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"Ann Lislegaard"
Murray Guy
By Claire Barliant

"The miracle of order has run out," a woman says in mellifluous tones, "and I am left in an unmiraculous place where anything may happen." The sentence occurs in the voice-over of Ann Lislegaard's computer animation *Bellona* (after Samuel R. Delany), 2005. The eleven-minute loop depicts a series of interiors that seem to fulfill Italian designer Joe Colombo's 1960s vision of a domestic future in which "furnishings will disappear; the habitat will be everywhere." The rooms are almost entirely empty, save for a few doors that lean against the walls and some hanging globe lamps that give this strange dwelling a retro-futuristic feel—like the set of *2001* if it had been designed by Verner Pantone. Vivid colors bleed into one another: green fades to yellow, rich purples give way to vibrant reds. Floors and walls are shiny and reflective to the point where they might be mistaken for windows looking into the next room, and this slightly hallucinatory effect contributes to a feeling that the space lacks substance.

Yet for all its visual seductiveness, this is an unsettling place. As the "camera" pans across each room, lights switch on and off and doors and windows open and shut without any apparent human intervention. There are no visible screws: Everything seems to be held together by magic, as though it might fly apart at any moment. At one point, the shadows of window frames are cast onto the walls and floors by an unseen light source suggesting that there is some sort of "outside," but one has the feeling that it must be an uninviting, alien terrain. The sole sign of life is the blinking red light on a radio, a stuttering blip in this smoothly monotone world.

The text of Lislegaard's voice-over was taken from Samuel R. Delany's 1974 novel *Dhalgren*. The book describes a fictional American city, Bellona, that is nearly destroyed (by an event that is never fully explained) and is then forsaken by federal authorities who leave the metropolis to the mercy of looters, abandoning the residents who remain to fend for themselves. Although both Delany's original telling and Lislegaard's recent take were made well before Hurricane Katrina, the video has particular resonance now, as people struggle to restore order to what is left of New Orleans. But while the excerpted text lends a veneer of social awareness to the video, *Bellona* is more than a coincidental commentary on the current state of affairs.

Lislegaard has created a virtual environment characterized by sharp lines and convincingly modeled forms that draws the viewer in before revealing its initial impression of permanence and solidity to be illusory.

She uses Delany's words to underpin a subtle interplay between cinematic, architectural, and conceptual space. "In this timeless city," the voice-over intones, "in this spaceless preserve any slippage can occur." Although such a lack of parameters might seem liberating, the desolate landscape that it defines also has no exit, no escape route, and the prospect of a "slippage" thus becomes terrifying. Lislegaard has long explored issues of space and subjectivity. *Bellona*, her strongest work yet, encourages us to survey our surroundings—schools, offices, cities—not as representative of safety or comfort, but as agents of control.



Ann Lislegaard,
Bellona (after Samuel
R. Delany) (detail),
2005, video instal-
lation, 11 minutes,
dimensions variable.

—Claire Barliant