

On an Exotic Adventure...
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Olaf Breuning, *Home 2*, 2007, 30 min. USA
Lev Kalman and Whitney Horn, *Blondes in the Jungle*, 2009, 48 min. USA

Exploring prickly themes of cultural trespass through the vernacular of underground moviemaking, these two videos chronicle Americans on exotic voyages abroad – in Papua New Guinea and Honduras respectively. Both employ low-brow comedy to paint their white protagonists as clownish interlopers in faraway lands. Removing themselves from their homes and shocking out of context, these naïve adventurers narrate their experience of foreignness and difference through bad jokes and foolish behaviour.

“I don’t want to go back, I don’t want to go back, I don’t want to go back home!”

In Swiss artist Olaf Breuning’s *Home 2* (2007), the artist’s long-time collaborator Brian Kerstetter continues the performed travelogue he started in *Home* (2004). Here he is in Papua New Guinea, clowning around with the locals while on a package tour and reminiscing about his past exploits in Ghana, Japan, the Swiss Alps, and finally, “home” in New York. Drawing on the contemporary art star’s experience of global nomadism, Kerstetter uncomfortably embraces the role of a Western pleasure-seeker bulldozing over the natives to find his own bliss. With childlike enthusiasm and intellect, he relishes each moment of cultural and subcultural boundary-crossing, narcissistically transforming every real-live encounter into a scene in his own vacation video, which we are watching played back, as if projected in someone’s rec room. One moment our anti-hero decides he could live in Papua New Guinea forever, the next he bitterly complains of “nature” – the bugs, the heat, the noise – preventing him from thinking clearly. Fellow tourists and locals largely stand by agog as this scrawny manic ginger runs around, his eyes clouded with opaque contact lenses in a nod to his character’s inability to truly see and understand his surroundings. Being where he arguably doesn’t belong and trying to play along is the only way of feeling truly “alive and free” for the jaded American who has seen it all, but when he is presented with a dystopic scene he can’t grasp the gravity of what he is witnessing. As one critic remarked about *Home 2*, “the viewer is left with the distinct notion that neither the traveler nor the world he has left is enriched by the experience.”

Olaf Breuning (b. 1970) was born in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, and lives in New York. Breuning works in photography, video, drawing, and sculptural installation. He has had solo shows at spaces including Chisenhale Gallery, London (2005), migros museum für gegenwartskunt, Zürich (2007), the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney (2007) and Surface to Air, Paris (2010). Pleasure Dome showed his videos *King* (2000), *Group* (2001) and *Home* (2004) in the 2007 screening *The Sign Flashed Out Its Warning*.

“I am nineteen years old, slim, blond, and looking for adventure. Let me be your special.”

Described as “*Saved by the Bell* meets Werner Herzog,” the shot-on-location mini-feature *Blondes in the Jungle* charmingly relates the story of three bratty blonde American teenagers – siblings Amber and Chino and their friend Jerome – as they journey through the jungles of Honduras in 1987. They have been sent by their famous Hollywood novelist friend Bret – ie. Bret Easton Ellis, iconic author of Reagan-era yuppie-excess novels like the canonical *American Psycho* – to find the fountain of youth before they have to go back to art school in New York for the fall term. Hacking through brush – and the occasional unlucky fauna – with a machete, and with a tape deck always in tow, the teens shoot the shit about AIDS, Devo, 21 Jump Street and Bill Murray while vacantly pontificating on their quest and on the ancient Maya (but for the most part, they may as well be in a mall). Like the protagonist of *Home 2*, they constantly narrate and comment on their surroundings without much insight – “Honduran TV sucks dick,” “that’s fucked up!” etc. – while high on drugs. Misadventures with quicksand, monkeys and Mayan Jaguar Gods (both in a dream sequence and in reality) inevitably ensue, not to mention their encounter with a smooth-talking itinerant coke dealer – and fellow blond – who goes by the name of Armani Rivette. Watching over the proceedings is an imagined archaeologist and expert on the Mayans named E. Arthur Thompson, who traced the same path in the 1960s. The music in the film is by El Jefe and the Executive Look, a fictional, very eclectic 1987 World Beat band appreciated by both punks and preps.

Lev Kalman (b. 1982) & Whitney Horn (b. 1982) are filmmakers in the alternative tradition of Warhol, Burnett, Fischli & Weiss. Their irreverent and experimental approach to narrative filmmaking mixes the exotic and artificial with the casual and idiosyncratic. Since beginning their collaboration as undergraduates at Columbia University in 2003, they have produced over a dozen films, music videos and video works. Kalman is based in Brooklyn, Horn in San Francisco.