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Dean, Mark

## Christian Disco (Terminator)

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Begun about a decade ago, her old-master painting project rigorously institutes a deep *re*-skilling that countermands the apparently traumatic *de*-skilling she (along with generations of artists since) experienced at CalArts. (She currently teaches oil painting to art students at University of California, Riverside.)

What makes the artist's militant focus on traditional craft of salient interest is the anachronistic pictorial strangeness she delivers in the course of balancing layered passages of virtuosic technique with a vigilant resistance to and active undermining of that technique's tyranny. These paintings are decidedly uncool and that, as it turns out, is both their great strength and the source of disarming fascination. I'd say they rub critically against the grain of now, but perhaps that implies too direct a causation. Utterly indifferent to concerns of contemporary aesthetic currency or audience, they set off on their own through the recent past of postmodern pastiche and questionable shades of good and bad taste into a subtly new, persistently personal, and altogether promising left field.

—Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

## LONDON

### Mark Dean BEACONSFIELD

The phrase “Christian disco” might trigger cringe-making thoughts of buttoned-up adolescent parties monitored by censorious adults and lubricated with fizzy drinks and Cliff Richard hits; but that scenario couldn't be further from Mark Dean's grimly impressive video installation *Christian Disco (Terminator)*, 2010. Crafted from a three-second fragment of the 1984 film *The Terminator*, it shows a young man and woman dancing in a disco, but, characteristically, Dean's edit desynchronizes and loops the footage, distorting its colors and corrupting the outlines of the swaying bodies. Luridly hued skeletal afterimages trail behind the dancers, occasionally catching up with them and sketching skulls onto their youthful, unconcerned faces.

The work's sound track cannibalizes the movie's theme music with its clanging bells and driving beat, and stitches onto it two voices, one male and one female, recorded from a Holocaust Memorial Day service at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. “Here ends the first lesson,” “here ends the second lesson,” they intone somberly, but Dean's piece offers no lesson. Projected onto a large screen in Beaconsfield's cavernous brick railway arch, it suggests both a gigantic danse macabre and hallucinatory



Mark Dean, *Christian Disco (Terminator)*, 2010, still from a color video, asynchronous loop.

video decor for a rave whose music plays on but whose celebrants have mysteriously disappeared. Hints of motifs from the Western Christian repertoire—apocalypse scenes or the horror-pornography of *vanitas* images—are grafted onto contemporary existential and political anxieties: nuclear proliferation, survivalism, or the effects of spectacular, hedonistic-escapist industrialized entertainment (such as the Christian-derived *Terminator* narratives, or images of present-day clubbing and drug use). The viewer is left in the grip of contradictory urges: to saturate oneself in the hypnotic ambience, and to get the hell out as fast as possible.

The other large video installation in this survey of two decades of Dean's work similarly attracts and repels. *Love Missile (7" vs 12")*, 2010, features two recordings of manufactured punk band Sigue Sigue Sputnik's single of the same name (with its calculatedly offensive “shoot it up” refrain), phased so they pass in and out of sync. The audio component accompanies a ten-foot-high video projection of a human silhouette, haloed by a sparkling golden aura suggestive of rock-concert stage lighting or a rocket's tail (in fact, it shows a street-light reflected on water). Two smaller monitors screen vinyl-record-shaped images of warships launching cruise missiles (these last are “deleted” with white strips, rendering them crucifixes). On paper, this conflation of rock, religion, warfare, and phallic imagery might sound rote, but the work itself is challenging and ambivalent. The doubled musical track generates slurs and echoes that lend it a peculiar depth. And the projected figure is likewise doubled so that its outlines never coincide. Ultimately, the work seems to embody impossible desires for psychical unity or transcendence—but though it signals the horror that can issue from the playing-out of such desires in real life, it doesn't trivialize them.

Beaconsfield's survey—timely, excellently curated by David Crawforth and Naomi Siderfin, and a big achievement for a small nonprofit team—also included a “video jukebox” screening thirty-six of Dean's videos plus the artist's written commentary on each. Briefly alluded to is the artist's childhood experience of rape, a shocking detail that suggests a searing therapeutic dimension in certain works. *Goin' Back (The Birds/The Byrds x 32 +1)*, 1997, manipulates Hitchcock footage of a bloodied, collapsed Tippi Hedren, shifting her back and forth from wide-eyed dreamy repose to terror as she fights off Hitchcock's attacking lens. On the sound track a repeated line from a pretty Byrds tune sings of “going back,” a paradoxically soothing reference to, in Dean's words, “the recovery of traumatic memory.” Hedren becomes a surrogate for the artist in a nuanced and moving moment of cross-gender identification.

—Rachel Withers

### Phoebe Unwin WILKINSON

Something has been happening in the painting departments of London's art schools in recent years. The Royal College of Art, Slade School of Fine Art, Goldsmiths, and the Royal Academy of Arts have all turned out young painters who have rapidly ascended into the city's best contemporary galleries and collections. While it seems harsh to be so reductive, there is a common thread many of them share: a semi-naïve, figurative approach that pays homage to Guston and early Picasso, often offering Dana Schutz a deferential nod too. The trouble is, not all of the members of this new “London School” are as great as the hype suggests. Phoebe Unwin, though, is definitely one of the good ones. Her recent solo exhibition, “Man made,” may not have been perfect, but it did show the potential of her thoughtful approach to paint.