

## **Jason Kahn // *The Garden***

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I was asked to record something of my impressions from a week at the Screamscape in Fribourg. I attended many concerts, saw many works of art, met many people, heard lots of screaming. But what really brought me to screaming was the garden of a house just in front of Fri Art. More than making me want to scream, this garden embodied the scream, was itself a scream. So loud that it deafened my ears, infusing my bones with its vibrations and scaring away all living things from its boundaries. I never saw a bird fly there, a snail creep across its grass. Not even the wind seemed willing to blow through the leaves of the well-manicured bushes. Not a blade of grass grew out of place, not one clump of dirt or piece of gravel seemed to lie outside the limits of an insane cry, "Ordnung muss sein!"

In the center of the garden, a small fountain with automatic waterfall trickled and gurgled with a kind of exceptionally brutal violence into a small pond. Plastic figures of birds frozen in gestures of quiet contemplation surrounded the crystal clear pool of water, where neither a fish swam, a frog jumped, nor a water lily dared to grow and deface the pristine rippling surface. Promptly at dusk, the water would cease to flow. And then with the fall of darkness the blue lights came on, planted meticulously in the flower beds all around the garden and glowing from pots of red geraniums placed in each window of the house. In the soft gleam of these lights, minute particles of snail poison sparkled like evil diamonds in the flower beds and the garden took on a nightmarish sheen, reminding me of the time me and a bunch of friends dropped acid in Disneyland, which turned out to be a bad idea because there is nothing more terrifying than The Magic Kingdom on LSD. But that would be another story...

I kept expecting the ghost of Mike Kelley to appear from behind one of the bushes, dressed in a king's ermine robe, with golden crown and bejeweled scepter, dragging a huge velvet upholstered throne across the lawn, which he would then plant right next to the silent pond and sit there, surveying his minions. The little clay figures of hedgehogs, raccoons and rabbits leapt down from their window stations next to the red geraniums and sat themselves before their king. Around the pond all the frozen birds came to life and ambled over to join the rest of the animals. With a wave of his wand Mike beckoned the animals to dance. In a ring they began to move in time as Mike let out a long, mournful scream. Soon the animals joined in, their little voices raised to the stars, perhaps squealing and chirping more than screaming, but giving their best nonetheless.

I stood there taking it all in and felt a scream start way down deep in my body, from the depths of my soul. I screamed along with the animals, with Mike. And I heard each blade of grass screaming, the ghosts of dead snails raising their slimy voices, every petal from every flower, the leaf of every bush wailing in the moonlight. It was then that I realized the ivy growing on the front of the house formed the shape of a large gun. With a great bang! the gun went off, again and again, echoing across the old city and lighting Fri Art in a blaze of red flames exploding from the bushy muzzle. All the blue lights in the garden began to revolve slowly and whine like broken police sirens. I expected a crowd of people to gather around to watch the spectacle, but nobody came. I seemed to be the only person privy to this show.

With a great whoop Mike rose from his throne and began to dance with the animals, who screamed louder and louder. Paul McCarthy appeared suddenly from behind a bush, wielding a big silver bucket of chocolate syrup and wearing a plastic Heidi mask pulled up halfway over his face. He walked across the lawn to Mike and emptied the chocolate syrup over his head, whereby the animals fled in terror and returned to their stations as frozen figures. In a flash Mike and Paul

disappeared and the garden was quiet again. The screaming inside my head had stopped. I heard a church bell somewhere off in the distance. A full moon cast shadows across the garden and set the red geraniums aglow. In the silence I heard many other screams now but none of them bothered me. They were like music to my ears.