

Hard Art - Interview (English)

1. Please tell me what / who he is and what it means ART OF EMPATHY project name?

My name is Jef Janssen and I am a resident of Diest. That is a very old, small town in Belgium, surrounded by trees and woods. I live here with my wife and two daughters (age 3 and 5). I graduated as a social worker, but now I'm working as a (substitute) teacher, a job I'd hope to combine with the creation of more music in the future.

The name 'Art Of Empathy' is one that can be interpreted in many ways. In a positive way like 'empathy can be the key to end misunderstandings and all the disasters rise out of them'. Or in a negative way: 'you got to know your enemy'. For me personally it's more like: open your mind, break through barriers and wander through the world with the curiosity of a child. With that frame of mind you might see or find things that really matter in life.

2. What was the beginning of Your project? How long have You been in music? What are Your experiences?

Years ago, when I about 14 years old, I started realizing that the adult world is as wicked and silly as a schools playground. Out of this disillusionment, I got attracted to emotional (melancholic, aggressive, dark) music, in which I found comfort: Madball, Type O Negative, Anathema, ...

After playing in some HC/metalbands, time and technology was right to create my own project, in which I could create the sound I really had in mind. That was a mixture between neofolk and darkwave: grounded on acoustic guitars, combined with dreamy or dark synths and whispering, haunting vocals. The two main influences were the neofolk side of Empyrium and the darkwave of Dargaard and Summoning.

As a DIY artist, I studied on the basic principles of recording, mixing and mastering, simply because I didn't have the means to let a professional do it for me. And... because I'd like to have all control. After releasing my first album 'Evening Sessions' was released the internet community was booming with netlabels and social media like Myspace. A wonderful time, I must say, because I got in contact with a lot of amazing artists from all over the world.

In 2010 I released 'Posthuman Decadence', an album which was kind of influenced by my discovery of the existence of a neofolk / martial industrial music scene. The fact is that the birth of my first daughter Liv was the deadline for that album. Now that I have an second daughter Finne, I became a total family man. Naturally. A family man, with a big interest in music and music creation, though.

3. What equipment / instruments you use to create your music? Do You prefer digital equipment, analog or acoustic? Are You interested in what's new musical world has to offer?

I totally don't bother from which equipment the audio-waves of a song are generated, as long as it feels good. I should say I'm a bit of a 'audiophile', but I don't kick on high-tech gear of analog instrument virtuosity. It can be interesting, but if the song writing is crappy, or the performance is without passion, it totally doesn't matter what equipment/instruments you use: the song will be shit.

For AOE, a simple PC + DAW is used to get all tracks in the mix. To express the neofolk-side of the AOE side, there's always an important role for acoustic guitars. On the other hand, to get the darkwave touch into the music: synth pads and layers, combined with piano parts are also very important. The third part of the AOE sound are the vocals: whispering, combined with self-layered choirs complete the typical AOE sound. Last, but not least, the use of samples can be a very effective way to create a certain sphere. If you listen to the first Rome albums, you can't deny that Jerome Reuters use of samples gives an extra, great dimension to the tracks.

4. Your album " Posthuman Decadence" released in Bunkier Productions I really like. It's great, congratulations! How do You have recorded? What was the driving force behind to the creation of music? How long You worked on the album?

Thanks for the compliments. It feels good to still get some nice feedback from time to time.

The recording process was entirely done at home, in my home studio. Almost entirely, because I collaborated with several artist I got in contact with. This DIY mentality is both a blessing and a burden: it's nice build things in a world of your own, but on the other hand it's very time-consuming. I took more than two years to finish it.

The main driving force that kept me on the track was the internal visualization of the finished project I had in mind. I knew this album could become a great one, as long as I would persist and finish it entirely. So when my daughter Liv came one month early, she accompanied me in the studio...

5. How did the collaboration with Bunkier Productions? Are you satisfied with the work of this label? Do you plan to release another album also in the Bunkier Prod.?

The collaboration with Thomas from Bunkier Productions went very simple: he contacted me through mail, two

years after the self-release of 'Posthuman Decadence'. I couldn't believe that he was willing to release a physical version of the album, next to the free album download option. Bunkier P. was the first label that agreed with that.

The fact that Thomas is an high skilled designer with a great taste in music made it even more interesting. So I'm very happy with the opportunity he gave AOE to release an album in Bunkier P. If the same opportunity would come around in the future: I wouldn't hesitate.

6. Share us something Belgian. What artists / projects / labels you appreciate and recommend from Your country?

I'm not that chauvinistic, when it comes to the Belgian music scene. Not because AOE doesn't get the attention it deserves. AOE is just weird music for weird people... I just don't like the arty farty, self-righteous of some people (artists, journalists, radio stations, ...) that dominate the Belgian music scene.

Though, if I would recommend some projects you should check out, it would be the metalcoreband Morda (R.I.P.), because of its amazing killer-riffs and songwriting. Also recommended are the EBM pioneers of Suicide Commando and of course some metalbands like Ancient Rites and Aborted. None of them belong to the regular music scene or get any airplay in Belgium, although they are loved from all over the world.

7. What next for ART OF EMPATHY? What are your plans? What would you like to do?

Because of family and job-related duties: I put AOE on a hold, for a while. This year, my house will get a new roof in which I can rebuild my home-studio. After that I will see what the future brings, but I WILL be creating new music with AOE. I have several ideas, but I don't know yet with of them will be the first thing to start with. Anyway: it will be something that's nature-loving, and driven by melancholy.

8. Is there any possibility that You visited Poland in future? In general, what is Your knowledge about my country :), what you know and listen to projects/bands/labels from Poland? Do you know how the neofolk scene in Poland?

YES! This year, I will visit Krakow for some days, together with my wife and some colleagues from one of the schools I was employed last year. We'll visit the typical 'highlights' like the city of Krakow, the salt-mine and Auschwitz. I wish I had more time/money to wander around into the great forest of Poland.

About 8 years ago, I also visited Poland with a school. Besides the Silesian nature, I was mostly impressed by the typical architecture of the ex-USSR. Also the influence of Catholicism made an impact, for instance when discussing with locals about gay-equality. Or in a very positive way when visiting a church on Sunday, the strength of the community-feeling was very impressive. That's something which is totally lost in Belgium: community through religion.

I don't know that much of the Polonian music scene, but I realise that Poland is full of great artists, all through history. The language barrier might be the biggest obstacle. What can you recommend me?

9. Thank You very much for Your answers. The last word is Yours!

I wish all listeners and readers to find a happy life, in which they can inspire others to pursue values like integrity and respect. I'm not a reggae lover at all, but I love Marleys quote: "The greatness of a man is not in how much wealth he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively." It's necessary to look all negativity of the world right in the eye, but dwelling around in it is never an option.

Infamis - [HARD Art](#)