

Press Release

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Utopia's Backyard
The Museum of Contemporary Photography
Columbia College Chicago
May 6 – July 2, 2004

CHICAGO - The Museum of Contemporary Photography in conjunction with the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Chicago-Hamburg Sister Cities program will present Utopia's Backyard featuring the work of five German contemporary artists: Peter Dombrowe, Beate Gutschow, Peter Piller, and Jeanne Faust with Jörn Zehe. Concerned with issues of truth and authenticity these artists explore concepts of the ideal contemporary landscape. On view May 6 through July 2, 2004 this exhibition demonstrates the range and talent of a pocket of Germany's leading contemporary artists.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography collaborates with a wide variety of national and international institutions and individuals in its efforts to expand and diversify the work exhibited. In June 2003 the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and the Goethe-Institut Chicago invited museum associate director Natasha Egan to Hamburg where she met and explored the work of dozens of artists, curators, and critics. Utopia's Backyard and the accompanying essay Clumps of Trees, Sleeping Houses, Garbage Sculptures and Life in Suburbia, written by art critic Ludwig Seyfarth, was the result of this partnership.

Beate Gutschow's large-scale digital photographs seamlessly depict the idyllic landscape inspired by the grand tradition of landscape painting in the seventeenth to nineteenth century. Reminiscent of painters such as Claude Lorrain and John Constable, Gutschow's classical landscapes are a collage of fact and fiction. Utilizing his massive collection of photographs from archive sources including commercial offices, police stations, and real estate offices, Peter Piller takes a humorous approach to recontextualizing these photographs. From a catalogue of over 12,000 negatives that he acquired from a defunct company that took aerial photographs of family homes throughout German to sell to the homeowners, Piller arranges selections of the archive in categories such as: houses next to graveyards; houses with shades closed; or houses with paths through garden. While the company often eliminated potential eyesores to increase the salability of their photographs, Piller chooses to show each photograph in its original unretouched state. Peter Dombrowe's detailed color photographs document piles of household junk often unknowingly arranged by homeowners into a convincing artistic compositions in the landscape.

Dombrowe does indeed make objects and architectural interventions that bear a resemblance to his photographic studies, yet most of the images in this exhibition are not artistic actions devised and executed by Dombrowe, but assemblages he has happened upon in or around Hamburg. *My Private Satellite*, a ten-minute looped film by Jeanne Faust and Jörn Zehe takes viewers on a trip through a somewhat inhospitable new housing development in the outlying Hamburg district of Neu-Allermöhe. The film only shows brief fragments of action—a man gets into his car; a woman runs after him; she tries to get in the car but the man drives off—to excite our anticipation of an unfolding narrative structure. The constant repetition of the same sequence, however, reminds us of the monotony of daily life and of the choreographed daily incidents in the films, *The Truman Show* and *Groundhog Day*.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography will host an opening reception on Friday, May 7, 2004 from 5 pm until 9 pm. Peter Dombrowe, Jeanne Faust, Beate Gutschow, and Peter Piller will give a gallery talk on Saturday, May 8, 2004 at noon.

This exhibition and related events are organized in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Hamburg-Chicago Sister Cities program and are supported by the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and the Goethe-Institut Chicago.

The exhibitions, presentations, and related programs of the Museum of Contemporary Photography are sponsored in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs/Gallery 37; the Surdna Foundation; Crescent; American Airlines, the official airline of the Museum of Contemporary Photography; and our members.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography is free and open to the public weekdays from 10 am until 5 pm (Thursdays until 8 pm) and Saturdays from noon until 5 pm. It is located at 600 S. Michigan Avenue on the corner of Harrison Street. For additional information please call 312-663-5554 or visit us at www.mocp.org.

Hamburg, Germany is one of Germany's most important business locations. Many companies have their headquarters there and it is an important city for the media and publishing industries. Architecturally, Hamburg can boast many classical and futuristic pieces of architecture. The current population of Hamburg totals 1.7 million. Its partner-cities include Shanghai, Chicago, Osaka, Prague, St. Petersburg and Marseilles.