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ARTFORUM

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“Matthew Buckingham”

Hamburger Bahnhof Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin

By Tara McDowell



Everything I Need, 2007, still from a continuous two-channel color video projection with sound.

This midsize survey exhibition presents a precise, restrained selection of work by American artist Matthew Buckingham that ranges across media and spans several years. Yet his most recent project included here has a particular resonance with Berlin and continues his excavation of the histories of specific sites such that they, in turn, have the reciprocal function of drawing our attention to the present moment. To this end, the two-screen video projection *Everything I Need*, 2007, performs a quiet unsettling of past and present. The right-hand screen displays text only, the firsthand account of Charlotte Wolff, a doctor, writer, feminist, lesbian, and Jew who lived in Weimar Berlin, then Paris and London, and whose life intersected with major events of the twentieth century in astonishing ways. Here she recounts her improbable return to Berlin on April 10, 1978, at the invitation of the Kreuzberg-based lesbian group L74, after leaving the country in 1933 following extensive discrimination and persecution. The screen on the left presents a series of closely cropped images, often still but at times in slight motion, of the interior of a 1970s-era airplane perhaps similar to that on which Wolff had flown. Buckingham's camera lingers on the textured orange seat covers and the blunt, leather-clad metal armrests (and their requisite attached ashtrays) with such determination that it soon becomes clear that he is presenting two different registers of memory: the narrative present in our consciousness and summoned at will, and the episode forcibly triggered by the unexpected detail or sensation (like Proust's madeleines or, here, the plane's dated interior). Although Wolff died in 1986 and her thoughts may be excerpted from her 1980 autobiography (the source is not explicit), the past tense of the voice is not immediately disclosed, and indeed, her intimate and candid reminiscences appear directed toward the viewer as if she were speaking in the present.