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**SASKIA OLDE WOLBERS**

**BÜRO FRIEDRICH**

**Berlin**

Even if you walk into a screening of *Placebo* (2002) halfway through the short DVD, its exquisite slickness impresses. Initially, this black-and-white work seems digitally rendered. But actually it shows slow-motion shots of white paint flowing through miniature wire-frame constructions. The paint's surface tension stretches it across the frames into sleek planes that then appear to melt away -first in small sections, then in large expanses, revealing again the metallic wire skeletons. From a purely esthetic standpoint, the piece is highly seductive.

But it gets even better when you watch from the beginning, because then the video's voice-over operates at full narrative force. Devoid of all emotion, a woman calmly recounts her personal tragedy. Working as a nurse, she had started an affair with a doctor colleague who was later revealed to be only a white-coated impostor. When she confronts him, he crashes the car in which they are traveling. Only then do we realize that she is telling the story from her paralysis-ward bed. Equally paralyzed, he lies one cot over. And that arrangement reveals another unsettling fact: her lover has no family. He had invented a wife as well as a medical profession, to conceal from her his utterly hollow life.

As a short story, this would be powerful stuff. But in combination with the imagery Wolbers created, it was mesmerizing. Evoking the patient's intermittent consciousness, small sets-an operating room, for example-emerge and then disappear within the paint-infused constructions. Sometimes the imagery synchs up with the story and sometimes it's more abstract, and its vivid visuals play off the woman's monotone. In this work Wolbers has managed a pitch-perfect melding of words and images, transcending the too-common tendency of today's video to be either eye candy or failed attempts at cinema writ small.

**Marc Spiegler**