

# The Black Hole Universe

A Film

By Zander Blom

I've wanted to make a futuristic sci-fi noir space film for a long time. Not necessarily a film in the sense that it is an actual moving-picture/audio-visual-experience, but I've wanted to work within and towards a similar structure that making a film requires. Something with a rough script and plot, something with different scenes that form part of a larger narrative, which can become a vehicle to talk about a lot more than what's literally happening inside the frame in front of you. In November 2009 I was invited to go on an art residency in Sao Paulo, it was my first artist's residency abroad. I was overwhelmed by the city. I was very much disorientated in this unfamiliar, almost extraterrestrial world. My studio; a lonely white space, right in the middle of this metropolis, surrounded by stretches and stretches of strange architecture occupied by strange people. I was also very much aware that I had come all the way from Johannesburg, which is a deeply strange Metropolis in it's own right. In my studio at the residency I found myself building sets and making still images for my film project instead of attempting to really engage with the greater environment. I successfully managed to colonise the studio space, make it mine and turn it into a home away from home with almost all the qualities of my space in Johannesburg. The same but different.

I started noticing interesting things in my little universe. Firstly the physical space of the studio was different to the way it is back home. The ceilings were not ornate and pressed, and the cornices were bold and simplistic, plus the paint on the walls was crisp and fresh. So it made different kinds of makeshift structures and compositions possible. Then, almost all my seemingly unexceptional props and materials were sourced in the city. Turns out, there are all sorts of oddities/inconsistency in the most commonplace materials. A wall paint that contains slightly less acrylic than another will have an entirely different visual effect once photographed, and a table lamp in a strange shape can potentially throw the most incredible soft light and create beautifully coloured lens flares, not to mention the inherent ability to double up as a space ship. The props and materials become the building blocks for an entire other world, so the oddities gets magnified and emphasized, which means that in a sense they stop being generic at all. There were other things that I observed and incorporated into my world, for example a way of using spray paint that I saw all around the city, the stark yet soft grays of the city - because of the weather the place was permanently covered in a haze of reflected light. So this duality arises, where to a large extent every city is the same city, and every room is the same room, and my personal abyss is the same abyss everywhere. But one can also very successfully argue the reverse, as I just have.

Once I got back to Johannesburg and gathered sufficient perspective on what had actually happen in Sao Paulo I decided that I wanted to do the rest of the space film project in different cities abroad – for a moment exchange my usual method of working in one very familiar location for endless stretches of time, with working for short bursts of time in foreign locations, and for a change, show the actual installations, which usually are only accessible through the photographs.

My references and ideas for this project are far flung. I'm looking at Abstract art, mainly Constructivism, Abstract Expressionism, and various strains of Minimalism. I'm looking at the surface and composition or anti-composition qualities in Minimalism. I'm also interested in the idea of art that transcends its physicality into a kind of pure experience of object and space. I'm looking at artists like Frank Stella (the Black paintings in

particular), Mark Rothko (the Rothko Chapel in particular), Ad Reinhardt, Jean Arp, Sol LeWitt, Alexander Rodchenko\*, Kazimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky, Donald Judd—people from all walks of the abstract. Because I'm working with photographic stills, the play between representational, and non-representational also becomes important, as well as the illusion of three-dimensional space versus two-dimensional flat surfaces.

Abstraction generally resists narrative, and subject matter; this is a point of particular interest since I'm working within the framework of a film. The project is framed as a film; in the same way that I tend to frame many of my projects as things that they really are not. The framing is a vehicle into which the project is conceived - a coded vessel that not only directly links to and strengthens the aesthetic and theoretical concerns of the projects, but it also provides an interesting predetermined yet malleable structure or base for the work to grow and take shape in. Furthermore I'm exploring archetypal images of colonized space, uncharted realms, alien life forms, and the imagined future, that comes with the territory of sci-fi film. My main film references are: 2001: A Space Odyssey - Stanley Kubrick, Metropolis - Fritz Lang, Dark City - Alex Proyas, Blade Runner - Ridley Scott, Star Wars - George Lucas, War of The Worlds - Stephen Spielberg. Other points of interest come from astronomy, science, math and philosophy.

In science and astronomy I'm interested in things like light, energy, Black Holes, Nebulas, Multiple Island Universes, and the idea in modern quantum mechanics that space is not empty, but rather seething with latent or virtual particles. I'm looking at the idea of mathematical beauty - something that is said to be about combining simplicity with depth. And when I think about that it brings my thoughts back to minimalism and abstraction, and beauty in art, and then back to the Void. Now my mind drifts towards the links between the Void, the pure experience of object and space, and the idea of staring out over the physical universe, into the unknown, or into nothing, or into a corner and all of these things somehow become one thing. So, simply put; I'm observing the world from my abyss, taking all these references and ideas, throwing them into my cauldron, stirring them around, and divining the outcome.

With my previous long-term projects, my interest has very much been an investigation/interrogation of art history, a sort of art-history/critical-theory lesson to myself. Although I'm still very much interested in the history of art my practice is becoming increasingly less polemic, less ironic and less theoretically or historically illustrative. Instead it is turning into a more open, abstract and idiosyncratic world, a more narrowly focused and fine-tuned, yet more chaotic and inclusive Black Hole Universe.