Oh, Satan! One and unique god of my soul, inspire thou in me something yet more, present further perversions to my smoking heart, and then shalt thou see how I shall plunge myself into them all!

Mrs. de Saint-Ange’s prayer could be the one granted to the contemporary artists who consider Black Metal as an inspiring light. Satan offered them the most extreme creative, deleterious, and (maybe) richest form. Acting as Odin’s raven-informants Huginn and Muninn (whose names translate to “Thought” and “Memory”), artists dissect a system, explore the sometimes obscure mechanisms which govern an organization, and appropriate the esthetical potential of their target. Thanks to the displacement of the subject and a change of state, they deliver a new vision. But does it mean that, using this cultural artifact as a referent, Black Metal is not an accomplished art? Does it need to be baptized by art to exist? If both cultural fields, contemporary art and Black Metal (so-called high and low), seem to be opposing or conflicting, what enables or motivates their collision? Thus we could ask ourselves, how do artists use Black Metal as a structural and thematic foundation for their work? A visual analysis of the referent signs of this musical genre allows us to observe the principle of revelation brought by art. The act of recognition presupposes to know already; to see is to learn. This semiology actually reveals that Black
Metal makes the most of art to enlarge its field of influence. Art has the capacity to suggest more than it shows and, using hermeneutics, the sign can be exceeded. If many artists apply a phenomenological approach towards Black Metal, it seems that only a critical analysis would allow an exploitation of its hidden potential. If art attempts to capture the elusive, to express the inexpressible, then art as an exegesis could possibly be its best interpreter. Finally, if this musical phenomenon witnesses its propagation, what matters to artists is an ability to transform Black Metal into a new aesthetic category. It means leaving behind the state of heterotopia to become an ideal genre to which the artwork could aspire to. Black Metal responds to our need for ritual and, when it is denoted by art, it reaches infinity. Just as Olaf I, King of Norway (995–1000 CE), spread terror with his drastic choices, contemporary art offers the possibility to expand and to become a real Gesamtkunstwerk. This is not a religious baptism but rather a philosophical one. It is a total immersion into contemporary Thought.

REFERENTS AS A WAY OF EXPANSION

Contemporary art depends on a subject, even if the subject is reflexive. The approach can be autotelic, or not, but it is always a matter of denotation. With the arrival of the media, art turned its interest towards popular culture with a creative appetite. It critically consumes and burns to ashes everything surrounding it.

Rock music, through its immediacy and its propensity to create meaning, was prone only a couple of years after its birth to Ray Johnson’s aesthetic experiences—Oedipus (Elvis #1) (1956). It is when Rock music evolved to Metal music, a musical genre that inherently expressed a strong awareness of its own existence, that the art scene decided to analyze, quote, and dissect the entire underground culture. Thanks to this citational postmodern logic, several artists have considered Black Metal as a potential subject. Whether Rimaldian seers or foolhardy rebels, artists have arisen who are deeply committed to using the musical movement of Black Metal as the object of their quest. This perilous choice is relevant because they are the ones who know the essential wealth inherent to this corpus. Thanks to art and reflexive work, the Black Metal movement reaches further than other subgenres: an extraordinary deployment.

It is interesting to identify these knights who, through their efforts to conquer an unclear and deserted world, have formed a new kind of legion. On an almost sociological field, we could observe that the number of these artists has distinctly increased since 2005. Obviously we will not go into details to present all of them, specifically because, facing a tremendous task, some artists succeed their baptism of fire better than others. We can notice that Black Metal, considered in its second wave, is a Scandinavian product, built and
conceived on European foundations. Although in the last twenty years Black Metal has inspired international contributions (including Colombian and Taiwanese bands), it is still, for the most part, exclusively Western. We can make the same remark concerning artists (even if the art market distorts this data in some way). Black Metal music was born in Norway. As we will see later on, it is naturally there that, inspired by the aesthetic of the movement, the first artistic attempts emerged. But it’s at the extremes that the power of Black Metal is revealed. While the Australian artist Tony Garifalakis (born in 1964) observed the waves of Black Metal as an adult, the younger American artist Grant Willing (born in 1987) contemplates and draws upon a past that now takes the appearance of ruins. It emphasizes that two different generational perspectives upon the events are made possible and potentially equally interesting. Black Metal keeps on fascinating artists long after its main originating events.

Figure 1. Torbjørn Rødland, “In a Norwegian Landscape 16,” 1994, c-print, 140 x 107cm. Image courtesy of Nils Stærk, Copenhagen.
Torbjørn Rødland, known for his realist and violent photographs, seems to be the first artist to have worked on Black Metal, or at least with a Black Metal sensitiveness. In 1993, he pictured himself as the personification of a young lonely romantic ephebe overwhelmed by a feeling of contradiction, torn between the call of nature and the modern world. This “quarrel between the old and the new world” would be the main reason for his psyche’s disorder. Rødland’s photographic series In a Norwegian Landscape (1993-1995) shares many concerns and visual codes with most of the first Norwegian bands [Figure 1]. Actually, he and the musicians shared the same kairos. They were aware that something was about to happen at that place, and at that time. It was not contingency but necessity.

As Rødland exemplifies, contemporary artists interested in this culture usually come from the same generation of musicians whose work they reference. Without doing a hagiography, this essay identifies the protagonists in order to understand what encourages them to work on a vile matter. Mainly we need to point at the referents. For many people, art simply reveals a few superficial points inherent to Black Metal, whereas, in fact, some artists are inspired by the strategies and the iconology that exists beneath and beyond the music. Other viewers question Black Metal and drive it into a corner. Although artists’ approaches are quite various, their artworks often analyze many of the same precise elements.

Let’s specify firstly that, though it is essentially the second wave of Black Metal that is autopsied by artists, the roots of the genre in the so-called first wave are not forgotten. In 2006, the Bulgarian artist Georgi Tushev outlined a fragmented face of the band Venom in a deconstructive, eponymous painting. Despite how the painting’s geometric framework nearly erases the subject, the image actually finds its strength from abstraction. Intellectualization through abstraction does not affect Black Metal but sublimes it. The artist Adam Sullivan also quotes Celtic Frost, a band from the first wave, as well as Joseph Kosuth as major influences in his work. By placing these influences on the same level, Sullivan suggests that there is porosity between Black Metal and contemporary art, and moreover that Black Metal as a “thought-object” could be taken seriously. In his cut-ups and collages, such as The Real Voice (2009), he presents an uncluttered vision of the Black Metal movement in order to reach a toned-down core—thanks to the use of an incongruous color code for this musical genre and a reduction of signs.

The history of the second wave of Black Metal, the very one which brought Black Metal out of its god-forsaken cellar, is appropriated by artists as the most immediate and maybe the easiest sign emerging from the movement. Insofar as music is immaterial, and ineffable, artists may refer logically to concrete elements, historical facts for instance, to evoke Black Metal. The facts and history of the second wave were almost immediately turned into myth, and art (of course) participates in the construction of a Black Metal
mythology. In 2005, Banks Violette took over the minimal aesthetic of a burnt edifice in his famous work Untitled (Church), unveiling himself as narrator. He does not forget that the main thing for a plastic act is to transform simple anecdotes into substantial works. Based on the artwork of Burzum’s Aske EP (Deathlike Silence Productions, 1993), Banks’s reasoning demonstrates the potential contained within these Black Metal artistic mediums.

Similar to the subgenre’s history and mythology, Black Metal logos, the identity and incarnation of a band often extracted from bands’ album covers, are an inexhaustible source of creation (as much as for the one who creates it as for the one who receives it) and probably the first aesthetic sign coming closer to art sensitivity. The American Anthony Burdin, a modern figure of the cursed artist, gives a primary role to the first Burzum logo in his censored installation Voodoo Room at the 2004 Frieze Art Fair. The installation recreates his former garage where he used to rehearse as a youngster, and where the logo was painted across a wall-length mirror. Here, the installation site is transformed into a nostalgic votive altar. Artists can use logos as ready-mades or in a will of appropriation, but it is important to see beyond the sign itself and to analyze its graphic or semiologic potential. The logos are indexical, but they must also be reflexive.

Figure 2. Erik Smith, “The Ghost of James Lee Byars Calling—The Coming of War (Absu),” 2008, charcoal on black tissue paper, 70 x 50 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.
From the image to the message, the lyrics have to become an object to manipulate. They are the voice incarnated. Even if melody foregoes speech, the lyrics are the body of the music. When the music stops, words stay. Moreover, words may also be visual objects, and artists are very adept at playing with semantics. Considered as elements inherent to this music, sound, and content, they are logically in the grip of artists’ creative will. The lyrics of Darkthrone, Emperor, Absu, or Bethlehem are the subject of a drawing series shown in Erik Smith’s installation *The Ghost of James Lee Byars Calling* (2006–7) [Figure 2]. This very clever work is a confrontation between art and history through James Lee Byars’ figure, “the artist-apostle devoted to the faith’s paradoxes,” and the history of popular culture through its darkest side.\(^4\) In a strong symbolic game, we come across essential visual elements such as the pentagram. The use of words in an artwork is a first step to abstraction. Words themselves could be considered as geometrical forms, but charged with powerful meanings. In order to understand the uses of these (sometimes cabalistic) signs and to reveal what is hidden, it is central to appeal to a hermeneutic.

Artists chose to put some distances to music itself and decided to interfere with the figuration, the incarnation of music through images.

![Per-Oskar Leu, video still from Vox Clamantis in Deserto, 2010, (Film photography by Petter Holmern Halvorsen). Image courtesy of the artist.](image-url)

Figure 3. Per-Oskar Leu, video still from *Vox Clamantis in Deserto*, 2010, (Film photography by Petter Holmern Halvorsen). Image courtesy of the artist.
Corpse paint immediately appears as the main specificity that refers to the genre. Black Metal culture is very codified and obeys constituent precepts of its musical beginnings. The visual impact of the movement is unquestionable and many artists colonize its endemic features, exposing it to the risk of caricature. Out of the wealth of elements within Black Metal culture that generate meaning, the foremost referent is the corpse paint. Undeniable, indubitable, and concrete, this surface and ceremonial element attempts a discursive rebirth under the cover of art. Like a narrative façade, it is an opening to a more reflexive content. Clara Djian and Nicolas Leto, a French-Swiss duo, reconsider the menacing and monstrous appearance of this masked face in their Angoisse series (2009-2010) by using stencils to refine the sign. Indeed, the use of this tool, extracted from art and crafts and urban culture, and so unfamiliar to this musical genre, enables the two artists to explore the capacity of this emblematic element, which could be reproducible ad infinitum. However, it is interesting also to allude to the activist use of spray paint by some bands at that time. The Norwegian artist Per-Oskar Leu uses corpse paint pertinently by shifting the subject from sign to incarnation, exteriority to interiority. In his video Vox Clamantis In Deserto (2010), he takes advantage of corpse paint to broaden its semantic construction [Figure 3]. He makes himself up as a grotesque Black Metal musician and emphatically performs again I Pagliacci, an opera by Ruggero Leoncavallo, in places historically linked to the movement (the Helvete basement, the Holmenkollen church). This strong work questions, not without irony, the notion of authenticity and transgression.

Revealing the man under the make-up does not mean humanizing Black Metal musicians. Artists, portraying these latter, seem to be turning characters into icons. Indeed, if corpse paint redefines the face, portraiture is often at the heart of an artistic work. In some artworks, the teenager is chosen as the absolute melancholic figure with infinite potential, but more often, as exemplified within the prolific work of Steven Shearer (who presents a real Metal Areopagus), it is the musicians themselves who are portrayed—Longhairs 19 (2004), Smoke (2005), and Davos (2007). Thus Frost, Abbath, Infernus, Varg Vikernes, Gaahl, Beherit, Euronymous, Necrobutcher, and Hellbutcher have become real icons, in the original sense of the word. Yet these portraits of musicians have followed the opposite direction of genuine icons: Art transformed icons (objects of devotion) to “simple” objects of aesthetic delightfulfulness, whereas Black Metal musicians (aesthetic quasi-objects, dressed and wearing make-up as statues) became icons through art—maybe, finally, like art recently did with masterpieces turned into irreligious icons. Fenriz and Dead, in particular, are the main muses of the genre, symbolizing both roughness and fragility. They are the most frequently quoted figures.
FROM SEMIOLOGY TO A WAY OF BEING

Thanks to art, Black Metal spreads and gains a considerable extension of its field of existence. Artists do not stick to its dark, morose, and contemplative aspect. Although the iconology empowering the exultation of violence, hyper-masculinity, and martiality does fascinate, our most valorous conquering knights try to decipher the monster by giving an interpretation of it.

They try to reach a spiritual level and, at the same time, go deeper under the surface of appearances. Their vision moves away from the signs and becomes interpretative. They have a notable recourse to Satanism, one of the fundaments of the spiritual dimension of Black Metal. This Dionysiac and libertarian call, exhilarating boundless musicians, is undoubtedly one of the driving forces of the creative process. Satanism, exploited and claimed by many bands, is the affirmation of paganism’s return—“give us the gods of paganism” begged Sade—and is also an openly admitted resistance to Christianity. Satan is a recurring figure in art history (reappearing in the 11th century, not to be ignored in the 12th century, and resurrected in the 19th century). Since the 1960s, he is an enlightened and liberating companion. The young Norwegian Sindre Foss Skancke, artist and curator of the exhibition Do what thou wilt should be the key to the world (the essential Crowleyan maxim from the Law of Thelema), attaches great importance to evil in his pictorial work. Art pieces such as Bringer of light, the world is yours... Luciferion! (2009) present a heavy and chaotic surface where mythology, alchemy, and occultism are shamelessly mixed. His very style evokes Black Metal graphic design, a universe whose mechanisms and mysteries he perfectly masters. The clumsy and fiendish Satanism lauded by many malevolent musicians is counter-balanced by a Promethean Satanism, highlighted by artists as the bringer of knowledge. This Luciferianism, in which Satan is an erudite character, a pure creative source (notably mentioned in some Darkthrone’s lyrics) reminds us of Romantic ideals. Intellectuals, writers notably, introduced Luciferianism in 19th-century art. It makes sense that contemporary artists maintain it, and that Black Metal appears as the perfect vector. By mixing pagan and occult imagery, artists reveal the links between Scandinavian devil’s music and Romanticism. The melancholic and dark, rambling development of the psyche allow a celebration of knowledge. Obviously, the veneration of nature, the fascination for the past’s magnificence, the rejection of morality, the cult of the genius, and a kind of nationalism are typically Romantic concerns shared with Black Metal. If Romanticism is an absolute art, does Black Metal’s involvement with Romanticism turn the genre into an absolute music? Actually, it gains this state through art. It becomes pure, speculative, and its metaphysical dimension makes it sacred. Artists who recognize this “Romantic agony” find the aesthetics of horror and terror as a source of pleasure, the splendor of the
monstrous. They reinterpret this referent with codes particular to art history, because their first aim is to fulfill their roles as interpreters. Raising Black Metal to a spiritual level is not sufficient for some artists who claim its destruction is necessary for it to obtain resurrection. Varg Vikernes, as a worthy and perhaps unwitting heir to a long philosophical tradition, expresses this process: “If you wanna build something new, you have to destroy the old first.”6 Destruction is a process to engender creation. The analysis (at times extreme) of elements extracted from Black Metal leads to its death, but promises also a rich resurgence. We have to go through this to reveal the power of the subject. Artists are akin to berserkers, those fighters who are hidden under wolves’ skin in Norse mythology. They appropriate Black Metal’s strength from within its own skin. This skin itself is still a powerful and frightening signifier, but its power is activated only when it is worn. Some artists, in a conceptual approach, do not burden themselves with knowing anything about that wolf . . . such is the case with the American Jay Heikes who, in 2004, used bands’ logos (such as Necromicon’s or Behemoth’s) for amazing works on paper. In these artworks, the logos become open windows to forest landscapes and emblematic lakes. He does not try to decipher those structures but captures their aesthetical strength. The text disappears and a truncated landscape appears, creating a new unity. The fact that Heikes has no particular attachment to his subject proves the authority of the sign.

A last form of detachment in relation to Black Metal immediacy is irony. This ironical approach, distant from the core, is not the least intriguing relationship between contemporary art and Black Metal. On the contrary, it is absolutely relevant and representative of how Black Metal is now judged and used by a part of the art scene. The Austrian Michael Gumhold kindly and humorously mistreats the caricatural image of the Black Metal musician. He links this representation to the image of a baseball player in his work O.T (Kadavergehorsam) (2006-08). The player dons corpse paint, like a ridiculous mask, and his bat is covered with spikes, like the Viking barbarian club weapon used as a banner by many musicians. These distinctive attributes are transformed into ironical referents. Gumhold’s scathing humor turns to irony in the work of the American Russell Nachman. In his paintings the famous Teutonic make-up is applied to ordinary faces, just as if they were wearing buffoon or devil’s masks. The dark side of the human condition interests Nachman. He reenacts the Divine Comedy and proves that Black Metal can be the metaphor of our society. His Palimpsest series are really a rewriting of Black Metal and religious histories, and his crude caricaturist style recalls illustrations from the genre’s first fanzines. A demystifying irony, tinged with primitive enthusiasm, turns out to be a useful strategy. These latter artists have succeeded in following the movement’s trend towards self-mockery. This ascetic practice—we attack ourselves—reveals a combative jeu d'esprit
and shows some detachment. It allows Black Metal to exceed the nihilism in which it previously seemed captive.

Inevitably, these artists give a sarcastic and embezzled vision of the movement, forcing us to simultaneously question the notion of authenticity in Black Metal when approached by art, and of Black Metal itself. Some artists attempt to do a hermeneutic of Black Metal, to give an interpretation of its codes and symbols, in order to reveal what is hidden beyond its elusiveness. It is a syncretic phenomenon that calls for many referents to exist. Drawing from the real as much as from the imagination, Black Metal creates a new reality: a hyperreality which simulates something that does not really exist. Meanwhile, Black Metal extols the virtue of authenticity as its supreme value. Artists point towards this fake authenticity to reconsider the genre’s fundamental basis, and they know that authenticity is not substantial to the object but is, rather, an effect produced by the gaze. The almost obsessive approach of the artist Bjarne Melgaard towards Black Metal reminds us of this ambiguous status, oscillating between reality and imagination. His compulsive, often formally violent, drawings are dug out from his confused mental universe and coexist with more symbolic works, such as Untitled (Portrait of Varg Vikernes) (2001), a piece showing a small, bronze-cast head hanging from a bonsai branch. Is this a pretense of Odin’s sacrifice or unfulfilled death wish? Then, in a thirst for truth, he invited Frost to perform in the memorable Kill me before I do it myself (2001), in which brutal theatricality brushes dangerously with reality. Frost’s participation enabled him to leave the simulacrum and participate with both Melgaard’s performance, and Black Metal itself, to achieve a new and sudden impetus of pure authenticity. Maybe we could say that, following Nelson Goodman, representing Black Metal is not copying it, nor is it only interpreting it, but it is defining it. Thanks to art’s movement beyond signs’ limits, Black Metal reaches new level of intensity. Artists challenge the notion of authenticity, the nodal point of the movement. But how does this authenticity apply to artists themselves? Do they really share its beliefs? Black Metal is a domain of thought that can be either exploited or sublimated by art. Yet, Black Metal also fuels art; and art feeds it back. Is that a fair exchange? Can we only talk about exchange?

FROM UNION TO BIRTH

“The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom,” confessed William Blake. It could define Black Metal’s destiny. The wisdom it yearns for could be conquered by art. But what could characterize the union of Black Metal and contemporary art?

The union of art and Black Metal cannot be compared to the marriage of Heaven and Hell in a Manichean framework. Though the dualistic oppositions seem obvious—art (an
elitist subject, which supposedly incarnates beauty, goodness, reason) versus Black Metal (a more populist genre, representing ugliness, badness, energy)—it is crucial to conceive the reversal of those values as a possible discourse. This is precisely what artists working on this musical theme suggest. The “aura” of the work is soiled and perverted, but its referent grants a revealed beauty. Art and Black Metal are not contradictory. Far from it. Their fusion enables each one to reach a culmination, an existential finality. Art makes the inscription of Black Metal into contemporary history possible and legitimizes it. If this movement seems sometimes blurry, as regards to the difficulty to discriminate between the fake and the genuine, it reaches, thanks to art, a new truth. It exacerbates and shares many aporia with contemporary art. Both appear as escapisms, forms of catharsis, desires to discard certain fears and feelings of pity. Art seems to be the most effective way for this musical genre to reach an ecstatic state. It clears the surplus and lightens the grey areas. It enables, above all, the possibility of annihilating the nihilistic enterprise by putting forward the will of life, of power, of light. The baptism that art suggests is like a revelation, a way to access transcendence. It is "this structuring operation holding together a mass of events in a single history." If Black Metal needs art to be completely accomplished, the opposite seems also true.

Could art be a threat to Black Metal’s integrity, and a nuisance to Black Metal’s development and survival? Perhaps the way art analyzes everything might tend toward dispossession, toward fading. Is the multiplication of referents a threat leading to Black Metal’s impoverishment? The baptism could turn then into a sacrifice. Baptism or death . . . caused by art. It seems necessary, even vital, to take this risk.

 Maybe we need to give a new definition of the way art comprehends Black Metal. If Black Metal is generally well accepted as a modern vision of Romanticism, rereading history backwards, “against the grain,” we may consider another speculation on its aesthetical projection: Black Metal is, conceptually and artistically, Baroque.

It is about identifying this entity as a category, as a movement, no longer musical, but autonomous and finalized. It has irregular, chaotic, and changeable aspects; it is the imperfect pearl of music. Its strength precisely lies in its strangeness. It is characterized by its excesses, hyperboles, and amplifications, as well as its will to escape from a frame, to surpass and transcend itself. Through the prism of art, Black Metal has become a metaphoric beyond Black Metal itself. It is a particular form of sensibility that can evolve to an ideal genre aimed at by the work of art. It is by the agency of art that this genre has to lead to a pure aesthetic form. It perfectly incarnates the aesthetic identity of our time and suggests, by the reversal of values, a real change of what constitutes beauty. It brings new codes of appreciation and it is the perfect emblem of the current expressiveness. Conclusively, it’s fairly obvious that the clearest thought emerging from all the possible
Theoretical labeling attempts is that Black Metal could be defined as a new aesthetic category by itself. It is also definitively, and literally, a Gesamtkunstwerk.

The young, Norwegian artist Erik Tidemann, for instance, tends to create a total fusion between the two worlds, art and music, and suggests an initiation to this theory. He commits himself, heart and soul, to his art. In his videos, he often appears in the middle of shamanic acts, something between black mass and activist performance, wearing the face of a freshly dead deer. On the occasion of the Nidrosian Black Mass, a Black Metal festival in Trondheim in 2007, he immersed himself in his research subject with his installation Kick out the Titans. Here, video and drawings are joined with beheaded animals’ faces and dislocated limbs and presented as stage set. The fact that he takes part in a context unfamiliar with contemporary art shows that he takes risks with the perception of his work. Finally, it is the art scene that sanctioned him by canceling the studio he was granted. This event demonstrates Black Metal’s potential danger to art. It’s a threat, visually and morally, to the public. To come back to the roots of Gesamtkunstwerk, we primarily need to talk of artists who are musicians, and vice-versa. To look at the possibility of defining Black Metal as a new influential categorical concept is to accept the greatness and the strength of its association with art, and to consider it as the possible birth of a total work of art. Art finds in music a natural extension of its expression.

Incidentally, many artists are also musicians and many musicians have an artistic background. The tendency towards exchanges between these practices can be observed in the field of Black Metal as well. Dimitris Foutris, like many artists, played in a band as a teenager. He nostalgically refers to his own direct involvement with the music by inviting the band Nethescerial to his Black Tuda performance in 2006 [Figure 4]. He and three others Greek artists, hidden under large hoods and dark albs, surrounded the band playing live. Did the artists metaphorically appear as the guardians of an occult knowledge or, conversely, did they stand for a threat?

Some artists have strongly pursued this double practice. Sindre Foss Skancke is probably the most interesting figure representing this interdisciplinary tendency. Because the activity of a studio artist is largely solitary, he has naturally pursued a personal accomplishment in his music and added to all the already existing one-man bands a new company, the band Utarm. His deep exploration of the subject, multidisciplinary approach, and sometimes collaborative practices as an artist/curator, are elements recalling a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk. He is one of the first to invite a musician of Black Metal into a white cube, not for playing his own role but to exist as an artist. Daniel Vransinn, the bass player for the band Carpathian Forest, seems to be attracted to the freedom given by art and tries to expend his field of creation with music at its core. He exhibited his video Phobia in 2009 at the Kurant Art Gallery during the Do what thou wilt should be the key to the world show in Tromso. Phobia is a global project, including various musical collaborations, that visually illustrates the different songs of the eponymous LP (Misanthrof ANTlrecords, 2010). Finally, Thomas Gabriel Fischer (of Hellhammer and Celtic Frost) explores the endless wealth of artistic creation in an outsider practice with a more personal approach. He began in 2007, by creating a series of painted death masks cast from his own face and painted in unique ways. Now, he examines three-dimensionality, with scathing ready-mades—dildos embezzled and transformed into religious objects. It is interesting to note that the approach of these two musicians reinforces, and even validates, the works of the different artists quoted before. Moreover, aren’t the latest musical attempts of a few contemporary clever bands the closest approach to this desire to elevate Black Metal to an upper level? The challenging concepts and principles to surpass oneself are shared by contemporary musicians and artists. Post-Black Metal musicians and artists work in concert for its ultimate advent.

The unsurpassable singularity of a phenomenon makes it an emblem, perhaps even a new system of thinking. Black Metal is beyond music. It exceeds its function of musical genre. It radiates with its sepulchral fire on every side of culture. Art can disperse the clouds that restrict the passing of its rays, and is among the best possibilities to reveal the hidden star. Black Metal is a suffering body that illustrates, in the same spring, all the
human darkness as much as its vital impetus. It belongs to an indiscernible zone between a finished object and a future one. If it is finished, art would be its extension. To plan it into the future is announcing its return. If it is not finished, art is truly revealing it. If we consider this movement as an access to a certain worldview (Weltanschauung), inspired by Romanticism and Satanism, the desire for transgression (based on affirmation and refusal) seems to act like the utmost source of motivation. With its intrusion into the art world as a rite of passage, Black Metal, as a symbolic form, aspires to an extension, a considerable propagation, a (re)birth. Art takes on the exegete function to unveil “the logic of sensation” of this epiphenomenon becoming a full aesthetic genre.⁹ The works of art dealing with Black Metal, using semiology to understand its mode of existence, seem to be the finished product, the ultimate and final stage of the Black Metal project itself. Furthermore, following Susan Sontag, who declares that “art is not only about something; it is something,” we can consider that art is Black Metal.¹⁰

Figure 5. Elodie Lesourd, “Ornament and crime (Hvis Lyset Tar Oss),” 2011, cut band t-shirt, epoxy resin, variable dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist.
NOTES
5 Marquis de Sade, “Dialogue the Fifth.”
6 Until the Light Takes Us, dirs. Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewell, DVD (New York City: Variance Films, 2009).