

Racheal Crowther Interrogates the Ethics of Care

At Galerie Noah Klink, Berlin, the artist's works toy with the interplay of vulnerability, exploitation and scrutiny that exists within systems of safe-guarding

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BY LOUISA ELDERTON IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 29 JAN 25



There is often a thin line between care and control. We see this on both micro and macro levels, with the latter including state apparatus, such as the police, through which power is exercised in the name of protection. Racheal Crowther's sparse but bold exhibition 'Gebrauchsmusik' (Utility Music) may comprise only two works, but their aesthetic combination of cold steel and surveillance technologies effectually evokes the interplay of vulnerability, exploitation and scrutiny that exists within systems of safe-guarding.



Racheal Crowther, *Close Call Only (10783, DE)*, 2025. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Noah Klink, Berlin

When first entering the exhibition, there is seemingly very little to actually see, but the crackling sound of voices pulls your attention to the gallery's back room. There, a television screen is locked behind an anti-ligature cabinet (designed to prevent vulnerable people from accidentally or intentionally self-harming), while a radio scanner is secured to the wall in a small white cage. These elements constitute *Close Call Only (10783, DE)* (all works 2025), which functions through an antenna that Crowther secured to the building's roof, capturing frequencies of 120–300 megahertz. In previous decades, this scanner would have picked up signals from air-traffic control and police radio, but here it switches between couriers – people who themselves are vulnerable, often working zero-hour contracts without social security. Footage from a CCTV camera observing the antenna plays onscreen: except for the ticking time register in the corner, only wisps of smoke from a chimney and passing clouds animate the image.

This combination of caged media alongside the transmission of intangible voices is unnerving: everything is out of reach and once removed. We are placed on the defensive between suggestions of protecting the machinery (the cage) and us from *ourselves* (the ligature). The work also inevitably evokes the historical specificities of the German context: under the pretext of protection, citizens of the GDR were constantly surveilled by the Stasi during the Cold War, with their methods including radio interception, telephone tapping, visual observation, video surveillance and covert recording. Also simmering is Michel Foucault's panopticon metaphor from *Discipline and Punish* (1975). For Crowther, the seen and the unseen are one and the same within a self-policing society, whether it's under the remit of state- or market-oriented control. The effect is discomfiting: though the artist situates us as the ones watching, we do so without agency and ultimately also exist under the insidious conditions of being observed.



Racheal Crowther, *Close Call Only (10783, DE)*, 2025. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Noah Klink, Berlin

Nearby is *Pipedream*® – a spherical, wall-mounted, stainless-steel sculpture in which the titular phrase appears in cursive text within the void of a medical cross that has been centrally cut out. Having seen this phrase on a fancy-dress nurse's uniform, Crowther here deploys it formally to wink at minimalist sculpture while speaking to a medical industry bound by commerce: the '®' in the title is the registered trademark symbol for companies, products or services. I think of a healthcare industry that oftentimes masquerades as actualizing care while having another eye fixed on financial markets. Having been employed as a social worker prior to undertaking an MFA at London's Royal Academy of Arts, Crowther centres this work on the actualization of care, its accessibility and the fact that adequate social welfare remains a 'pipedream' for so many around the world.



Racheal Crowther, *Pipedream* ©, 2025. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Noah Klink, Berlin

Care has been an overbearing buzzword in the art world for the last few years, with innumerable exhibitions exploring the subject from positions as far ranging as gender, health, indigeneity, land, decolonization and non-human species, among others. *The art world cares!* Yet, Crowther's exhibition feels fresh, unflinching and even urgent, channelling an unsentimental approach to the ethics of care as mediated by the cautionary, and the role of imagination in carving out our own limits.

Racheal Crowther's 'Gebrauchsmusik' is on view at Galerie Noah Klink, Berlin until 1 March