

Rabit: Les Fleurs Du Mal

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Daniel Bromfield

11/14/2017

Rabit's *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is meant to be taken as a piece with two recent albums he worked on: Elysia Crampton's *Demon City* and Chino Amobi's *Paradiso*. That's easy enough to do, because the album is really of a piece with the last half-decade of avant-garde electronic music. *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is the breed standard of a specific kind of electronic album: typically made by a queer producer or producer of color, popoptimist in its willingness to appropriate cues from chart music, filmic in the way the tracks blur together to form a cogent experience, bold in the way it uses sounds to scare and shock. The list of collaborators on Crampton's *Demon City* is probably the best overview of this loose "scene," which history will eventually give a nifty name.



Rabit is a Houston native whose experiences growing up queer and Catholic informed his first album *Communion*. While that album resembled nothing so much as shards of metal flying into each other at high velocity, *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is a slow-burn that seethes with dread. Talking about individual tracks gets to the point less than talking about individual moments. Rabit's strategy here is to sedate us with atmosphere before scaring us shitless with a sudden interruption: a pitch-shifted coital moan, a blast of gunfire or, most jarringly, on "Dogsblood Redemption," someone screaming "YOU'RE ALL A BUNCH OF FUCKING SLAVES!" (He flashes his popoptimist card by having a robo-voice solemnly recite Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide.")

So it's not unlike Arca's *Mutant*, Lotic's *Heterocetera*, the Amobi album, or a lot of other records from the thornier corners of electronic music. But it feels bold in just how little it cares for conventional standards of musicality. Sure, there's a lot of room for how weird you can get with an experimental electronic album, but *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is astonishing in how much of it passes by without a hint of melody or harmony. Most of the album's square footage is taken up by distant voices and the whoosh of white noise. Rabit's early work was lumped in with post-grime guys like Logos and Mumdance, but here the ties to club music are negligible—though "Ontological Graffiti" kicks off with a lurch familiar to anyone who remembers the brostep boom.

It's a bit hard to gauge what Rabit's getting at with all this. *Paradiso* explicitly mapped a dystopian United States not too far from the one we live in today. Crampton, a poignant futurist, has pages of batshit sci-fi backstory for hers in case you're interested. But while the voices on *Les Fleurs Du Mal* murmur with dread and discontent, it's hard to say why they're unhappy. Maybe we're supposed to have read the Baudelaire book after which the album's titled, but doing that much homework for a half-hour album seems like more work than it's worth. So we end up appreciating *Les Fleurs Du Mal* as a visceral experience. It works just fine on that front.

- Label:
Halcyon Veil
- Release Date:
November 3, 2017