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Superflex in “Bloodflames Revisited” at Paul Kasmin

by Noah Dillon



Superflex, still from Burning Car, 2008. Digital video, runtime: 11 minutes. Courtesy of Superflex.

A Mercedes just burst into flames, right in the interior middle. Mercedes are kind of universal, right? In movies and on the news you always see members of a junta or cartel kingpins or threatened pro-Western dignitaries or suspicious CEOs riding around in Mercedes. And then you see the blackened husks of those cars in the aftermath of civil strife. They often provide a kind of proxy for the bodies we don't see on the news. There are, perhaps, burned Mercedes in Syria, Mexico, Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere *right now*. The fire just kind of leapt up. The space around the car is totally undefined blackness and the flames spread and there's no sound except for roaring and crackling auto combustion. There are few cuts in the video and you just see the fire engulfing the car as the camera pans back and forth. Pretty quickly it's an inferno spewing sooty black into the night sky. The video was made in Vietnam, which, along with its neighbors, Thailand and the Philippines especially recently, has experienced more than its share of violence. The tires are burning and the paint is puckering with boils. The camera gets really close, circling the car. Have they drained the oil, the gasoline and other flammables from out the vehicle's organs? Could it explode? Superflex is from the Netherlands, where you probably see scenes like this far less often. But if they had Mercedes in the 17th century, there would have been Dutchmen torching them. Lawrence Weschler's essay, "Vermeer in Bosnia," does a great job at piercing the myth of still reflection in Dutch masterpieces, reminding you that just outside his beautiful paintings Vermeer's countrymen were conquering the world (including Vietnam) and setting it up for the kind of crises that lead to flaming luxury sedans today. The tires are gone on one side; the thing takes a contrapposto stance in the darkness, fire still chewing at the headlights and guts. It's still burning when the credits start rolling. All this happened in about eight minutes — is it in real time? How long does it take to completely destroy a car and leave only a charred skeleton on the roadside, rebels trudging past, for civilians to ponder the horror of? NOAH DILLON

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