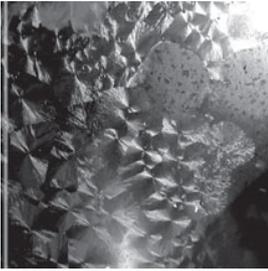


Brainwashed - Alex Keller and Sean O'Neill, "Kruos"

Written by Creag Dunton

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Alex Keller and Sean O'Neill may have been collaborators since 2015, but *Kruos* is actually their debut release. That relative youth does not translate to lack of experience on the album, however, as the duo's work is a complex, nuanced work of sound art, conjured up from some rather rudimentary sources, largely just field recordings and a telephone test synthesizer. It is a bit of a difficult, unsettling experience at times, but a strong one nonetheless.

[Elevator Bath](#)

The two halves of *Kruos* complement each other well, with each side representing some drastically different approaches to sound. The first half begins rather simply with a big, looming bassy analog tone that slowly oscillates in pitch. Sputtering at times, it functions well as an underlying foundation for the processed field recordings to be constructed upon. The duo introduces these rather coarsely via recordings of violent, heavy reverberated knocking. There is a rhythmic quality to it, but is anything but conventional. Instead, it functions as a jarring, menacing addition to initially restrained sounds.

Keller and O'Neill are not just working with pure field recordings, of course, so after some of those loud outbursts, a bit of delay scatters the sound nicely, giving an additional sense of depth. Beyond that, some weird creaking textures and shifting of pitches balance out the open space well, bringing a nicely foreboding quality to the composition. The tones get even more varied and pushed to the forefront, building up to a dramatic, yet abrupt ending.

The second half of the record is the more subtle side to *Kruos*. The low frequency synthesizer hum reappears, but here blended with an ambience somewhere between white noise generator and air conditioning system. From here slow, sparse pulsations appear, representing another misuse of that telephone test equipment the duo utilizes. Sputtering, rumbling electronics appear, giving a bit more tension to the otherwise peaceful surroundings, but still staying more restrained and less confrontational than the first half.

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Eventually these indistinct and mostly unidentifiable field recordings and found sounds are presented in a less treated way, consisting of far off birds and insects that again capture the vastness of nature very well. Towards the conclusion, however, the duo decides to get weird again. There is a reappearance of some of the knocking/clattering type sounds that were heard throughout the first part, building to a more disorienting, chaotic arc before coming to another abrupt conclusion.

Alex Keller and Sean O'Neill may not have used a significant amount of instrumentation to construct *Kruos*, but they achieve a great deal with what they have. It is difficult and challenging at times, and there is not much to grab on to as far as conventional rhythm or melody, but it excels in abstraction. In many cases the result is far removed from the source material, but the environment the two create on here is just as fascinating as any natural one that could be captured.

samples:

- [Kruos I \(Excerpt 1\)](#)
- [Kruos I \(Excerpt 2\)](#)
- [Kruos II](#)