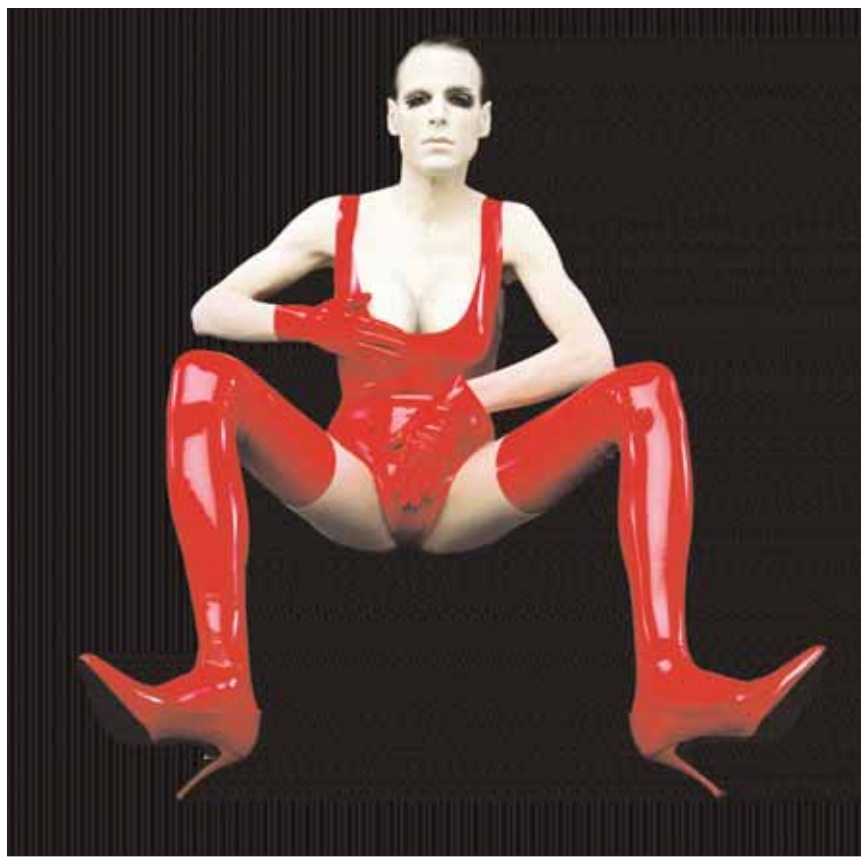


# SINGING THE BODY ELECTRONIC

**Tobias Bernstrup**  
is acclaimed  
for his edgy  
digital videos,  
genre-bending  
performances,  
and dance  
tracks that  
get stuck in  
your head



**E**XCEPT FOR the fact that Tobias Bernstrup occasionally performs electronica music in a red latex teddy and a blond-streaked scarlet wig, he could easily be typecast as a geeky digital artist, creating his work from keystrokes and mouse clicks. Comandereing software intended for video games, the 34-year-old Swede designs 3-D environments such as nightclubs, wintry city streets, and Modernist skyscrapers. Each features a distinctive, original sound track and androgynous characters in fetish gear—often bearing a strong resemblance to the artist’s stage personae. “Games are like a fetish version of reality to me,” Bernstrup says. “And in performances I use materials that resemble those in my videos.”

Jerome Sans, codirector of the Palais de Tokyo museum in Paris, says Bernstrup’s work stands out as an innovative exception in digital art, a medium he finds generally un compelling. “Most digital work merely mimics reality,” Sans explains. “But Tobias is inventing something new. He has a broader perspective, dealing with landscape, architecture, desire, and fear.”

Born in Göteborg, Bernstrup was studying video at Stockholm’s Royal University College of Fine Arts when the makers of the shoot-’em-up computer game Doom included an editing function allowing players to model the virtual spaces where the combats took place. “I bought a copy of the video game and started working with its software to make video art,” he recalls. In 1995 Bernstrup began collaborating with a classmate, Palle Torsson; they rebuilt museums as virtual spaces, giving them the look of video-game fighting arenas. In 2001 Bernstrup, by then working solo, built his first interactive piece. Viewers could use a mouse to navigate his virtual spaces, stocked with life-size characters and futuristic structures—all projected on the walls in front of them.

As a video and installation artist, he has had solo shows in museums such as the Palais de Tokyo, the Vienna Kunsthalle, and Basel’s Museum für Gegenwartskunst. And he has exhibited at the moniquemeloche gallery in Chicago, Stockholm’s Andréhn-Schiptjenko, and Cosmic Galerie in Paris. Bernstrup’s interactive pieces sell for between \$15,000 and \$18,500, while his digital videos cost

between \$10,000 and \$12,500, all in editions of five. His musical works sell at standard record-store prices. The dance tracks are released on vinyl for the DJs in the fetish-scene nightclubs favored by Bernstrup, now a Brooklynite.

“I think of music as a very essential component of my work,” he says. “If you see one of my shows, whatever medium I use—video, computer game, or performance—there’s always the music, a song that will be stuck in your head after you leave the exhibition.”

Several times a year the artist performs live, usually in venues like Stockholm’s Färgfabriken contemporary-art space. Wearing transvestite fetish gear—or other outlandish costumes—Bernstrup sings over tracks of original compositions, often with his own videos playing on the backdrop. “The concerts are like seeing David Bowie in the ’70s,” says Jan Åman, director of Färgfabriken. “Tobias goes fully into this Eurotrash disco character, not holding back.” Yet there’s still a strong connection with Bernstrup’s digital work. “Onstage, Tobias is behaving like an android, neither man nor woman,” Sans says. “He really becomes one of the characters in his videos.” —*Marc Spiegler*

FAR LEFT Portrait of the artist.  
LEFT Bernstrup poses for the CD  
*Re-Animate Me*, 2002. RIGHT A  
character in the computer  
animation *Re-Animate Me*,  
*Intro*, 2002.

