

In a Hell of a Mess

Commentary on Radio 3 (RadioBerlinBrandenburg) on 10/15/02

Whoever hasn't had enough Armageddon à la Hollywood can overdose on the Apocalypse in art, courtesy of Christoph Draeger, the Zurich-born artist (*1965) currently living in New York. Nobody tosses bigger fireballs with greater style into the picture than he can. No other artist cuts his videos so edgily and with such theatrical perfection as Christoph Draeger does, especially when Gary Braslin from PanOptic supports him in digital animation. Somehow, Christoph Draeger is always at war, at least in terms of the imagery he recycles. For a good ten years now, catastrophes and disasters have been his chosen ground. Right now, there is hardly an artist on the international scene who can be compared to Draeger, because only he employs fiction and cinematographic fantasy so tersely, so tough and mercilessly in order to undermine our faith in the clips on the news. Draeger glosses over nothing and invents little for the sole purpose of coming closer to the reality of the event and the reality of the media's news product. We stare at his videos and video installations—and with lidless eyes. Death pressed a kiss on each of these kerosene shrouded centrifuges of pictures. If you ask yourself a couple of days after viewing the videos and installations which images you recall—and Draeger certainly invests a lot of time respecting and perfecting the guise of the time in his work—you definitely don't recall the details of the catastrophe. Rather you find a chain of images of fire and gigantic explosions like those that neither you nor, even, soldiers and firefighters know from training, though perhaps from their worst nightmares. Christoph Draeger's terrain is where his "picture machines" begin to grate on your nerves, where you turn into a hive of sensations, where you can no longer differentiate between what's inside your head and what's taking place outside, particularly on the TV screens. Draeger's video production **The Last News** runs no longer than 13 minutes. It's news time on "MSNBC 24 Hour Disaster and Survival Newschannel". What you see is, nomen est omen, a torrent of images, a roller coaster ride in the twilight world of terror, insanity and obsession on the news. It begins with the voice of the pseudo-moderator, Guy Richard Smith,

appearing here as Guy Smith, getting constantly shriller, cracking from pure emotion, screaming like mad, shrieking and stuttering in a blubbering staccato. Christoph Draeger pushes the media's lust for violence and terror to the absurd and lets the sensation-mongering implode in the mawkish, largely arid tangle of officious terminology.

The Last News opens the idiocy of the massacre channel with a bombardment of Big Ben, followed by terrorists destroying the Chrysler Building in NY before aliens, who threaten Paris with an atomic bomb, pulverize the White House. Naturally, in the simplistic approach of Big Bang TV, the aggressors never have a motive for their actions, they are just creepy bad guys and have to be finished off like zombies.

At intervals, self-proclaimed "Men in Black" force their way into the picture to give their estimate of the threat. In an effort to relax the viewing public, almost criminally cute tips appear on the screen—tips on calming house pets during the Apocalypse. Naturally, there is an emergency number should the television public wish to comment on what they have seen. It goes without saying it's live "on air." Christoph Draeger tortures us with the brutal instrument of the media hallucination so that you wish for only one thing: interference, black out, broken film, anything—just The End.

Christoph Tannert In Teufels Küche

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