

Death and Resurrection

“To represent terrible and questionable things is, in itself, the sign of an instinct of power and magnificence in the artist; he doesn’t fear them. There is no such thing as pessimistic art. Art affirms.”

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*



Lustmord / *Sexual Murder*

Installation view, Weimar, Germany

Room installation:
Dimensions 70mm x 120mm.

Materials:
Peep hole, wooden floor, mannequin, chair, mirror, knife, doll, red neon light, dirt, rocks, womans clothing, wine bottle, shovel, mans clothing, stool.



Lustmord / *Sexual Murder*

Bixby actively builds upon source material and research for the construction of his works. For this project Bixby analyzed murders in pre-Hitler Germany and their artistic representations, investigating the chilling motives behind representations that aestheticize violence, and that turn the mutilated female body into an object of fascination. The German term *Lustmord* implies desire or pleasure along with sexual gain from the murderous act or representation.

In his installation *Lustmord* (2012), Bixby uses tilted perspective, angular lines, and clutter to accentuate the organized chaos of a scene. A woman sits in the corner of a room, leaning forward with her feet hanging above a glowing red rectangular hole in the floor and a bloodied knife in her right hand. A man's jacket and hat on the floor next to the woman indicate the recent disrobing of the victim.

Bixby leads the viewer to the perpetrator through his canny arrangement of objects on the floor, directing the eye up the middle of the image through the shovel leaning against the wall, to the pile of dirt, and onto a tall mirror with a baby doll at its base mimicking the woman's glossy-eyed expression. One is left to puzzle out the location of the missing body. On the floor in the foreground, a scattered bouquet of flowers along with a dark-colored bottle, suggest a nonviolent prelude to the murder that we assume followed.

The most important witness to this crime is the viewer, whose voyeuristic relationship to the scene is accessed through a peephole. The image does not give us a view of the world outside, but we can assume this crime is occurring in the city. The image does not feature a window, and instead offers a large mirror which functions in a similar manner, suggesting a space beyond the picture plane—a space that we the viewers, inhabit. The mirror is placed squarely in the middle of the room, emphasizing the viewer's perspective, and underscoring the viewer's complicity in the *Lustmord* as bearing witness to the crime.

A final indication of the metropolitan location of *Lustmord* is the *mise-en-scènes*. The setting is an interior urban space of an apartment or hotel room. While not only representing the urban surroundings, the room can be understood as representing traditionally gendered spaces. The typical *Lustmord* villain's entry into the private space of the room where he murders a female victim is a violent parable of sexual penetration. It could be further suggested that the violation of the private, traditionally female space of the home by a male criminal is an inversion of the female urbanite's increasing encroachment on the public spaces of the city. The danger of the metropolis is thus insinuated: if the modern woman enters into the public life of the city, she is putting herself in danger. Bixby plays on the *Lustmord* genre by inverting gender roles and putting the female into the role of the criminal perpetrating a crime upon a male victim.

Lustmord is a sustained reflection on the relationships between gender, crime, violence and representation, and is part of a series of works titled *Death and Resurrection*.



Archäologie, Ausgrabung, Und was übrig bleibt / Archeology, Excavation, And What Remains

Installation view, Weimar, Germany

Room installation:
Dimensions 70mm x 120mm.

Materials:
Wooden floor, red neon light, dirt, rocks.



Archäologie, Ausgrabung, Und was übrig bleibt* / *Archeology, Excavation, And What Remains

As a continuation of his series of works titled *Death and Resurrection* Brian Bixby's second work in the series is an installation in which he is using architecture, light and space to represent gender identities and narrative imaginations of a crime scene. The installation consists of a single room with walls and ceiling painted black, the wooden floor has an elongated rectangular cut which follows the grain of the wood floor panels. Inside of this cut is a red neon light which illuminates the interior of the hole and allows us to see further into the hole which is filled with dirt. On the lower left side of the hole is a pile of dirt and rocks about two feet high, presumably this material has been removed from beneath the floor panel.

One interpretation can be drawn by taking into consideration Bixby's title, *Archaeology, Excavation And What Remains*. We must first ask ourselves what is it that is being dug up or recovered from the past? In this case I will venture to guess that the archaeology Bixby refers to is essentially a reference to the past; past memories, dreams and perhaps innocence itself. Where is this past being taken from, metaphorically it appears it is coming from the womb - the slit in the floor roughly approximating an analogy of the eviscerated reproductive organs that spill from the cleaved vagina - again referencing *Der Lustmörder (Selbstporträt)* by Otto Dix. Lustmord is the ultimate paradox of life and death, fusing two seemingly irreconcilable, radically opposite poles, and Bixby's reference here to female genitalia in his own Lustmord composition reinforces this paradox. And so, what is it that remains? I believe that the artist is proposing this very question rather than providing a concrete answer.

Bixby's series *Death and Resurrection* is inspired by his research into the Weimar-era paintings of Lustmord. These Lustmord crimes often involve the destruction of women's genitals and a sexual excitation in the act of killing. The phrase traces back to the psychiatrists and scholars reacting to the serial murder wave that affected Germany in the early twentieth century, and it was intended to be a technical and secular description, with no connotations of "monsters" or "evil". The view at the time was, naturally, that scholars just should not think that way. Yet when translated into English, "lust murder" reverted to ancient ideas of moral evil and depraved sexuality. For the public these murders created waves of fear, shock and eventually grew into the basis of morality tales for children as a warning about the dangers of the world around them.

In this sense you can see these serial murder stories as representative of a loss of innocence that we have as children. And in a wider sense, the painters who created the original Lustmord paintings had recently suffered their own loss of innocence after experiencing first hand the cruelty and violence of war. Bixby's installation takes this history into consideration and puts it into a room for us to experience first hand on a personal level. The loss of innocence and dreams is a timeless theme - and this piece is not only a reference to the 1920's Weimar republic. Bixby's installation takes place in a somewhat domesticated setting - the floor has a feeling of age but the room itself, although completely black, has some tell-tale signs that make us feel like we are in an interior urban space. Only a small light in the ceiling lights the room other than the neon light, but on the wall there is a large black heavy curtain that presumably covers a window. There are several electricity plugs in the wall that also hint at a domestic living space - this is not a room representing a void or a non-place, this is visibly an urban setting shrouded in black, somehow transformed as if taken from a dream.

As I stand inside Bixby's dark dream room as it were I think to myself about my own archaeology, about when I first learned about death, experienced violence, lost my virginity, and if my own innocence was truly lost or if perhaps it had just been buried in my sub-conscious. Could it be what Bixby is saying is that innocence is not lost but rather it is in need of digging up and remembering? If this is indeed his intention then perhaps what remains is our future and a revitalized spirit knowing that in fact nothing is really lost afterall - even in the most extreme cases, we are still humans with a soul.

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