

SCHWARZWALD INFO// ENGLISH

On February 26-28, 2010 and on various dates in March 2010 **Noordkaap** presents the group exhibition **Schwarzwald** in and around the Energiehuis building, Noordendijk 148, Dordrecht

Guesturator: **Arno Coenen**

Artists: **Abner Preis** (USA), **Alexander Krone** (Denmark), **CHAOMETRIC**, **Arno Coenen**, **Dragan Striskovic** (Croatia), **Gwen Stok**, **Hans van Bentem**, **Iris Roskam**, **Martijn F. Overweel**, **Luuk Bode**, **Marinus de Ruiter**, **Martin C. de Waal** en **Michael Markwick** (USA)

Opening night : Friday February 26 from 19.00 until late. Featuring performances by opera singer Martina Prins, Kid Goesting (electro/metal), Transformer Di Roboter (electro) and the metal bands Onheil (Dordrecht) and Signs of Darkness (Limburg). In cooperation with the Popcentrale Dordrecht venue.

*Welcome to the elder ruins again
The wind whispers beside the deep forest
Darkness will show us the way*
(Mayhem - De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas, 1994)

Schwarzwald is a collaborative artwork in the form of a dark forest. It represents primal human urges through painting, sculpture, video, photography, collage, performance, storytelling, opera, electro and heavy metal.

In European culture and art the forest is an emotionally charged subject; it can stand for fear, danger, strength and beauty at the same time. Author Elias Canetti connected the symbolic idealization of the forest to the rise of national socialism. In the feature film *Antichrist* (2009) by Lars Von Trier the main character regards the forest, and consequently nature, as a destructive force.

It's striking how in times of crisis people are attracted to symbols of nature; in 1930s Germany the forest was widely used as a simple, universal symbol to appeal to all people. Currently in The Netherlands the sea (or water) is used as a symbol to connect the nation, not only in pop music and popular films, but also in the campaigns of successful populist political parties.

By appropriating symbols for propaganda these symbols become unambiguous in their meaning, with the unwanted effect of becoming suspect. The artists in the Schwarzwald exhibition demonstrate that a symbol, in this case the forest, can be used in many contradictory ways and by doing so they deflate the symbol of its univocal appearance.

The international artists contributing to Schwarzwald are fascinated by the European perspective on the forest. However, they tend to expose the forest as a creative source and an unpredictable, polymorphic phenomenon. They refer to denounced art forms like heavy metal, True Norwegian Black Metal, gothic art, tattoo art, Wagnerian opera, Eastern European folk art, decoration, woodcutting, kitsch, camp, fairytales and children's stories.

The nature of the works incorporated in Schwarzwald is not a moralising one. It rather is in line with horror cinema; the effect is alternately frightening and humorous, with the intent to put the senses to a test.

Schwarzwald takes the shape of a festival; the emphasis lies on the opening weekend, in which Noordkaap collaborates with Popcentrale Dordrecht and cultural centre Energiehuis. After the weekend there will be incidental events alongside the exhibition.

Metal Heart III

Schwarzwald is a continuation of the Metal Heart project by artist and curator Arno Coenen (1972). Recently Coenen organised two group exhibitions entitled Metal Heart, in art space Planet Art and at the alternative art fair Kunstvlaai in 2008. With the help of likeminded artists Coenen expressed his fascination for heavy metal, the subcultural phenomenon known for its extremely loud and dynamic rock music.

In his adolescent years Coenen was a heavy metal fan. After his art education Coenen discovered that many aspects of heavy metal corresponded with his artistic vision. Heavy metal can be regarded as a multidisciplinary art form, in which loud and dynamic rock music is combined with slogan-like lyrics and powerful visuals. The exaggeration, magnification, the grand gesture, the provocative character and the shock effect are aspects of heavy metal that can be recognized in Coenen's visual strategy as well.

Not unlike many post-modern art forms, heavy metal is full of paradoxes that are interesting from an artistic and conceptual point of view. Heavy metal sounds extremely violent and antisocial, while the behaviour among fans is mostly warm and friendly. Heavy metal arose from grass roots fan culture, but is very commercial at the same time. Heavy metal sounds recognizable, but is often full of influences from all kinds of cultures and musical styles (see documentaries like Heavy Metal in Baghdad (2007), about the Iraqi metal scene, and Global Metal (2008), about metal scenes all over the world).

On the visual side heavy metal is full of strange juxtapositions as well. At first sight the typical attire of metal bands (leather, spikes, chains) looks like an expression of macho culture. Most fans who dress up in this fashion do not seem to be aware of its origins. It has in fact emerged from the S&M gay scene, which is apparent from interviews with singer Rob Halford of the early metal band Judas Priest, who has pioneered this style of clothing. Like Halford, Norwegian metal singer Gaahl has kept his homosexuality hidden for a long time.

Noordkaap is interested in the continuation of the Metal Heart concept for several reasons. Like heavy metal, Dordrecht's local working class culture can appear off-putting and antisocial at first glance. A closer look reveals unique rituals and manners that have their own tradition, which stems from the Dordrecht's history as a port and a tough blue-collar town. The city also has a strong and visible church tradition. The visual language of heavy metal has baroque aspects and often refers to biblical themes. The cult surrounding heavy metal has fanatical, religious dimensions, wherein fans persevere in their 'faith', even in times when their style does not appeal to a large audience.

With a new chapter of Metal Heart, Noordkaap presents an event that is accessible to diverse audiences, from art aficionados to metal fans, youth interested in subcultures, local residents and other curious people.

website Schwarzwald:
<http://derschwarzwald.info>

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