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TimeOut

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“Ann Lislegaard”
Murray Guy
By Merrily Kerr



Crystal World (after JG Ballard) Photograph: Courtesy Murray Guy

Ann Lislegaard's mesmerizing new digital animations take inspiration from classic science fiction without illustrating it, and connect to hot-button current events without relying on them for meaning. This is strange territory seen anew.

The frozen land of Ursula K. Le Guin's 1969 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the tropical jungle of J.G. Ballard's 1966 *The Crystal World*—whose settings and titles the artist borrows—host abstract alternate worlds where opposites are conjoined to enchanting and disorienting effect. Lislegaard's *Left Hand of Darkness* (after Ursula K. Le Guin) is a riveting whirl of geometric patterns, moving text and ski gear. Though the exact combination of images is calibrated not to repeat, the combined effect remains deliberately less nuanced than Le Guin's meticulously imagined planet. Lislegaard's literally black-and-white environment has a chilly, nervous energy, with a crackling static soundtrack suggesting a futile search for communication. Superimposed anatomical diagrams of male and female sex organs (referring to the novel's androgyne race) bluntly deny pleasure. The mood in *Crystal World (after J.G. Ballard)* is equally stark.

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There may be environmental overtones in Lislegaard's struggles between human(oid)s and nature, but her work's appeal, both aesthetic and intellectual, lies in its extreme contrasts: a setting simultaneously snow-white and white-hot, an icy crystal suddenly melting into a black pool, modernist architecture surrounded by overgrown vegetation, and sharp tonal contrasts punctuated by blinding flashes of light. In reimagining Le Guin's and Ballard's already eccentric departures from the norm, Lislegaard has created stunning, binary-busting visions, both horrible and beautiful.