

frieze

Dan Rees

Tanya Leighton

Dan Rees's latest show at Tanya Leighton, 'Space Invaders 2', consists of three works: a photomontage, a 15-minute video, and a square Artex painting (Artex is a UK-invented surface coating added to walls and ceilings to add texture, widely used in the 1970s).

Space Invader (Monimbo Platz) (all works 2013) is composed of 54 square inkjet prints arranged together so that they form the outline of a Space Invader from the hit 1970s arcade game. Nowadays the game carries a strong sense of nostalgia, which is key to understanding this exhibition. We might even call it a kind of solidarity with the past. 'Invader' is also the pseudonym of a French urban artist who documents his 'Invasions' of cities across the world online – pictures of Space Invaders composed out of coloured square tiles – weather resistant and difficult to damage or remove.

The photos that constitute the montage are all taken in and around Monimbo Platz, a small public space in the Berlin neighbourhood of Lichtenberg, where, in 1985, Nicaraguan-born artist Manuel García Moia created the mural *Nicaraguanisches Dorf – Monimbó 1978* (Nicaraguan Village – Monimbó 1978). The mural was meant as an expression of solidarity between the communist German Democratic Republic and this Nicaraguan community, which in 1978 rose up against the Somoza dictatorship.

Rees's montage does not feature any pictures of the actual mural because it has been removed: in its place is a sort of information post, with images and text about the former monument. Rees's photos also generally denote absence and transition. Transitional spaces are portrayed: overpasses, railway tracks. Or people in transit, going shopping or further afield. Temporary election posters, cars: a BMW estate carries a legend on its rear window in a black typeface – 'Ost Wut Security Laden und Mehr': which roughly translates as 'Eastern Fury, Security Store and More'.

Nostalgia for the GDR, referred to as *Ostalgie*, is accompanied by a bitterness toward the changes that have taken place since the fall of the Berlin Wall: Monimbo Platz was the site of a memorial to an uprising that ended in a massacre of Nicaraguan Indians, many of them women and children. In reunified Germany, this revolutionary event appears forgotten. Rees's montage of photos in frames (square like the Invader's tiles) is a monumental act of

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'Space Invaders 2', 2013, exhibition view

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those who oppose the established order. The photos show what a political diatribe would not: waste, dilapidation, transience, the tragic inability of the individual subject to encompass political history. All one can do is try to remember.

The video *Laverbread* is shot at Rees's grandmother's house in South Wales, and is half composed of shots of Rees and his unseen cameraman in the kitchen, as he brews cups of tea and toasts wholemeal bread, which is then spread with laverbread, the name of a Welsh speciality made of seaweed. (Richard Burton called it 'Welshman's caviar'.) Laverbread signifies a sense of home for Rees, but this home is a melancholy place. We see the artist sitting with his grandmother, who is struggling to open some junk mail. In the foreground, a magazine with the title *Enjoying Everyday Life*, still packed in its transparent envelope, lies on a shelf on her walking frame. Henri Lefebvre's 1971 book *Everyday Life in the Modern World* could be a manifesto for Rees's practice, dedicated as it is to the ignored, the unnoticed. At the end of the video the camera tilts up quite deliberately to scan the Artex ceiling of the sitting room. The lens thoughtfully follows the shell-like forms inscribed there. Botticelli comes to mind. It seems logical to make an Artex Painting, which derives its formal characteristics directly from a type of plaster decoration strongly associated with Britain's downtrodden working class.

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