

“In the middle of the night I got up. I had decided to do so the night before. I had been thinking of an object that I wanted to get hold of. A window from Rustic Canyon. I took my bike from the studio, put it in the van and drove to the bluffs of Palisades Park and down along the shore on the Pacific Coast Highway One. Within the short distance before I turned off the highway and up the hills, I was finding myself between the darkness of an unlit ocean and the sleeping city – driving on the edge of a dream, the city and the world.

A billboard advertisement flashed up: The Man in the High Castle. Coming Soon. The silhouette of a man figure in uniform overlooking a city. An American flag flying overhead. His arm band is of the kind that carries a black, crawling, four-legged spider.

At the mouth of Rustic Creek I took Chautauqua Boulevard up along the Pacific Palisades. The Eames House is tucked in behind Eucalyptus trees up on the slope on the left and, turning right, I had the Rustic Canyon neighbourhood below and Will Rogers State Historic Park above. I followed the winding road – tracing Sunset Boulevard with my headlights. Up on Capri Drive I thought of what Steven Spielberg would possibly be dreaming of, fast asleep in his house somewhere to the left of me. Kubrick’s Napoleon? I reached the top and parked where the paved and civilized world ends.

Another darkness appeared ahead of me: blackened even deeper by my feeling of foreignness and the fact that I didn’t want to be seen at all. I turned on my torch and took the dusty fire road, protruding a dizzy beam of light onto it. No one here. Just as I intended. After a short while I passed the yellow colored road block, and crooked myself around its bar. It’s all slightly uphill and on the left side stooping downhill. I thought of a car wreck stuck deep down in one of the bends. The dirt road is cut along and near the top of the ridge of the canyon. Just on the other side, the sprawl of the city stops. And here I am in a vacuum: an abrupt halt to its process. This open space is known as the “Big Wild”. Far down there is the Rustic Creek again, or the waterbed traces of it. It’s been unusually dry for years. It’s only when it appears again further down towards the ocean that there is water collected in a concrete culvert. It’s a cool breeze and it carries a hint of burnt wood, making me think of the colossal brush fires that have swept through here from time to time. I saw traces of smaller fires along this road in the spring. My imagination lit the way and kept it burning with the thought of all the Eucalyptus trees that were present here, all deriving from the former Santa Monica Forestry Station - an experimentation by Abbot Kinney, on varieties of the immigrated tree. It opened in 1887, and itself burned down in 1904, just like the properties higher up in the canyon did later, and to where I was heading now. No lights to guide me from its ruins. The unknown, crumbled by time’s tooth and the licking of fire, now covered by a coat of overgrowth and night.

999 steps lead you to the bottom of the canyon. From here two flights of stairs start as well as a barbed wired chain-linked fence. It runs ahead of me as I continue on the road beside it. Having visited the place earlier, me and my friend Jordan were stopped by a patrol car for a “talk”, just as we had started descending a trail. Speaking from a distance, the officer – still up on the road and tucked behind sunglasses, a badge and the wheel of the car – talked to us about his duty keeping people out of the property. That was if your intention was not of the right kind. There was a “beautification project” going on. Beautiful in the way you picture a picnic in the green. He continued to come up with ideas for not carrying on. “Nothing down there of any interest. Should rather continue up the fire road till it hits Mulholland Drive and go left and you’ll find the Nike Missile Control Site.” We continued down through the chaparral.”

– Marius Engh, Santa Monica, November 11, 2013

Marius Engh (born 1974) lives and works in Oslo. This is his sixth solo exhibition at STANDARD (OSLO). Other solo exhibitions include “*Eschscholzia Californica*” at Centrum Kultury Zamek, Galeria Przedmiot Fotografii, Poznan, Poland; “*Nec Plus Ultra*”, Taylor Macklin, Zürich, Switzerland; *Eschscholzia Californica* at Emanuel Layr, Vienna; *My Target Is Your Eyes* at Galleria Gentili, Prato; and “*Exhume to Consume*” at Supportico Lopez, Berlin. Marius Engh’s works have previously been included in exhibitions at Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Santa Cruz, Tenerife; Henie Onstad Art Center, Høvik; Kunsthall Oslo, Oslo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster; Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen; and Witte de With, Rotterdam.

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