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tema celeste

contemporaryart

christoph draeger

self-portrait



For almost ten years I've been working on issues of catastrophe, destruction, and violence. I've always tried to keep my position as far as possible from the way the media reports such events. Like most people, I have never experienced disaster myself, with the exception of a car crash. Instead, as an artist I construct destruction. My fascination is abstract, and my

approach is detached, often ironic. For my project "voyages apocalyptiques," for example, I travel to places where disaster happened and photograph the sites, often years later. In these pictures you can't see much of the disaster anymore; most of the photographs simply show idyllic landscapes. On September 11, 2001, the disaster came to me.



▲ Christoph Draeger *Ode to a Sad Song*, 2001, synchronized six-channel video installation, burned-out caravan, grass, plants.

◀◀ Christoph Draeger and Reynold Reynolds *Apocalypse Place*, 2000, synchronized two-channel video installation, destroyed apartment.

I watched the events unfold live from my studio window and simultaneously on TV: quite a surreal situation, between total shock, terror, and fascination. At the time I was preparing a show for Roebing Hall entitled *If you lived here you would be dead now*, and, as always, I was behind with my work.

But since nobody could possibly do anything that day, I decided to walk downtown with my girlfriend.

Crossing the Manhattan Bridge, I photographed #49 of my “voyages” series, which started in 1994 with the World Trade Center, after the 1993 bombing.

I changed the show’s name to *Ode to a Sad Song* and managed to open it on time. It was very hard to get the work done, because of my own paralysis and everybody else’s. My installations are often quite complex and excessive, so I need a lot of assistance, and that was hard to get in New York around this time.

The piece featured the ruins of a burned-out trailer, and the smell was all too familiar. I have always been interested in remakes and simulations, and here I had my own little Ground Zero, installed less than five miles from the greatest American disaster ever. If September 11 changed the world, it didn’t change my work much. At first I decided not to do anything about it. Many local artists felt the urge to express themselves and came up with a lot of stuff related to the tragedy. But I decided I had time. Eventually I started a project that was my reaction to the media frenzy and resulting wave of patriotism: *The Last News* (a collaboration with the filmmaker Reynold

Reynolds) is an acidic satire with reference to September 11, probably the most undesired thing that could be produced in America today. It touches on the notion of Hollywood-anticipated Armageddon and on the increasingly manipulative reporting of American media outlets like CNN and Fox. Yet although this new video may be received as a provocation, it makes most people laugh. *The Last News* continues the *Apocalypse Place* project, which can only be taken as seriously as television itself. Reynold and I started the project in 1999-2000, at the turn of the millennium. It’s a sitcom that takes place in a completely demolished home where beautiful young people live as if nothing was wrong—like a post-catastrophic *Friends*. The installation is a reconstruction of the destroyed apartment with a projection of the sitcom. The residents are completely affirmative about disaster; they anticipate it and gladly accept their own roles as model victims. Our society is fascinated with catastrophe, with the iconography of destruction. This has reached a new level with the World Trade Center disaster. It is fascinating how the mechanisms of our high-end game culture have been directed to destroy its very symbols, using our own planes and broadcast systems to report globally upon the destruction, thus producing exactly the kind of imagery we secretly desire.

Christoph Draeger was born in 1965 in Serneus, Switzerland. He lives and works in New York. Photo Credit: Roebing Hall, New York.