

DARBEN – ART DOES NOT EXIST APART FROM REALITY

By the mid-2000s, a distinct current called RABM (Red and Anarchist Black Metal) emerged, largely in response to the presence of NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal). RABM bands took the genre's feral intensity and repurposed it for anti-fascist, anarchist, and ecological causes. Groups like Panopticon, Iskra, Dawn Ray'd, and Feminazgül used Black Metal as a tool for critique — attacking capitalism, patriarchy, and fascism while retaining the genre's raw spirit of defiance. Swiss band Darben just released their debut EP, "Karg", showcasing awesome Punk infused Black Metal that is openly politically charged. (JOKKE) *Pictures by Dungeoncinth*



Darben was born out of a long-standing friendship and shared political conviction. When you finally decided to create this band after nearly two decades of knowing each other, what did you want to express that your previous projects couldn't?

HNS: Darben is my first Black Metal project in a very long time. It's also the first time I've taken on the writing and lyrics, as well as the playing and vocals. The main focus was the style of music and the freedom to write lyrics exactly as we saw fit. That was what we wanted to express.

LVR: Darben is my first project in 20 years. During that time, I often thought about starting something new, but I was never sure which direction to take. When HNS suggested creating Darben, it immediately felt right. We share the same mindset – musically and politically – and that makes Darben the perfect platform to realise the ideas I've carried with me for the past two decades. We've deliberately chosen to set no boundaries – neither musically nor conceptually.

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The word Darben translates to “languish.” How does that idea of withering or enduring suffering capture the essence of your music and worldview?

Darben isn't just a word – it's the state most people are forced into while the ultra-rich gorge themselves on power and profit. The world has been spiralling down for decades, and the gap keeps growing. We know we're still among the most privileged – we're not starving, we have a voice, and we can create freely. But that doesn't blind us. It fuels us.

Our music channels that tension: the guilt, the rage, and the refusal to look away. If you're languishing, you're still alive. And if you're alive, you can fight back.

You've cited both Black Metal giants like Darkthrone and Mayhem as well as Punk icons such as Discharge and Totenmond as influences. How do these two seemingly different energies – chaos versus protest – meet in your sound?

The Black Metal we like best is always rooted in Punk, Crust, or Hardcore – so we don't see these as different energies at all. Both forms share something else: their musicians feel frustrated and angry about the world around them, and they treat their music as a form of rebellion.

Your lyrics are written entirely in German, your native language. Was this a conscious act of defiance against the dominance of English in Metal, or more of a necessity to express emotion and anger authentically?

HNS: To be precise: Hochdeutsch – or (High) German – isn't our exact native language. We learn it at school, and it is the official language in the part of the country where we both live. Our native language is Swiss German, which is close to Hochdeutsch but not the same.

The themes and chosen words in Darben's lyrics are highly emotional for me, yet I didn't feel that Swiss German was the best language to convey them. I wanted a certain “artistic distance”. I also think German can sound very harsh and direct, which suits the content. Most of all, I chose German because I feel safe using it. My English is fine, but I don't consider it good enough to write and shout in.

Darben's music is openly antifascist, feminist, and anti-capitalist. How do you navigate the line between political expression and artistic creation without reducing your songs to slogans?

We see Darben first and foremost as a musical project, not a political campaign. The main goal is to play the music we like. The political stance that comes through is a welcome by-product, reflecting our own beliefs and attitudes.

Not every song is about antifascism, feminism, or anti-capitalism. But this is our shared mindset, and we wanted people to be aware of it. We believe you should write lyrics about themes that genuinely move you as a person.

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The intersection of politics and Black Metal remains polarizing. Traditionalists argue that overt politics “pollute” the genre’s focus on individual freedom and nihilism, and that Black Metal has always thrived on provocation and opposition. Others insist that apolitical art in a corrupt world is itself a political choice. What’s clear is that politically engaged Black Metal reclaims the genre’s original spirit of rebellion, not through nostalgia or empty provocation, but by re-rooting its rage in lived reality. As a band that takes a clear political stance, have you ever felt the tension between your anti-fascist beliefs and the accusations of censorship or moral policing that often come with “cancel culture”? How do you navigate that line?



Our anti-fascist stance isn’t a moralising finger-point, but an expression of our conviction that art does not exist apart from reality. Black Metal has never been mere escapism for us – it has always been resistance. For us, rebellion doesn’t mean disappearing into a nihilistic pose. It means channelling rage where it’s needed: against authoritarian ideologies, against exclusion, and against indifference.

We understand that some see political engagement as a limitation on artistic freedom. For us, it’s the opposite. Our freedom as artists lies in taking a stand – without fear of labels like “cancel culture”. Criticism isn’t an attack on freedom of expression, but part of a vibrant discourse. Anyone who speaks out must expect disagreement – that applies to us as much as to anyone else.

We try to navigate this line not by preaching dogma, but by treating our music as an expression of lived experience. It isn’t a manifesto, but a mirror of our reality. And if it provokes, then it’s doing exactly what Black Metal should always do: challenge!

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You've decided to keep Darben a studio-only project. What does the studio environment give you that the live stage cannot? Could that ever change in the future?

We were able to work at our own pace and as a duo, since neither of us plays drums. That gave us a lot of freedom and made the whole writing process more relaxed. We could focus on single riffs for as long as needed, slowly building the songs. In most rehearsal situations, that becomes boring because you're eager to play full tracks.

With KOV, we found the ideal drummer to express our ideas. We contacted him once we felt the songwriting was almost complete.

We're now considering testing things in a live setting to see whether we can perform these songs as a full set. HNS has never shouted through an entire show, nor played guitar while shouting, so we need to try that before planning any gigs. If it works, we'll definitely play a few selected shows. We would also need a fourth member to handle bass.

The collaboration with Dungeoncinth created a visual world for “Karg” that leaves the genre open for interpretation when seeing the album cover. It's also a quite abstract visual that doesn't reflect the political topics the band covers. How important is visual art in expressing Darben's themes?

Visual art is an important part of how we express ourselves as a band. The name Darben and the album title “Karg” are closely tied to the current global political situation and the state of humanity. They reflect a sense of scarcity, emptiness, and imbalance.

The artwork, created in collaboration with Dungeoncinth, shows a barren, almost surreal landscape. It's abstract and open to interpretation – which was exactly our intention. We didn't want to illustrate our political themes directly, but to convey the emotional atmosphere behind them: quiet, yet powerful.



Visuals help us deepen the mood of our music and create a stronger emotional connection. They don't explain the lyrics, but they complement them. The cover of “Karg” is like a window into the world we're portraying with the album – raw, minimal, and open to personal reflection.

The record ends with a cover of “Macht kaputt, was euch kaputt macht” by Ton Steine Scherben. What does that song represent for you, and how did Tamara Funiciello's speech tie into your version?

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HNS: The song represents, for me, a rebellious way of thinking and a deep anger towards capitalism. I've always enjoyed working on cover versions from musical styles that differ from my own, especially when the song itself is inspiring. In this case, the rebellious lyrics and the nasty main riff wouldn't let me go after I heard it for the first time. To be honest, I discovered it through the cover version that Totenmond recorded long ago. So, the circle closes again, as Totenmond are also very important to me.

I heard the speech by Tamara Funiciello, a Swiss politician and feminist activist, at a 1 May event in Zürich. I was instantly hooked and shared it live on my private social media account. After that, I realised her speech was the perfect voice sample for the cover. In just a few words, she nails the connection between feminism, capitalism, and class struggle.

Each of the five songs on “Karg” deals with a specific theme from capitalism to social media and personal despair. Did you conceive the album as a conceptual whole, or do these tracks stand as separate reflections on different kinds of decay?

“Karg” wasn't originally conceived as a concept album. It developed organically – both musically and thematically. The lyrical content grew out of current events, personal experiences, and observations that shaped the writing process over time.

That the album is now seen as a coherent, conceptually unified work is something we're genuinely pleased about. It shows that the different themes – from critiques of capitalism and digital alienation to personal despair – come together to form a larger picture. This thematic connection wasn't planned from the start, but it reflects our perspective on the world and the emotional landscape we wanted to capture.

“Hexenmal” draws inspiration from the art of Marina Abramović's, a Serbian conceptual and performance artist, and speaks of the violence done to women by the Church. How do you approach translating such intense, painful themes into music?

HNS: There wasn't a strategic idea behind this. The words came to me spontaneously and were written in a short time. But the inspiration had built up over a longer period. Thanks to my life partner, I was introduced to feminist activism as well as contemporary art. Abramović was one of the artists who instantly captivated me. I've admired her ever since I first came across her, and I recommend her work to everyone.

Another key inspiration for the lyrics was the book “*Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*” by Silvia Federici. This was also introduced to me by my partner, who helped break down the content. I wanted to show, in a simplified or symbolic way, what patriarchy and the church do against FLINTA* people all over the world. I am deeply sad and angry about it, and I fully support all activists fighting for the rights of FLINTA* – this song is just a humble contribution.

(FLINTA is an acronym commonly used in German-speaking feminist and activist contexts. It stands for: Frauen (women), L – Lesben (lesbians), I – Inter (intersex), N – Non-binary, T – Trans, A – Agender / Asexual. The asterisk (*) is added to explicitly include*

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people with other gender identities or sexual orientations that fall outside of these categories, making the term more inclusive. Essentially, FLINTA is used to refer collectively to people who are affected by patriarchy and gender-based oppression, highlighting solidarity among these groups. ADDERGEBOED)*

“Permafrost” reflects a very personal crisis. Was writing this song a way of processing that experience, and does sharing it publicly feel like a form of liberation or exposure?

HNS: I don’t want to go into details but let me put it like this: I am relieved. I’ve overcome this hurtful period in my life, though the inner bruises are still healing. Overall, I feel I’m past it, and those lyrics feel like a form of closure.

Switzerland isn’t typically seen as a hub for politically engaged Black Metal. Do you feel connected to a local scene, or is Darben deliberately isolated from musical and ideological trends?

The underground scene here is relatively small. While many Swiss bands don’t necessarily express their political views through their music, they personally hold left-leaning positions. At the same time, an antifascist Black Metal festival takes place in Bern.

Darben sees itself as part of the strand of the scene that represents these values, and we don’t see ourselves as separate from the wider Swiss underground Black Metal community. At the same time, we are very aware of the presence of right-wing Black Metal events and venues that continue to book bands with questionable agendas.

“Karg” feels like a complete statement, yet also a beginning. Do you see Darben continuing down this path of politically charged Black Metal, or is the next step still undefined?

HNS: Thank you for that compliment. It’s a little surprising, as the songwriting took almost six years, and right until the end, we weren’t sure whether it would work out or if we had written enough songs to fill a full album. I’m very happy with the result, though the journey was long and demanding. If I find enough inspiration, there will definitely be another release.

LVR: “Karg” may feel like a complete statement, but as I mentioned before, the themes the album explores will continue to occupy us – both personally and artistically. If there are further steps ahead for Darben, then “Karg” will have been just the beginning. It lays the groundwork for what might follow, musically and thematically.

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