually see what they do back there. We also don't really know anything about them besides the fact that they step behind this street-level billboard to do what they'd rather people didn't see them doing. The video's pretty straightforward and nondescript in that way. The camera's zoomed in too far and placed at the wrong angle to get the whole picture or even really glimpse what's going on. Instead, we get fleeting, disconnected details like what color cargo shorts one guy's wearing (baby blue) or how slowly this other guy drags his fingers along the orange frame of the billboard or what dumb, quick graffiti somebody scrawled on the front of the Plakat with a Sharpie.

There's also all these vivid details staring out from the wheatpasted Plakate: The names and dates and slogans and celebrity faces and logos and loaded imagery. The advertisements are in German. And they feature pretty bland stuff, like some second-rate mobile phone company or what seems to be a weird public relations campaign for doctors or a local Berlin beer company's new elderflower flavored wheat beer. Then the video cuts to show that same mobile phone company's aging German celebrity spokesperson (I've always wondered who he is but don't know his name) in concert. Then it cuts to show another thing from one of the advertisements in real life, like a grill. And all the things look pretty glaringly banal, pretty far from anyone's fantasy. At one point there's also a painting hanging in a museum. At another point the video's view of Berlin switches from grubby and street level to a sweeping panorama, just for a second, and it's maybe the only time when reality looks better than the ad. But then, tons of people who visit Berlin just want to experience some tourist vision of it.

The video's also almost violently silent.

It's nondescript but delivers a bald dose of reality. I mean, I can only speak for myself, but it's what my reality tends to look like these days.

John Beeson

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