

THINGS CAN CHANGE VERY QUICKLY

Catalogue text for *Greetings From Bergen*
Mark Jan Wlodarkiewicz
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Things can change very quickly. On September 11th, 2001, the world took a disturbing leap into reckless change, forced through violence and destruction. Art and culture are usually the harbingers of societal movement, but in this case the REAL WORLD trumped what ever any artist could ever say about the human experience. I met Christian Bøen, literally the week before; I was a guest at the Kunstakademiet, there to lecture about sound and moving image. During that week I met with students and critiqued their work. So here is Christian, a young techno musician and artist and I am looking at his videos and thinking, well there is some darkness in this nice guy. His work seems to break down into a few categories, the dark and wry humor of the installation "Killing Machine," a washing machine that leaks blood upon the floor, bad plumbing and a macabre visual pun. The music video's "Catwalk" and "Music Video," which are both dark and recursive experiences with sonic and visual layers, and then there is the more abstract work, "Splash" and "22.11.02" which uses a similar technique as his music videos to explore a dark visual landscape. These two works are mostly black and white recursions with gritty distorted sound. Darkness is further explored with "Cuerpo_Kropp" which reveals the corporeal structure of the human form via stills of a man's body morphing into the underlying architecture of x-rayed bone.

Then there is "Inferno X" which seems to be a different sort of piece. It doesn't get so easily categorized. A man is standing statically next to the run down architecture of an industrial dock. In quick fade up and outs, we approach him, until we are focused upon his face, which seems not as normal as the grey figure we have been seeing would imply. We observe his visage briefly. His eyes are white blanks and the edges of his face blur. This is also the first color in the piece: his complexion glows dimly fire like, reds and yellows. As we zoom into the figure, there is the sound of some recursive machine that gets louder as we get closer, implying that he is somehow mechanized either physically or emotionally. Once we have zoomed into his face a different sort of landscape is presented, instead of the bleak and rainy dock, we are shown quick flashes of a colorful but arid landscape, the mechanized sound subsumed by clicks that sync to the desert images. These images soon fade out and we are now in a tight close up of the man's totally blank eye, again fading in and out, left and right eye, left and right eye, the skin in colorful reds and yellows as if it was lit from within via a burst of flame. the sound completely changes to sonar or morse code, transmitting it's abstract message and the churning of the machine returns fading up to a quick crescendo and we are back on the grey rainy dock and it's quiet. But only for a moment, as the man then immolates, he explodes into a large ball of flame.

The exterior imagery, cold, wet and foreboding contrasts with arid, though in a way equally foreboding desert landscapes, implying that this man is so alone and so dry of life, that he is fodder waiting to explode and he does. At first I thought this piece was about the difference between interior and exterior perception and about the gap between them. I remember asking Christian why he explodes in the end and said something like, 'he has to explode in the end.' What's intriguing to me is the attractiveness of the images, that they are in a way, beautiful and architectural.

It almost seems that the man wants to explode, this action as much about desire, as destruction. A week later I saw the piece differently. On the television we saw explosions like we have never seen before. Huge, disturbing paths of destruction steak across the televised sky in the form of stolen airplanes being returned in the most obvious way possible. The man in "Inferno-X" is also being returned. He can't possibly contain himself in his own body, he tries to communicate to the exterior world but it is deaf to his obscure language, and in a last impossible act he erases himself in the most violent way possible. Is it a choice or something that just happens? It is not know. Perhaps the pressure of so much arid space, so little life, could not be contained and simply ignites.

Do things always have to end in violence? As this is being written, my culture, the American one, is trying to convince the world that violence is the only path to progress. The American government has drawn a through line from airplanes crashing into buildings to bombs being dropped on the other side of the world. I would think that these explosions are more of an end than a beginning, a punctuation upon the story of American culture and an opportunity to start a better paragraph. "Inferno-X" is as much as warning as a end result. It seems to say we need to reconcile with what is within us, with what is on the outside and if we don't then, bombs drop, buildings fall and we risk out own immolation.

Mark Jan Wlodarkiewicz

Mark Jan Wlodarkiewicz (AKA vordo) edits and designs music and sound for both feature and indy films. He is also an eclectic dj who spends most of his time screwing up other people's music in front of a computer and occasionally he does it in real time. His film credits include Romeo + Juliet, Armageddon, Wag the Dog, the Mothman Prophecies and Lara Lee's film Modulations and Synthetic Pleasures. <http://abstrakt-zone.com>