



Daniel Hartlaub at Electro Studios Project Space

Learning to live in these weird times – Daniel Hartlaub at the Electro Studios

Over the weekend of 26–28 May, the Electro Studios Project Space (ESPS) in St Leonards hosted the first UK exhibition of German artist Daniel Hartlaub. If you weren't there, read on – *Stewart Rayment* reviews this extraordinary happening.



A glimpse of Hartlaub's artwork at ESPS

Daniel Hartlaub works across several media, drawing, a film maker, music videos, comic books and graphic novel, computer games, performance. The genesis of these is frequently a charcoal drawing, which Hartlaub describes as Black Drawing, a technique erasing from a blackened sheet; he also found that this works drawing digitally. The show was entitled *The Post Apocalyptic Romantic* (or how I learned to live in these weird times).

Daniel Hartlaub is a German artist based in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He studied at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach, Germany and at St Martin's College of Art and Design in London, England. *Die Post-Apokalyptische Romantik* started as an art movement with Jasko Barabus, following their visit to a decommissioned nuclear power station near Frankfurt; Jasko died last year.

If you think Romantic in terms of Constable, Delacroix or Turner, you will sense the irony here, though perhaps the haunting quality of Casper David Friedrich provides an unanticipated link. Are we post-apocalyptic? Is an apocalypse already upon us? The Chernobyl disaster and Fukushima are amongst the better-known nuclear accidents. Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia is in the hands of the Russian terror-state. Chernobyl provides the best context, as Nature has fought back.

Versuchatomkraftwerk Kahl was closed in 1985; Germany is decommissioning all their nuclear plants, whilst we expand ours. Hartlaub speaks of the contrast between the elegant architecture of the plant and Nature's reaffirmation around it. Climate Change and Covid 19 (famine and pestilence?) join and ever-present war, at last one we are forced to notice... surely the four riders are assembled; are we living in a post-apocalyptic world, or at least, as Hartlaub puts it, 'a slow-burning apocalypse'? Yet 'only on a fictional/cinematic level do we allow the apocalypse to happen, and to entertain us.'

One of the things that immediately struck you on entering the gallery was the scale of some of the works, from ceiling to floor; Daniel said that he likes to see these as backdrops, a connecting link with his cinematic and theatrical work perhaps. The darkness also emphasises the Film Noire connotation as many of the drawings will be extrapolated in other mediums. The works featured span over about 20 years, many of them coming from his 2022 *Rosalie* project for a comic and computer game. Film works were shown concurrently.

So, why St Leonards, one might ask? Hartlaub has participated in works here before, and has regularly collaborated with Keith Rodway and local ensemble Necessary Animals, either providing artwork for them, or the band providing the music for his computer graphics etc. (indeed amongst the recorded music available was the number *Nobody Knows Who I Am*, which was written by Keith Rodway for *Rosalie*).

This leads in the multimedia event on the evening of Saturday 27 May. The set opened with Simon and the Pope (Simon Charterton & John Pope), another familiar Hastings drum & bass ensemble (they usually play at the Marina Fountain on the first Thursday of the month).



Simon and the Pope

After a break the music jumped straight to the avant garde. Necessary Animals followed, first improvising behind Lucy Brennan Shiel's rendering of Yeats' *The Second Coming*, then Amanda Thompson's version of *Nobody Knows Who I Am*. Their style might be described as how Roxy Music might have turned out in Brian Eno and stayed and Bryan Ferry left.



Lucy Brennan Shiel performing with, Amanda Thompson and Keith Rodway's Necessary Animals

They were followed by violinist Richard Moore, familiar from Bluegrass sessions at The Stag, but very different here as modulated at the hands of Anthony Moore – (no relation – formerly a Slapp Happy/Henry Cow and sometime Pink Floyd collaborator amongst others). Finally, Hartlaub projected clips from his films and still works, with the Moores and Necessary Animals improvising against that backdrop. The studio doors gave these an appropriately post-industrial setting, and the more architectural images a new 3D quality.



Richard and Anthony Moore (not related)

If all of this music wasn't enough, the evening also saw the launch of two recordings, an LP, a musical collaboration between Hartlaub and ambient composer/musician J Peter Schwalm *Die Post-Apokalyptische Romantik*. Schwalm is probably best known in the UK for his work with Brian Eno. Necessary Animals released their single *Nobody Knows Who I Am*. Details of how to find these are below.

The disused workspace environment of the Electro Studios, hung with Hartlaub's dark work gave an edge to what must have been one of the most ambitious ambient/minimalist music projects in the town for many years. Indeed, one of the punters, on leaving, said that it was probably the best performance she had seen in Hastings over many years. Keith Rodway deserves a special mention here, for pulling it all together.

The exhibition was funded by a grant from the government of the Hessen Land (state), proud of their culture and happy to reach out beyond their borders. In contrast, our government cuts Arts Council funding and forces them to make unthought out decisions as part of its Levelling Up programme. In response to this, Equity, the performing arts trades union, is calling for a decentralisation of Arts Council funding, perhaps along German lines? British bands struggle to perform in Europe post-Brexit; where would the Beatles have got to if starting today?

Its a grey world, and here, illuminated in black and white by Daniel Hartlaub.

You can see more of Daniel Hartlaub's work on his website (<http://danielhartlaub.com/>). Both of the recordings are laser-cut in very limited runs and if interested in acquiring contact Daniel Hartlaub by email (mail@danielhartlaub.com).

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