

Goat Blood, Black Metal, and Bumblebees: A Q&A with "Mirror Me" Editor Brandon Stosuy

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"Mirror Me," [out now](http://primaryinformation.org/index.php?/upcoming/mirror-me) (<http://primaryinformation.org/index.php?/upcoming/mirror-me>) from independent publisher **Primary Information**, is not your ordinary art book. Bringing together the work of over a dozen contributors, including the project's co-organizer, [Kai Althoff](http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/9190/kai-althoff/) (<http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/9190/kai-althoff/>), **Village Voice** regular **Zach Baron**, and musician [Matteah Baim](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Matteah+Baim) (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Matteah+Baim>), the volume is not modeled on the sleek tomes of a publisher like **Steidl** but rather pulpy 'zine classics like "Maximumrockroll." The newsprint edition is thoroughly enigmatic, combining lyrics, family snapshots, ruminations on metal icons, sketches, and black-and-white photographs. "Mirror Me" was edited by **Brandon Stosuy**, who is an editor at [Stereogum.com](http://stereogum.com/) (<http://stereogum.com/>) and the **Believer**, a student of downtown New York culture, an academician of metal, and an occasional co-organizer of events with [Matthew Barney](http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/3649/matthew-barney/) (<http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/3649/matthew-barney/>). **ARTINFO** recently spoke with Stosuy about his latest endeavor.

Part of the appeal of "Mirror Me" is its sense of mystery, and I mean that in the most general sense — we're thrown into the 'zine without knowing what we're in for or, at times, what we're looking at. I gather that the book came from a previous exhibition and 'performance' in New York — can you describe what that entailed, and how that process culminated in the 104-page book that's now out from Primary Information?

The mystery is essential to "Mirror Me" — the project was, and is, extremely personal for Kai and me. The original "Mirror Me" installation — housed at **Dispatch Gallery** for three months in the summer of 2009 — was something we did as a 50/50 collaboration. It depended entirely on both participants: We literally divided the small space in half, hung reflective material in the middle, filled the space with things that held different sorts of emotional, intellectual weight for both of us. The original impetus was our friendship and this dialogue we were having about [Varg Vikernes](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Varg+Vikernes) (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Varg+Vikernes>); you get an overview of it in the final text of the 'zine. Our actual 40-something page dialogue was looped, in various versions, during the installation. As we continued talking, things grew more complex and emotional for various outside reasons, moving us beyond **Burzum** and black metal to family and personal loss.

It started as something Kai and were doing alone, but we ended up involving a number of friends for these various reasons; the installation involved a continual accumulation — each month we added more to it. At first it was a series of video loops by [Peter Sotos](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Peter+Sotos) (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Peter+Sotos>) and [collages by Philip Best](http://philipbest.blogspot.com/) (<http://philipbest.blogspot.com/>) on one wall. We left the opposite wall blank. Then [Lionel Maunz](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Lionel+Maunz) (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Lionel+Maunz>) added sculpture and drawings to that other wall. In the third month, Kai and I moved into the space for the night. The official opening involved a number of rituals enacted by Kai and me and the other contributors. It's nothing I want to repeat here, but there are a few eyewitness accounts out there. After "Mirror Me" was deinstalled, we were asked to include it in some way in the **White Columns Annual 2009**. "Mirror Me" wasn't something we could or would want to recreate in another space.

It wasn't a traveling exhibition. I'm not sure we even considered it an exhibition, actually. It was a one-time culmination. Our friend [Theo Stanley](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Theo+Stanley) (<http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Theo+Stanley>) had documented the final opening night — we edited down a 20-minute video from the few hours of that footage. We initially included the video, along with the 'zine, at White Columns, but it gave away too many of the secret, ritualistic aspects of the

installation, so after that opening, we removed it, leaving behind the 'zine as the project's only residue. That, and an older edition of **Nabokov's** "Ada" that had fallen apart by the time the White Columns show came down. It was also included at Dispatch, along with a few other relevant books.

There's a long list of contributors who are involved with this project, including Zach Baron, Matthea Baim, Adam Helms, and Peter Sotos. How did you make the decision to combine the various works into "Mirror Me" without specifically demarcating whose work is whose? Are we supposed to read a linear narrative of sorts here?

Everyone involved in the original installation contributed to the 'zine. During the White Columns exhibition I asked the participants to add pages to the master copy every few days. This way it had a feel of accumulation, like the original installation. And also like the installation, it's unclear who did what — it's communal. Each page does reflect back to the original "Mirror Me," though. Secret identities are hidden in the logo on the front of the 'zine, for instance, the same logo we placed on the glass door of Dispatch. And it goes from there. There are a number of narratives embedded in the 'zine. I can't speak for Kai, because I don't want to give away his story. Mine includes (among other things) the show, my relationship with Kai, my relationship to extreme music, and small towns, and my family (and families in general). The ghost that haunts my threads, though, is my mother, who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer during the preparation of the project. She died this past June. As she got sicker, and it became clearer she wouldn't beat the cancer, her life and our relationship started guiding my side of things.

Why a 'zine? Because it's important to note that the publication has the look and feel of a classic black-and-white 'zine — right down to the ink that smudges off on your fingers while you're reading.

I like the look of 'zines. This one reminds me of "[Maximumrocknroll](http://maximumrocknroll.com/) (http://maximumrocknroll.com/)," which had a huge influence on me as a teenager — even when I hated it. That, and I did a 'zine for years as a kid. It was called "White Bread" and dealt with growing up in a white-trash working-class household. I felt comfortable returning to that form: I wrote each person involved in Mirror Me, asked them for a couple or more images, and pieced it all together. Someone suggested I lay it out on a computer, but it looked horrible that way. It was much easier with scissors, tape, and glue. "Mirror Me" was, and is, messy. It wouldn't make sense as a glossy book.

How does the life, music, and incarceration of black metal musician/convicted murderer Varg Vikernes inform "Mirror Me"? How would you say black metal/death metal and contemporary art cross over in a more general sense? You've collaborated on events in the past with Matthew Barney, and I take it that he has a similar appreciation for the genre.

The 'zine's final text about Varg and [Wynton Marsalis](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Wynton+Marsalis) (http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Wynton+Marsalis) offers the general framework for this. There's also just something about the one-man black metal band, the solitary individual. Varg — his often fascist, racist, homophobic, etc. beliefs, but also his amazing singing voice, his constant talk about family, especially his mother — is everywhere in the piece, for various reasons. I think it's most satisfying if folks dig them out on their own. But definitely do some reading on his mother: the time she tried to break him out of prison, wrote public letters in his defense. As far as the projects Matthew and I do together — those are based on a mutual love of metal and we've tried to keep them pretty far away from the contemporary art scene. Part of the fun of those events is their cultic nature, their secrecy. We intentionally promote them to an underground metal audience (and some non-metal friends), not the art world. Again, for me at least, there's a fascination with anonymity. We've done three and have a couple more in the works.

A lot of what's included here isn't for the fainthearted. On one page we see what appears to be a family photo of a mother and daughter on a swing set, over which there's the text: "Where the sun is silent/ the cold earth slept below/ baptized in black goat blood." Is it possible to 'love life' and also love black metal? From an outsider's perspective one can't be faulted for thinking that all this doom and gloom can get a bit... unhealthy? Yet obviously fans of black metal are finding something life-affirming here, inspiring and uplifting, even.

A lot of what shows up in the 'zine appears grim or evil, but is actually much gentler. The image you mention is a photo of my mother (six months pregnant with me) and my sister. The text is a mantra I pieced together from various black metal lyrics and repeated in my head during the part of the final performance where [Scott Campbell](http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/33846/scott-campbell/) (http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/33846/scott-campbell/) tattooed me — a whippoorwill on my left bicep and then a coded number system that relates to Kai and me on the back of my right arm. I thought it was interesting how pretty black metal lyrics can be, their connection to nature and the earth, to silence. My mother lived in the rural Pine Barrens; there was this whippoorwill in the trees around the house that kept me awake most of my childhood. Her house and barn were both falling apart. The trees are dense there, so you don't get too much sun. She had farm animals. She drove a pickup. She hated the city. So, weirdly, my mother's life reminded me of black metal — after I realized she was going to die, I mean. To me, it isn't doom and gloom. What's going on right now with American black metal ties into punk, hardcore, country music, etc. It isn't always as eerie and removed as what people have come to associate with the earlier Norwegian stuff, for instance. Not too many American black metal musicians wear corpse paint, for instance. And most go by their given names at this point. It's more personal — the veil's been lifted and the music's more human for it. That, and you're just as likely to hear [Johnny Cash](http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/35852/johnny-cash/) (http://www.artinfo.com/artists/profile/35852/johnny-cash/) or [Hank Williams](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Hank+Williams) (http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Hank+Williams) in my household, as you are [Bone Awl](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Ash+Pool) and [Ash Pool](http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Ash+Pool) (http://www.artinfo.com/search/results/?query=Ash+Pool). Anyway, yeah, you can love life and black metal.

What artists in New York and beyond are you most excited about these days? What's the most memorable performance you've attended or collaborated on recently?

I think **Lionel Maunz** is doing amazing work. He's one of the main contributors to "Mirror Me," but I'd say that even if he wasn't. He's the real deal, something a lot of artists pretend to be, but can't pull off honestly. Same goes for **Adam Helms**. I'm really excited about both of these guys' upcoming solo shows. The **WOLD** show Matthew and I did together a month or so ago was memorable, as was his **KHU** piece in Detroit last week. That one left me drained for days afterward; I was almost brought to tears a few times while it was happening. This past Friday I put on the **Swans** show at **Brooklyn Masonic Temple**. That was fun. I was a huge fan of theirs as a teenager, so felt pretty amazing to organize their first NYC show in 14 years.

"Mirror Me" ends with an interesting juxtaposition of images, considering so much of what proceeds the final pages is obsessed with death. We see a sleeping child, as well as a bee. Why end a death-and-decay obsessed book with such a pure and innocent image of young life?

These are both difficult to explain, but they do tie into loss and regeneration. The child is my son, Henry, who was born in July, five weeks after my mother died. The bee is something too personal to discuss. That said, the whole 'zine is about life.

Mirror Me is available now from Primary Information.



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