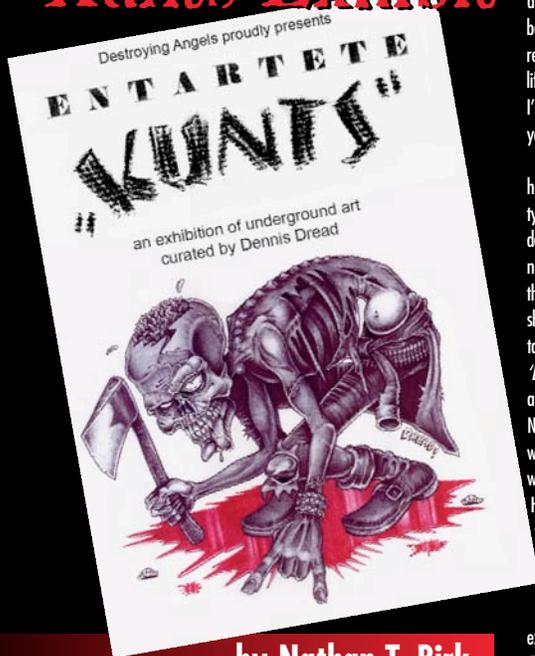


VISUAL AGGRESSION

DENNIS DREAD + Entartete Kunts Exhibit



by Nathan T. Birk

There's an inextricable link between heavy metal and the artwork you find emblazoned across its myriad record covers. Think about it for a moment. How differently would you listen to albums like Slayer's *Reign In Blood* or Iron Maiden's *The Number of the Beast* if they had more "polite" cover artwork or even none at all? Think for another moment. Thought so. Artwork, especially of the "evil" or at least less-approachable variety, in heavy metal is nearly as important as the music itself. Sure, it is entirely possible (and suggested) to solely listen to heavy metal music free of any outside influences, but ultimately how rewarding would the experience be if you didn't double-fist it with the accompanying artwork? Really, how deeply would that heavy metal music be imbibed into your bloodstream without the artwork? Again: Thought so.

Everyone has their own favorite metal covers. I have mine, too. It's a shared language, if you will, something that hips up those who "get it" and those who should get out. But curiously, the extended art community's starting to warm up to the transgressive nature of heavy metal (and, relatedly, hardcore punk) artwork, and one dude who's helping to make those inroads is one Dennis Dread. You've probably seen his stark-yet-detailed pen-and-ink work across covers by Abscess, Engorged, Phobia and most recently Darkthrone's *F.O.A.D.* He's a totally legit dude, and is helping such similarly styled artwork get its due from more than just headbangers and punks through his now-annual *Entartete Kunts* exhibit. Begun last year at Optic Nerve Arts in Portland, Oregon, Dread's curated exhibit featured artwork from the likes of Ed Repka, Jeff Gaitner, Sean Taggart, Mark Riddick, Ross Sewage and others as well as his own. By most accounts, the first *Entartete Kunts* was a beer-fueled blast and a modest success,

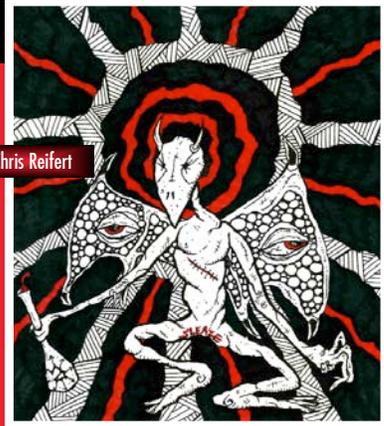
thus setting the stage for a brand-new installment this year.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the success of last year's show," begins Dread. "Sean Taggart sent his original art for the Crumbsuckers record *Life Of Dreams* and it was really great to see fans show up to have their photo taken in front of that drawing like it was the fucking grail! That was pretty much the rabid response I had hoped to see, but you never really know who will attend this sort of event. The gallery was packed for the opening and we even sold some art, which was very unexpected considering the crowd was mostly beer-swilling headbangers, not wealthy art collectors. I'm very appreciative that so many people came out, but I'm also a stubborn bastard and had already planned to forge ahead with more exhibits regardless of the warm reception. I've been drawing for most of my life without much in the way of recognition or monetary gain, and I've been cranking out 'zines that barely anyone reads for 10 years...the general stagnancy of the world bolsters my resolve!"

If you're still scratching your head about the exhibit's tongue-twisting title, Dread gives the low-down: "I can't resist an unfortunate pun, and I've decided to use this title for all my annual group shows. The title is a snide bastardization of the German term '*Entartete Kunst*' ['degenerate art'] and a reference to the 1937 Nazi exhibit of the same name, which featured works of art that were officially banned by Adolf Hitler. Most of those original works of art were destroyed by the Nazi Party immediately after the exhibit, but I'll politely return all unsold artwork to my respective degenerate pals."

Dread says the first *Entartete Kunts* exhibit started as, "a logical extension of my own solo art shows and my underground publication *Destroying Angels*. The mission with both projects is simply to create and celebrate uncompromising art from the fringes of obscurity. Most people have a misconception that art galleries have to be pretentious affairs, but I quickly realized that they're a great excuse to drink beer without some asshole blowing cigarette smoke in your face while a lame band soundchecks for an hour. As soon as a local gallery became available to me, I just contacted a few friends whose work I enjoy, and the show coalesced rather quickly. I made special arrangements so that neither the gallery nor myself as guest curator would take a percentage of the sales, allowing fans to directly support underground art with the artists reaping all the profit from their work. This sort of deal is unheard of in the 'art world,' and I'm fortunate to have the unwavering support of my allies at Optic Nerve Arts."

This year's *Entartete Kunts* exhibit will feature artwork from the likes of Joe Petagno (Motörhead, AngelCorpse, Krisiun), Joseph A. Smith (Bathory, Averse Sefira), T. Ketola (Watain), Chris Reifert (Abscess/Autopsy), and of course Mr. Dread himself, as well as "plenty of surprises," he promises. As for any stylistic/ideological overhaul between the two installments, Dread says, "the exhibits are only ideologically similar in that I begin by inviting artists whom I respect and with whom I wish to be associated. I attempt to assemble a relatively



Chris Reifert



Drew Elliot



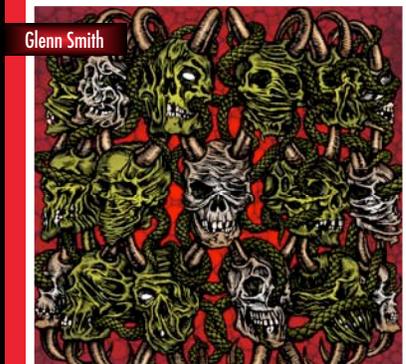
Conny Cobra



Kriss Hades



T. Ketola



Glenn Smith



Musta Aurinko

“...THE IMAGE A BAND PROJECTS WITH THEIR ART AND APPEARANCE IS VERY IMPORTANT, EVEN WHEN THE BAND'S IMAGE SUGGESTS THAT THEY DON'T MUCH CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH THEIR IMAGE. I WOULDN'T WANT TO SEE D.R.I. OR NAPALM DEATH COVERED IN BLOOD AND HUGE SPIKES. AT THE SAME TIME, IF WATAIN OR NIFELHEIM PERFORMED A SHOW WEARING SHORTS AND FLANNEL, I WOULD BE DISAPPOINTED AND THE POWER OF THEIR MUSIC WOULD FALL FLAT.” —DENNIS DREAD

diverse group of artists, and there's no particular theme beyond asking each person to send some of their favorite works of art. Last year's show featured only American artists whereas this year's event will encompass more than 10 countries! Last year's show also tended to be a bit more comical and cartoon-influenced than this year. By sheer coincidence, many of the artists I've invited this time seem to work in a more harrowing and less irreverent style. Several of the works in this year's show also have an unstated ritualistic bent. For instance, Bobby BeauSoleil's sensual pencil drawing was rendered within the brutal confines of prison, where he continues to serve a life sentence for murder, and is clearly the residue of deeply personal erotic imaginings. Similarly, Manuel Tinneman's allegorical drawings and the stark symmetry of T. Ketola's engravings convey an almost alchemical technique. But don't worry...there will still be an unhealthy dose of thrashing zombies, flying eyeballs and gratuitous perversion!

Now, about that: Some folks argue that “image” has no place in metal/punk, that the music/message is what's most important. This writer begs to differ, because I interpret “image” as both how the band presents themselves (physically speaking) and especially the imagery used in their artwork of choice. Again, would *Reign In Blood* really have the same effect if all you heard was the music? Or hell, covers like Death's *Scream Bloody Gore* and Bolt Thrower's *In Battle There Is No Law* — they seem sorta quaint now, but back then they were fucking intense. Or even on the punk end, the covers to Crass' *Feeding Of The 5000* and Discharge's *Why* totally complemented their respective musics. Dread weighs in: “Imagery is simply how we perceive the band and its music with our eyes, and artwork is an important element in that unconscious equation. It's silly for these

‘image purists’ to think that sound exists in a vacuum! Punks tend to concern themselves with staying ‘real’ while metalheads are vigilant to stay ‘true.’ Meanwhile, both genres devote their vast catalogs to fantastical songs about monsters, demonic possession, sorcery cannibalism, murder, revolution and wars they've never really experienced! In the '80s, this idea of image was hotly debated when thrash bands began dressing like their audience and wearing jeans and Reebok sneakers. Later, there was the death metal/black metal image controversy and the emergence of things like corpsepaint to boldly declare a band's position. For me, the image a band projects with their art and appearance is very important, even when the band's image suggests that they don't much concern themselves with their image. I wouldn't want to see D.R.I. or Napalm Death covered in blood and huge spikes. At the same time, if Watain or Nifelheim performed a show wearing shorts and flannel, I would be disappointed and the power of their music would fall flat.”

Dread is off and running — listen up. “There's a magical function to great art — and I believe metal and punk can be both — that conjures a deeply personal response. There is no doubt that image, artwork and appearance, affects and enhances the total artistic atmosphere of sound. Ask anyone who ever saw Discharge or Crucifix perform and they'll tell you that when they saw all those banners hung up around the stage, they immediately felt as if they were part of something much larger than themselves. Philosophy aside, I completely agree with your assessment regarding those classic records! Ed Repka's cover for *Scream Bloody Gore* is fantastic, and I was very pleased to showcase his paintings in last year's exhibit. Just glancing at *Reign In Blood* invokes in me a very distinct time and feeling. In the case of Crass, it's interesting to note that simply

by wearing all-black clothing — presumably unusual for punks at the time — their political messages were imbued with a profound gravity. Since they could barely play their instruments when they began, one could almost argue that their image alone helped spawn the entire UK anarcho-punk movement! Of course, Crass also had the brilliant artwork of Gee Voucher, whom I hope to pin down for a future exhibit.”

That said, having grown up in the late '70s and into the '80s, you've gotta wonder whether Dread ever bought a metal/punk album solely based on the cover art. “Record covers were the first ‘art’ I ever noticed, and I still occasionally buy music based solely on the cover art,” the man confirms. “I'm only slightly embarrassed to admit that, as a kid, the very first record I ever purchased with my own money was the soundtrack to an animated film called *Heavy Metal*. The image of a beautiful alien woman swooping down on a fierce bird immediately grabbed me. And it was called *Heavy Metal*. Imagine my disappointment when I got home and realized that it was actually a pretty lame soundtrack to a pretty lame film about a pretty lame ‘adult’ comic magazine. I bought the first Iron Maiden record without ever having heard a note! I got into Voivod, The Acclaimed and Cryptic Slaughter the same way. I distinctly remember buying Grim Reaper's *See You In Hell* just because I couldn't refuse the image of death riding a purple steed! I also picked up that Gastunk record [*Under The Sun*] with Pushead's chromatic melting zombie face! Repulsion had an oddly similar ode to rotting corpses on *Horrid* a round the same time. I also picked up Mercyful Fate's *Don't Break The Oath*, and that remains a personal favorite — who could resist that demon beckoning through the flames? Another favorite was Celtic Frost's *Emperor's Return*! I still remember flipping

through the import bin and stumbling on that cover — fucking brilliant!”

Bringing the past to the present, Dread continues the thread: “Today, we have all this music available at our fingertips, but it all becomes quite meaningless. At the risk of sounding like a cranky old man, it seems to me that when we download entire catalogs with the click of a button, we are depriving ourselves of the rites that put music in its proper context. Things like writing real letters or meeting the crazy bald guy at the local recordshop — and he was inevitably bald, was he not? — have become lost. Personally, I don’t really want music without album cover art.”

Right on, brother. But do you think there are certain styles or at least elements that *should* make up heavy metal art? Compare Petagno’s covers to those of Travis Smith — *huge* difference, or maybe not? Not to get dogmatic or anything, but.... “Y’know, matters of aesthetics and personal taste are probably the few areas of life where a truly dogmatic stance is beneficial; perhaps it’s even necessary. The creative process is one of problem-solving and decision-making, and as such, artists are always in a paradoxical state of both destroying and creating worlds of possibility. As a matter of personal taste, Travis Smith represents a current trend in commercial art that leaves me cold. I just don’t resonate with all those Photoshop layers. But he’s probably making a fortune while I’m drawing in a basement with ballpoint pens...”

Dread gets in a self-deprecating chuckle before concluding prophetically: “The digital aesthetic probably sells ‘units,’ and that sort of imagery seems vague enough to allow the vast majority of consumers to identify with the product, but the soulful nuances of the human hand will never bow out to technological advances. I’d personally rather look at a Nick Blinko or Away drawing than some digitally manipulated image of a tree! The record covers that I most cherish are not necessarily ‘good drawings,’ but they have a spirit and a determined passion that seems to have spilled directly from the artist’s hand. As far as I’m concerned, that is what great art is all about. That is the spirit in which I sit and attempt to create memorable and exciting drawings to this day. It’s funny when I hear people talk about ‘the dying art’ of drawing or dismissively refer to hand-drawn art as ‘oldschool.’ The act of scrawling images on a surface is as primal as fire and fucking!” [www.dennisdread.com] 

**Entartete Kunts 2008
Opening Reception:
Friday - June 20, 2008
from 7:00 pm to midnight
@ Optic Nerve Arts in
Portland, Oregon.**

Dennis Dread in the studio...



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DENNIS DREAD Select “Artography”

- Abigail, *Forever Street Metal Bitch* — 2003, Drakkar
- Abscess, *Damned And Mummified* — 2004, Red Stream
- Abscess, *Horrorhammer* — 2007, Peaceville
- Abscess, *Thirst For Blood, Hunger For Flesh* — 2004, Necroharmonic
- Autopsy, *Dead As Fuck* — 2004, Necroharmonic
- Autopsy, *Dark Crusades DVD* — 2006, Peaceville
- Axiom, *Impaled By Chaos 7”* — 1999, Ministry Of Peace
- Axiom/Autonomia/Church Of Nihil Split LP — 1998, Catchphraze/Gasmask
- Bung, *Nerve Gas & Masturbation Demo* — 2001, Self-Released
- Darkthrone, *F.O.A.D.* — 2007, Peaceville
- Engorged, *Engorged* — 2002, Deathvomit
- Engorged, *Where Monsters Dwell* — 2004, Razorback
- Engorged/Groesome Stuff Relish Split 12” — 2004, Last House On The Right
- Golers, *Backwoods Messages* — 2008, Unrest
- Hellshock/Consume Split 7” — 2003, Self-Released
- V/A, *Lucifer Rising Soundtrack* — 2008, Ajna
- Machetazo, *The Maggot Sessions 7”* — 2003, First Blood Family
- Phobia, *Cruel* — 2006, Willowtip/Deep Six
- Phobia, *Grind Your Fucking Head In* — 2003, Deep Six
- The Horror Hive Compilation* — 2004, Razorback
- Victimizer, *The Final Assault* — 2007, Hells Headbangers
- WarMachine/Yankee Wuss Split 12” — 2000, Consensus Reality
- W.T.N., *Black Hearse* — 2006, Scrotum Jus