

ARTFORUM

REVIEWS NEW YORK

Mores McWreath CUE ART FOUNDATION

Mores McWreath's video *Remain*, 2009, takes place in a monochromatic retail wasteland, a rubble-filled, computer-generated landscape, recalling a Best Buy warehouse after a riot. Announced by an electronic chime, the artist appears in this

charmless CGI interior to deliver gnomish and self help-inflected pronouncements. Dressed like a sales associate, in khaki trousers (with the size sticker still attached) and shapeless polo shirt, with his head neatly shaved and a microphone attached to his lapel, he seems perfectly harmless, but the irony quotient of his words is hard to measure: He alternately flatters and bullies; there is a defensive cast to his posture, a slight sneer that accompanies the assertion "fashion is all about self-expression"; sometimes his advice is delivered with mounting urgency, as is a brief speech that could have been excerpted from a middle-management lecture on marketing, informing us that "packaging matters, signage matters, merchandizing display matters. Craft matters."

This, of course, is life in our shopping society. McWreath's character inhabits an inert retail landscape; he partakes in all its tropes, all its deadened forms of language, but he is not of it, not quite. He is self wavering between resistance and giving in. His repetition of inanities reminds us that access to a variety of consumer goods does not constitute real freedom, and that real freedom is not simply resistance: An anticonsumerist stance is also a kind of brand, a pose, something that, as it turns out, is only too easily co-opted by transnational corporations.

McWreath, according to his artist's statement, is pursuing Roland Barthes's concept of the Neutral, an escape from binary opposition, and *Remain*'s protagonist may well be a sort of third option, assembling out of these things – the clothes, the boxes, the words – a self that has nothing to do with being for or against. Assembling meaning out of parts gives it the potential to be both everything and nothing: For example, *Everything's Better*, 2006, a video work shown alongside *Remain*, comprises a loop made up of fragments mixed and matched by the artist each time the work is shown. It is an expression of nearly aggressive randomness – a handprint slowly changing color, reflecting both infinite variety and the state of being trapped.

That this show was organized by Andrea Zittel prompts one to engage in a parlor game of form and intent. Zittel, too, explores the idea of freedom, though hers is made manifest in physical solutions, often hard-won, while McWreath's is an uneasy philosophical state that is much more difficult to pin down. "Maybe if I just keep talking I will say something profound," his character intones, and then repeats the phrase again and again; later he laments, "Too much communication – just shut up!" His ideal, elusive territory – beyond resolution, beyond conclusions – lies somewhere in between these two models, between personal expression, available in all its forms at the mall, and the choice to forgo expression altogether. Or perhaps it is somewhere else not yet imagined by our formidable engines of public relations.

- Emily Hall



Mores McWreath, *Remain*, 2009, video projection, latex paint, muslin, wood, sand, burlap. Installation view.