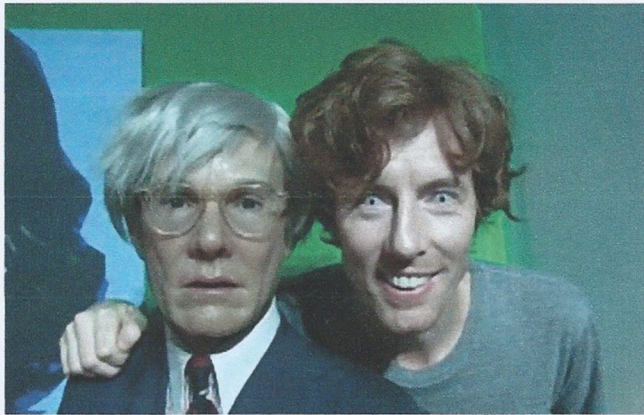


There's No Place Like Home (And That's Probably for the Best): Olaf Breuning's 'Home 3' Takes on New York



Kerstetter in 'Home 3.' (Courtesy the artist and the Metamatic Research Initiative)

A tall, gangly redhead wearing ice-blue contact lenses is at an Occupy Wall Street rally. "I'm here demonstrating for the people," he says jubilantly, holding aloft a banana peel. Then, suddenly, his mood shifts, and he looks shaken. "The problem is, I don't know if I'm the 1 percent or the 99 percent. I was never any good at math." He snaps out of it and begins dancing with a nearby group of protestors. Seconds later, he points excitedly at a Fidel Castro impersonator whom he mistakes for the genuine article, and dashes up to him. "Habla Español?"

The Occupy rally is but one stop on the madcap romp through some 50 New York City locations—the Apple Store, Nathan's hot dog eating contest, a Chelsea gallery opening, Balthazar—that constitutes Swiss-born artist Olaf Breuning's new film, *Home 3*, set to premiere at the Swiss Institute on September 4. Like its predecessors in the series, *Home 1* and *Home 2*, which were set in far-flung locales like Machu Picchu, Paris, Ghana and Tokyo, this one stars the artist's good friend Brian Kerstetter as a loony tourist. But the new film brings Mr. Breuning closer to the place that, for the past 10 years, he's actually called home.

"It's my homage to New York," the artist said a few weeks ago, sitting on one of the red molded plastic seats of a booth, originally from a pizzeria he used in a shoot, that he's plopped down in a grassy field on his 10-acre property upstate. His artistic reputation may be that of a rollicking prankster—he's made a piece involving people in monkey suits, another with people in Viking costumes and another in which the Easter Island sculptures were turned into Easter bunnies—but in person Mr. Breuning is soft-spoken and serious.

In his studio, he cued up another scene from the new film. "This is kind of primitive," he said, as Mr. Kerstetter romped in a stretch Hummer limo with two half-naked blonde strippers as a male midget stripper looked on. Later, Mr. Kerstetter puts on an "Angry Bird" costume, has a steak at Balthazar, runs into some women on the street

and begins dancing with them in a primal, sexual fashion.

In its antic editing and non-linear narrative, *Home 3* was partly inspired by the films of a younger artist, Ryan Trecartin. "When I saw [them], I said, 'Fuck, yes. That's what I should do,'" Mr. Breuning said. He has his quibbles with Mr. Trecartin's films, but their responsiveness to their cultural moment got him. "To be right in the time—he hit the nail with a time-spirit I liked."

But the more significant influence on *Home 3* reaches further into the past. Whereas the first two *Homes* were self-funded, to the tune of \$30,000 to \$40,000 each, *Home 3* was financed by a grant from the Metamatic Research Initiative, an organization set up in 2009 by two Dutch collectors who wanted to preserve the legacy of Swiss-French artist Jean Tinguely, best known for his own *Homage to New York*, an enormous, Rube Goldberg-like kinetic sculpture presented at the Museum of Modern Art in 1960. With spinning wheels, spindles and upturned pots spitting flame and puffs of smoke, it was designed to self-destruct.

Home 3 is an update of the Tinguely in more ways than one. Tinguely's homage commented on the industrial age through the use of industrial materials; Mr. Breuning's *Home* films use the internet to send up the very erratic, high-speed, obsessive culture the internet has produced. He began conceiving the *Home* series around 2001. "At that time," he said, "people started to seem obviously addicted to virtual worlds." All three films began with web-trolling, but for *Home 3*, instead of Googling tribal rituals, Messrs. Breuning and Kerstetter scoured the New York arts calendar for events with, as Mr. Kerstetter put it, the "most comic potential."

And while they are filled with the sophomoric humor that is a staple of Mr. Breuning's art—they have been compared to *Jackass*—the *Home* films also share the sense of alienation that characterized Tinguely's sensibility. "In Tinguely's *The End of the World II*," said Metamatic Research Initiative director Siebe Tettero, referring to a piece that successfully self-destructed in Las Vegas in 1962, "he brought a very sharp, cloaked message about how the world really wasn't as funny as we all think. That's what Olaf does as well."

In *Home 1*, Mr. Kerstetter portrayed a young man in a ratty wife-beater who tells a series of fantastical stories in a kitschy hotel room while variously stoking a fire, taking a bath and jumping on a bed. In one vignette, a gang travels to Pennsylvania's Amish country, assaults a young Amish boy, strips him and puts an ET mask on his head.

As the line between reality and fiction blurs—is this a story the narrator made up or one he's remembering?—the film becomes claustrophobic and menacing, the narrator increasingly confused.

Home 2, which turned heads at the 2008 Whitney Biennial, resurrected the same character, this time as a goofy tourist who, through his unwittingly confrontational interactions with locals from Tokyo to Papua New Guinea, raises questions about exploitation and exoticism. By the end of the film, the editing has gotten choppy and fast-paced, and the protagonist seems on the verge of self-destruction. Where *Home 2* walked a line between offensiveness and entertainment, the third installment feels less in-your-face, but perhaps that's because it's on familiar turf.

"It doesn't matter where the films take place, they always feel like they're in the same off-kilter, Breuning world," said Swiss Institute director Gianni Jetzer. "The character is a little bit from another planet. And he's a lonely character. There's something quite melancholic about him."

A longtime supporter of Mr. Breuning's work, Mr. Jetzer included him in the first exhibition he ever curated, "Diana 98," at X-Tra in Zurich. The show was timed to the one-year anniversary of Princess Diana's death; Mr. Breuning's piece was an installation set to speed metal music. Of the wide variety of media across which Mr. Breuning works—sculpture, photography, installation—Mr. Jetzer considers the films to be "the truest part of his work, because they're his passion. There's no market for the film work. He doesn't do them for gallery shows."

With his films—unlike, for instance, a outdoor sculpture commission he is currently working on in Toronto—"I don't feel pressured to do something that people like," said Mr. Breuning. "There are so many compromises. With the film, I can do whatever I want. And that makes me happy."

He and Mr. Kerstetter started making films together in the 1990s in Zurich, and continued to do so after they both moved to New York around 2000. "We have a 12-year history of going out each Friday night," said Mr. Breuning. "We meet, we have drinks, we have dinner. Then we go to clubs."

The *Home* series was a natural outgrowth of their travels. "Brian is an incredibly good sport," said Mr. Breuning. "He would take his clothes off and go into the street."

Though not a professional actor, Mr. Kerstetter has a fabulist sensibility that works well with Mr. Breuning's ploys. "We'd be out in Papua New Guinea and see something interesting. Olaf would say, 'these 10 mud men dressed in white,'" Mr. Kerstetter told *The Observer*. "Then he would point to something on the ground and say, 'Pick that up and see if you can get into some sort of conflict.'" He would, and then some: Mr. Kerstetter once got kicked out of Machu Picchu for chasing an alpaca while wearing a bull's head.

But with both men entering a more domestic phase of their lives—Mr. Kerstetter has a child and may soon move to Belgium, Mr. Breuning is settling into family life with his wife Makiko—*Home 3* may mark the end of the series. "I think the naiveté is connected to this innocent moment of jumping into the world," said Mr. Breuning. "For a 42-year-old man, that gets lost."

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