

THE GORE MET

MENU: A SICK AND TWISTED RADICE SALAD



Italian cult film legend Giovanni Lombardo Radice is likely the only actor in cinematic history who can claim to be in two films in which women get their breasts graphically skewered. How's that for obscure horror cred?

As John Morghen, he appeared in Umberto Lenzi's *Cannibal Ferox* (1981) playing a murderous drug dealer forced to watch vengeful natives hang Zora Kerova by her breasts. More recently, he appeared as Mr. Roeg in Domiziano Cristopharo's *House of Flesh Mannequins* (2009, but just released on DVD) as a dotting but sinister father with a mechanical larynx and a fondness for cigarettes and liquor. (Granted, he's not actually in the film's brief pseudo-snuff clip, featuring a woman getting her breasts agonizingly drilled through sideways, but he's close enough.)

An Italian/American co-production, the movie is sometimes overly ambitious and challenging. A prominently displayed poster for Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) reveals the principal inspiration for Cristopharo's script, which also contains nods to David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983) and a surrealist aesthetic akin to *Blue Velvet* (1986) that would make David Lynch wince.

The film is structured like a stage play, with title cards preceding each segment. The "Prologue" is shot from the point-of-view of a man with a camera following an attractive woman down a darkened road into her home, and up to her bedroom, where a black-gloved hand creeps into frame and she starts screaming.

This segues into "Act I – Sebastian," which introduces a troubled introvert (Domiziano Arcangeli) who takes photographs of fatal accidents and the organized sexual abuse of children for Cannoluti (Randal Malone), a flamboyant smut peddler who deals filth from a street-side newsstand. Sebastian has divided his family home into rental apart-



ments, one of which is occupied by Sarah (Irena A. Hoffman) and her father (Radice). When he's not taking photos or shooting video, Sebastian stares disconcertingly at Sarah through her window. She gently wends her way into Sebastian's home and asks to see his work. Instead (in the spirit of *Peeping Tom*), he shows her footage of him as a child and reveals that his father was a famous psychologist who deprived him of sleep and filmed it as part of an experiment. When Sarah becomes upset at a random insert of hardcore pornography, Sebastian shows her footage of himself as a young man masturbating with a blow-up doll!

Things get stranger from here. In "Act II – House of Flesh Mannequins," Sebastian visits a theatre and peers through the portholes that line a dark corridor into small rooms where people in fetish masks or makeup engage in a variety of sex acts. Further in, he moves through a gallery of glass-

fronted exhibits of naked men and women – some of whom are disfigured – before entering a room in which a man stomps broken glass like grapes in a barrel, his blood trickling out a spigot in the bottom.

Sebastian finally loses his tenuous grasp on sanity in "Act III – Sarah" after Sarah's father catches

him jerking off to a graphic snuff film and Cannoluti is arrested. Sarah reveals her dark desires to Sebastian and makes love to him while an explicit film plays in the background. Their relationship disintegrates in "Epilogue."

Despite a secondary role, Radice is the main attraction, dispensing advice and some of the pseudo-intellectual babble on the voyeuristic nature of television (which regularly bogs down the plot) before coming on to Sarah's boyfriend, Tommy (Jerred Berg)! Arcangeli's stilted delivery of his English dialogue actually enhances the awkwardness of his character, and Hoffman is simply scintillating.

The extras on the Elite Entertainment DVD include the typical making-of supplements, and a less typical sixteen-minute compilation called Snuff Films credited to "Moe Hamarian Almehairbi," comprised of the full sequences of the fake snuff bits used in the film. There's a man who has had needles stuck in and through his penis, which looks distressingly real, a penectomy that doesn't, a third guy tortured with a razor blade, a bound woman who is unconvincingly beaten and stabbed, and finally the utterly disturbing pièce de résistance – a bit from a fetish short in which a woman suspended in the air by hooks through the flesh of her back is lowered to the ground so a thin metal rod can be hammered through her breasts before being attached to an electric drill.

Now, where's the bleach? I need a bath...

