

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY

MARKUS HANSEN

Markus Hansen on Bringing Post-9/11 Dreams Into Three-Dimensional Space

It's now been 16 years, so the collective shock of 9/11 has run its course. But while that immediate trauma, and its lingering effects, obviously impacted citizens of New York City and the Washington D.C. area, and Americans in general, the collective shock also rippled across the globe. Artist Markus Hansen, living in Paris at the time, was particularly struck by the terrorist spectacle's emotional and psychological effects. Four years later, Hansen used this shock to create the installation *The ones that got away* (2005), in which he turned a hotel room into an immersive dreamscape simulation of his post-2001 mind.

After 9/11, Hansen began recording his dreams. He'd done it before, but for other purposes. This time, however, Hansen wanted to see how the collective shock would work on his subconscious mind.

Hansen experienced what he calls a "moral ambiguity" in his dream states, and incorporated many of them into *The ones that got away*. Hansen did this by transforming the select dreams into written texts, then imprinting them onto the hotel walls with a luminescent pigment, which would only glow if spectators triggered a photographic flash upon entering the room. Also coated in luminescent pigment were pillow sculptures, modeled on a series of illustrations of bunched-up pillows drawn by German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer. While Hansen hasn't shown the installation in years, he did document it with a video, which acts as a sort of secondary artistic artifact. Viewers see the flash bulb, triggered by visitors, flickering inside the hotel room and illuminating the texts and pillows' luminescent pigments.

The atmosphere resembles the dream spaces conjured by David Lynch, a filmmaker and artist who has also plumbed the subconscious mind for material and scenographies. But Lynch's dream states are often steeped in American noir's archetypes, Hansen does something different. In his alternately dark and illuminated hotel room, he creates a space that could be anyone's post-9/11 dreamscape.

DREAM: What was your state of mind in the days and weeks following the September 11th attacks?

Markus Hansen: 9/11 affected everybody. It wasn't just an American issue, and it wasn't like an act of aggression that killed hundreds of thousands of people, like the Syrian War has done over the last four or five years. There was something so succinct that was engineered by al Qaeda that really hit the psyche right across all strata of societies.

How exactly did this feeling of being part of a collective shock intersect with the dreams you showcased in *The ones that got away*?

I'd recorded dreams in the past to see what was surfacing in them, and what I could hold onto the next day, which was the hard part. After 9/11, my dreams were really, really quite disturbing, so I started to record them again. The pieces of texts come from those recorded dreams. It seemed a very pertinent way of using those dreams.

Can you talk a bit about the installation space—that is, how you ended up installing the work in a hotel room?

It was quite funny, as it was one of those art fairs which, at that time, used to take place in hotels. I thought, well, if I'm going to do something in a hotel room, I'm not just going to hang dinky pictures on the walls. Let's use the space, let's use the context. So this idea of this place of passage seemed like a very appropriate location for these dreams.

And, of course, as the dreams were from that specific location (New York City), it all seemed to be conceptually quite pertinent a few years later. Although, thinking back on it now, I'm wondering how many people actually picked up on that because I don't recall getting any feedback on that contextual relevance.

The installation hasn't been shown in years, so your video recording is now how people get a glimpse of *The ones that got away*. The video itself, much like the installation it captured, is very evocative.

It's almost as if the struggle the camera is having in recording what's going on actually makes it into another piece. It gives you a strange sense of urgency. This luminescent pigment is making life tricky for the camera, so the image is constantly in a state of disintegration. It's that instability that I'm always really attracted to. It's a bit like dreams—they can slip between your fingers. One minute they are there, and the next minute they've disappeared.

What camera were you using?

I don't know. I still have it in a box somewhere. A little Sony single-chip camera that I always carried around with me, and I did performance stuff with it as well. It was really handy. It was like a pen for me: something I could use in all kinds of contexts. It was underpowered but it worked for what I was doing.

Today, it's really odd because it seems like every gadget can take a picture or film, and my desire to pick them up seems to have waned somewhat. I'm almost going back to painting. It's really strange. But I'm currently doing a performative project based on Wilfred Owen, a World War I poet. We are doing some choreography and deconstructing the poems, but we're doing it live, and I'm very interested in using the 360-degree cameras that have come out recently.

In looking at the video, the pillows really stand out as sculptural objects.

They're quite sculptural. They're three-dimensional reconstructions of a drawing of six pillows by Albrecht Dürer, done in 1493, that I was always obsessed with. The pillows look like Carl Andre sculptures. But, of course, because of the way Durer drew these pillows they look quite tortured.

At the time, there was the paradox of sleep as a form of forgetting and oblivion but also regeneration. For me, the pillows embodied this paradox. And within the context of the September 11, 2001 experience, how do we move on from something that settles into the psyche the way it did? How do we forget?

For me as a German, these historical questions are something we are always asking ourselves. I'm not saying we turn around in circles. Hopefully we are actually able to move on. But you observe these traumatic moments, and then you try to figure out how a society, group or individual can move on without creating more damage.

This raises another interesting question. You're not a psychoanalysis, you're an artist, but after recording your dreams and turning them into an installation, do you think that people deal with these traumatic events in a constructive way in their subconscious dream states?

As you say, I'm not a psychoanalyst and I'm no dream analyst either, but I could certainly begin to deduce this from what I was reading. You start seeing patterns [in dreams]. Some of my dreams were quite apocalyptic and absurd. But at the same time you sort of think, well, obviously the subconscious is busy with it and it's working hard.

I don't know to what extent it's actually helping, and if there is any residue from a healing process that we can benefit from once we regain consciousness. Maybe they are just nightmares and subconscious irregularities.

In the end, the idea of recording one's dreams and working with them is the interesting process. You're making the unconscious conscious, and from that point you can actually take steps toward moving on. It certainly gives you something to work with.

Interview by DJ Pangburn