

Art in America



Tonight: The Remaining Monsters

by Adam O'Reilly



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"Maybe the physical zine has no meaning for bands these days, since they are connected on the web and to their fans all the time," says Cary Loren, artist, bookstore owner and multi-instrumentalist member of pioneering noise band Destroy All Monsters. He's playing devil's advocate, as he prepares to release *Destroy All Monsters Magazine 1976–1979*, a 278-page facsimile of the band's coveted zines. Made in collaboration with Primary Information, a New York-based publisher, the book presents these zines as if they were part of the discography of the band—as crucial as any album. The kaleidoscopic array of photography, collage and writing provides insight into the group's dystopian political views at the time.

Tonight the group will show two 60-minute videos at Migrating Forms in Brooklyn. The video *Clear Day* is a compilation of live DAM shows from Detroit, Los Angeles and San Diego. There are also interviews with the band mixed in with snippets from old Mexican horror films. The video, which was made in 1995 and released only on VHS, has been out of print since the late '90s. *Grow Live Monsters* is a 60-minute compilation of short films made between 1971 and 1976.

Formed in 1973, Destroy All Monsters (or "DAM" as it is often called) was a collective of musicians and artists, consisting of Loren, Mike Kelley, Niagara and Jim Shaw, all of whom hailed from Ann Arbor, Mich. (Later members included Michael Davis of the MC5 and Ron Asheton of the Stooges.) Their first show, in 1973, featured a violin, a sax, a vacuum cleaner and a coffee can as instrumentation. The group was asked to stop after 10 minutes of performing.



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The audience for DAM's progressive new sound was small and drawn mostly from the young art crowd. As Loren reflected in a 1996, "Imagining an audience for this was outside of reason. At most there were 30 people who came to hear us. One of them, David Fair, was to begin Half Japanese a couple years later after checking out our squall. "Calling All Girls" was an original DAM tune that found itself changed on Half Jap's first single."

The music was chaotic and clever: high-pitched violin, tape loops, free jazz reminiscent of Sun Ra taken beyond any musical reference known at the time. It challenged the audience with dark humor, projections of cartoons and a synthesis of proto-punk, noise, heavy metal and psychedelia that was heavily informed in art-world discussions of noise music, experimental compositional and improvisation methods.

Despite having a cult following (definitely far more than 30 people) as a live group, DAM released very little recorded music. They deliberately left their sounds in the ephemeral space of live performance. It wasn't until 1994, when Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore issued a three-disk compilation of the music they did record, during the late '70s, that the band entered the canon of experimental

Moore chronicled the early era of the group, when they were self-professed anti-rock, making amateur recordings of their own live performances, Mike Kelley's liner notes for the album reflect their unchanged manifesto from the 1970's: "Music is eternal; it is ahistorical. So says the polliwog. Music in time is Muzak: floating strains, the meaningless pap that provides the background soundtrack for other peoples' lives."

In 2009, James Hoff, co-founder of Primary Information, curated a show of Destroy All Monsters ephemera at Printed Matter in Chelsea. "Hungry for Death" included an accompanying vinyl of unreleased DAM recordings from 1975, *Double Sextet*. Over the last two years the group has traveled and exhibited the Destroy All Monster's archives, consisting of hundreds of posters, stickers, T-shirts, zines and miscellaneous items in London, Oslo, Athens, Paris, Lausanne and Rome.

"I've always felt a little embarrassed about the magazines. I liked them at the time, but later they just seemed too large and unfocused, slipshod," Loren said. "They were made under real low-quality conditions, most pages were hand-printed, and my skill levels were really poor, almost non-existent." Uneven rainbow rolled screenprints, faded Gestetner prints, film stills and scratchy writing contribute to the ramshackle quality of the magazines. It is what gives them their lasting charm. Like the music that was produced