

ULVER LIMINAL ANIMALS

HOM 036

AT THE END OF THE ROUGHEST YEAR in their history, Ulver is proud to release their thirteenth studio album, titled *Liminal Animals*.

Spin back one year. Almost out of nowhere, Ulver starts to drop new songs, sometimes one, sometimes two at the time, like the spectre and its cruel shadow. They are on a roll, doing whatever they want to, and with no immediate or strict concept other than to keep the beast alive.

“Quite liberating in these twilight years”, they said.

But as the pieces are laid out, the songs start to shape a world of their own. Creatures abound. Ghosts and spiders, gods and sheep. Flocks, swarms, and *sensations*. (See *The Senseless Seven*, Austin Osman Spare’s drawn self-portrait on the album cover.)

There’s something in the air.

Liminal Animals is permeated by the smell of disaster and documents, with deep concern, a dark and troubled place in a dark and troubled time. Yes, in the vast Ulver catalogue, now dating back 30 years, it wouldn’t be hard to argue that *Liminal Animals* can be seen as a continuation of its acclaimed predecessors *The Assassination of Julius Caesar* (2017) and *Flowers of Evil* (2020). This time around, though, their reflections on the overwhelming confusion and conflict seem to have become more pronounced and explicit, as if the songs were born out of the acute intensity of the current situation.

What in the world is happening now?

Musically, the album opener ‘Ghost Entry’, which broke the silence almost one year ago, could indeed be seen as taking a lead from their previous albums. But *Liminal Animals* soon reveals itself to also be a reflection on their deeper history. The guitar and bass driven second track, ‘A City in the Skies’, might hint at the *rockier* moments of their *Blood Inside* album (2005), whereas the soothing, melancholic ‘Forgive Us’, featuring world-renowned trumpet player Nils Petter Molvær, and the smouldering ‘Locusts’ *could* have been relics from the years between *Shadows of the Sun* (2007) and *Wars of the Roses* (2011). Similarly, the album’s two haunted nocturnes *could* have been secret transmissions from Ulver’s earlier electronic ambient oeuvre or the stellar experiments on *ATGCLVLSSCAP* (2016).

And one could go on like this, and never really hit the mark. What about the B-side opener, the infectious and anthemic ‘Hollywood Babylon’, or the final single ‘The Red Light’, both showcasing Stian Westerhus’s inventive guitar work, and among Ulver’s catchiest moments?

Liminal Animals feels and sounds like a record made by a band being on a threshold. *Set in a perfect storm.*

There's no way around this: as the making of *Liminal Animals* commenced in 2022, Tore Ylvisaker, sound wizard, keyboardist, and a core member since 1997, had gradually drifted away from the pack. Initially to pursue other endeavours, before removing himself completely from the workings of the band. Everyone still reading knows what happened in August, as the rest of the pack was about to end the recording sessions. The absence of brother Tore, to whom *Liminal Animals* is dedicated, will forever haunt these tracks.

There's a final song in here, too. 'Helian', a dark and *intoxicated*, 11-minute track, recorded in September, and featuring Jørn H. Sværen's reading of the dreamlike and on the verge of delirious long poem by Georg Trakl (1887–1914). It is the eulogy no one could have expected, revealing Ulver's continued exploration of groove, repetition, and texture. It is, I think, the inevitable rite of passage, a journey to the borders of language and the disintegrating form. Into the unknown.

As the intense flow of words ceases and the crackling beats and sounds recede, 'Helian' feels like the fulfilment of a promise. *Wolves Evolve*.

Where to go from here?

TORE ENGELSEN ESPEDAL
Via Francigena, November 2024

KEY INFO

Ulver will release their new album, *Liminal Animals*, for a full digital release and pre-orders for LP/CD on 29 November 2024.

Liminal Animals, their 13th studio album, is their first in almost five years. Songs from the album have been released digitally as singles over the past 12 months, with no promotion outside their own channels. "Quite liberating in these twilight years", the band said.

Liminal Animals was written and arranged by Ole Alexander Halstensgård, Kristoffer Rygg, and Jørn H. Sværen, mixed by Anders Møller at Subsonic Society, mastered by Vegard Sleipnes, and performed by Halstensgård, Rygg and Sværen with Stian Westerhus (guitar, bass, strings and backing vocals), Ivar Thormodsæter (drums), Anders Møller (percussion and choir), and with special guests Nils Petter Molvær (trumpet), Sara Khorami (choir), Astra Eida Rygh (choir), Sisi Sumbundu (choir) and Torgeir Waldemar Engen (choir).

The album was recorded and produced at Lupercal in the Old Town, Oslo. Additional recordings were done in Pitch Black Star Spangled Studio, same city, different location.

The cover art features *The Senseless Seven*, a 1911 drawing by Austin Osman Spare. Design by Paschalis Zervas, + wolframgrafik, Athens.



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MYTHOLOGY

www.houseofmythology.com
info@houseofmythology.com