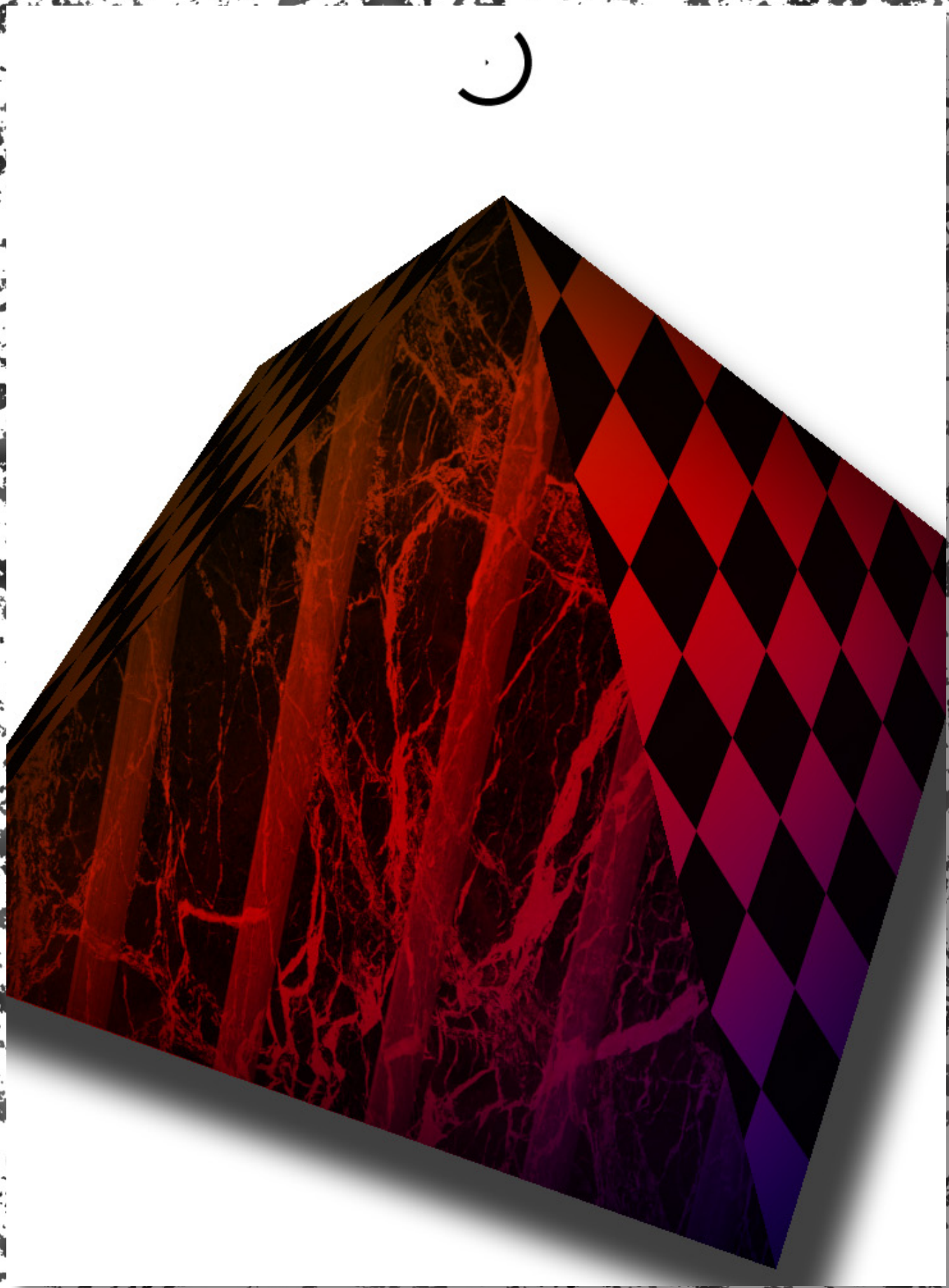


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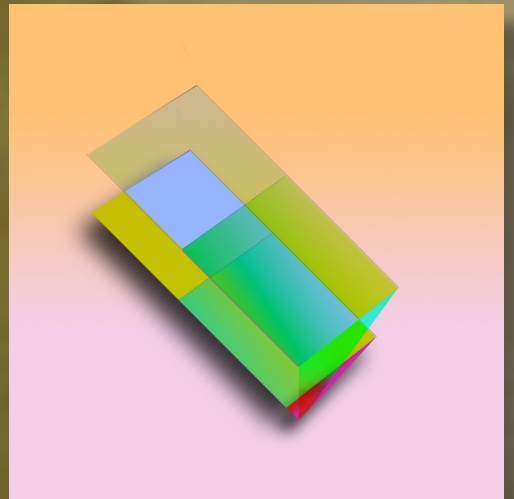
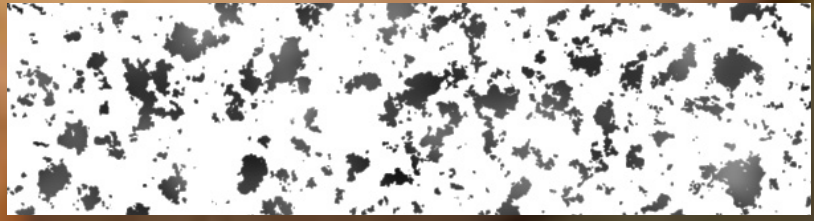
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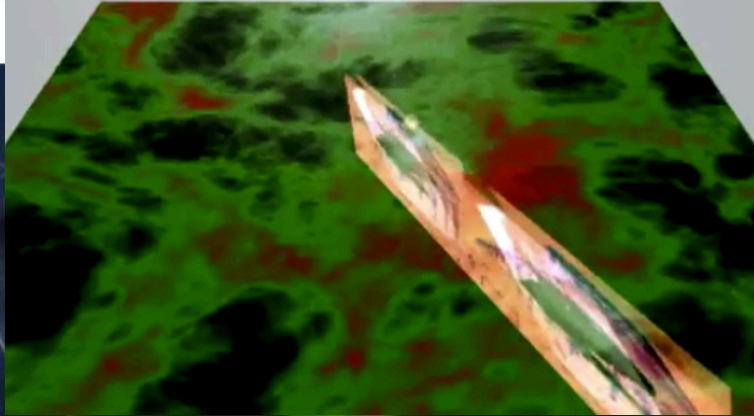
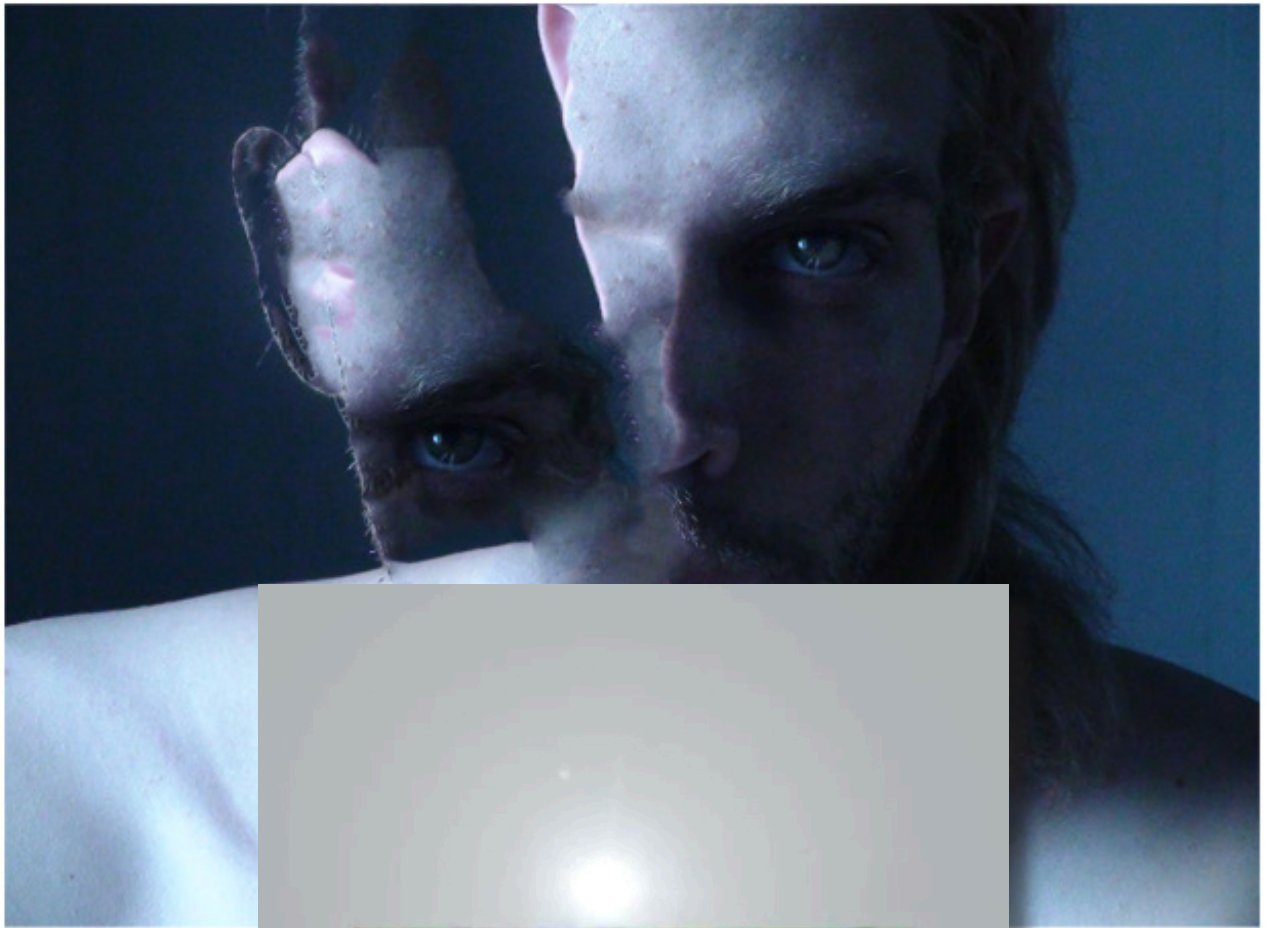
The Cohen Gallery
Perry & Marty Granoff Center for the Creative Arts
Brown University



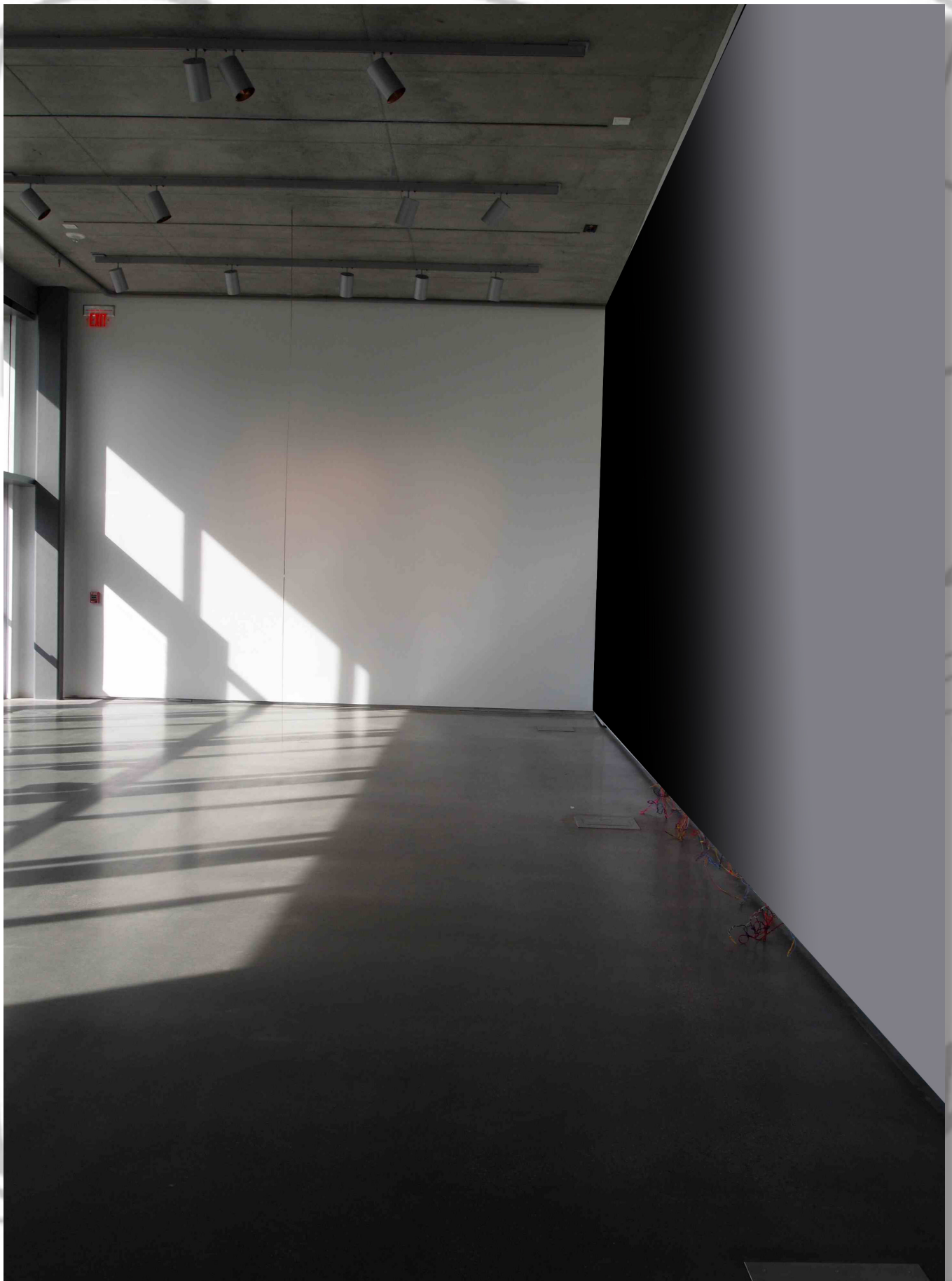










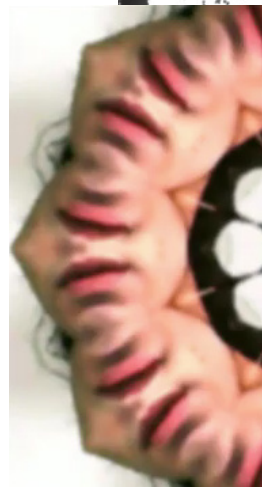


WIRE MIGRAINE REVIEW

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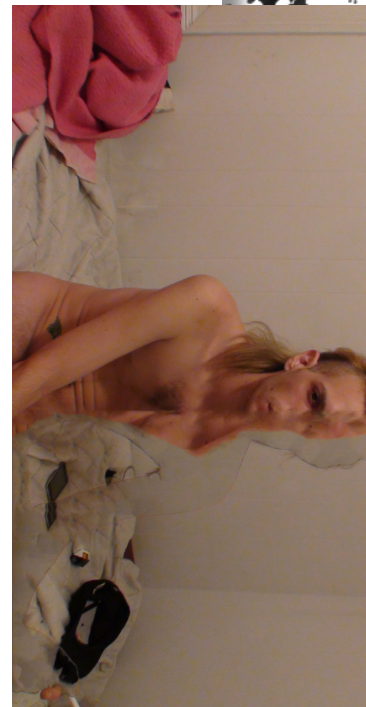
Up till 2011 witch house had been an incapable subgenre. A cripple, an invalid among the electronic underground. It was a scene built entirely on concept rather than content with hardly any talent in its halls. The fanbase, ironically, tended to agree. Witch house albums were generally badly rated even by supporters. It was clear what we all wanted: a cross between darkwave, dark ambient and the US chopped and screwed scene, the main problem was that no-one seemed to be any good at it. Most albums had ridiculous titles and imagery, and most witch house bands had strings of symbols for names. The whole thing was — quite literally — a joke. Highly-regarded bands like White Ring, Mater Superior Vision, oOoOO and Salem got close to producing decent material but never went the distance. There was just no consistency, no heart in a music form whose genesis was construct rather than character.

Xavier Valentine seems to have seen these shortcomings and made a concerted effort to do something about it. Wire Migraine, the first full album from his \wedge [Aarrcc] proj-



ect, dispenses with the problems and prefabrications of the scene through staying firmly embedded in the soil of darkwave. It's an album full of variety and flux but which never loses its own thread. It knows exactly what it wants and never wavers from its cause. It is a serious, palpable entity built on turmoil, trust and feeling, and it oozes quality from the opening notes. Throughout its twelve tracks we're taken on a run of blissfully pained ambience; heavy, resonating EBM-like pulses; beautiful, melodious chillwave and dark gothic undertones all fronted by Xavier's distorted vocal presence. And the whole thing never drops the ball for a moment. It is a monolith to the fabled consistency which the scene was so aridly gasping for previously.

Even though *Wire Migraine* consists of twelve songs, upon download you'll find that the whole thing comes through as one track. This is doubtlessly intentional since the album is sinuously threaded together, each song bleeding and melting into the next. It is a work of wholesomeness and completion, its constituents are meant to stay uniform, not orphaned. And the segues are beautifully done, sometimes harshly and sometimes subtly. It can be the heavy bass drop into a faster number that



will herald the change of track or sometimes just the humble drop into a new key from semitone to semitone. Wire Migraine is as much about achievement through subtlety as through excess.

Moments after hitting the play button it becomes apparent that we're in for something special, that we are in the presence of a genuine artist rather than someone dubbing themselves as such for the notoriety. "Gunnell" opens the album with a staggeringly beautiful ambient track. No clichéd synths here, just echoing, gasped vocals swirling around a simple, minimalist piano track as single notes bounce us off from the distance, each one hitting with meaning and feeling. There is nothing incidental to this, we are already in a new realm, a dark underworld hollowed out through solace and lost essences. Things pick up for the excellent "Nothing" with its pounding, punctuating bassline and then rise to a disturbing crescendo at "Revenge City", possibly the harshest track on the album with painfully distorted vocals. But even in these harsh moments, Valentine is able to retain an air of melody, an air of humanity, and as listeners we feel a natural empathy. These are not self-indulgent screams meant to affront us, but to communicate, to

share and complete. In the varying emotions set out through the album it's hard not to relate or to feel a familiarity with what's on show.

"Hallowed House" is one of the album's best moments comprising an ethereal, haunting ambient backing track with spoken vocals hammered into the foreground. Hearing a rap on a witch house album is almost as ridiculous as on a darkwave or goth one, but Valentine takes the chance here and it works astoundingly well. "Hallowed House" is, in a way, the album's crowning moment: it shows Aarrcc as unafraid to take risks, certain of its own core and drive, pulling areas from other genres and moulding them beautifully to fit its own needs while giving us new perspectives and experiences. The album then ebbs into the harsher, more upbeat but melancholy Ambulance Muscle before dropping into the title track which serves as a wonderfully atmospheric finale.

Wire Migraine is an astounding achievement. It is an album born fully from organic feeling and being. Nothing is forced. Everything about it, from its dripping, liquid ambient moments to its coarser, more disturbing clarion beats, is completely natural, convincing and lifelike. It is an album illustrated



by an internal palette of pain, solace and sensuality, communicating each with beauty and honesty. Since the beginnings of witch house back in 2009, it's sad that it took so long for the subgenre to come out with anything decent, but now that it has, it will take a while to top this. Wire Migraine should be seen as the hauling pin of the art form, one which other artists can look to for their own benchmark of quality. With a second album already in the works for release this Autumn, Aarrcc has his work cut out in binding this unstuck rabble.

