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House Of Flesh Mannequins

Elite // Unrated // February 21, 2012

List Price: \$19.95 [Buy now and save at [Amazon](#)]

 Review by [Ian Jane](#) | posted April 2, 2012 | [E-mail the Author](#)
The Movie:

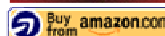
The oddly titled Italian horror import from 2009 *House Of The Flesh Mannequins* follows a young man named Sebastian (Domiziano Archangeli) who was horribly abused as a child and who has carried a lot of that emotional baggage with him into his adult life. He wasn't just slapped around and mistreated, however, he was subjected to constant documentary videotaping at the hands of his strange father, a man who obsessed over capturing as much of his son's life on tape as possible. Maybe not so surprisingly, Sebastian has grown up with a penchant for working with cameras, though as an adult he's behind the camera, not in front of it - but Sebastian is messed up, taking odd jobs working for the likes of a child pornographer named Cannoluti (Randal Malone).

Sebastian also happens to own the building that he lives in, renting out rooms to various tenants and his two different worlds start to collide when a new tenant takes up residence, Sarah Roeg (Irena A. Hoffman). Sarah's father, who she lives with, is blind and not in good health and she takes some unusual solace in Sebastian's work and soon enough, they strike up a very strange relationship that quickly heads on a downward spiral.

Written and directed by Domiziano Cristopharo, *House Of Flesh Mannequins* was obviously heavily influenced by the early 'body horror' films of David Cronenberg, the nasty gore set pieces of Lucio Fulci, the darkly sexualized surrealism of David Lynch and most obviously a certain Michael Powell classic. If it never quite hits the same levels that those three have at high points in their careers, you've got to give Cristopharo credit for accomplishing as much as he has here with what seems to have been a fairly modest budget behind him.

The film goes into some very dark places and is certain to make a lot of people uncomfortable but behind all of this depraved behavior and unsettling imagery are some interesting arthouse sensibilities made most obvious in the movie's visuals. The movie is also unafraid to get very graphic - so be prepared for a lot of twisted sexuality and actual self mutilation in a few of the more fetish heavy sequences. The lighting and cinematography is top notch, so that even when the most horrific things are being portrayed in unflinching detail, there's some impressive technical craftsmanship on display, but underneath it all is a completely twisted but no less effective sense of pitch black humor. Not everyone will get the joke and fewer still will appreciate it but it's there just the same.

The film's weakest link, however, is it's leading man. Domiziano Archangeli plays the lead with an appropriately disconnected tone but actually takes that aspect of his role too far for us to be able to really feel anything for him. The movie sets him up to be at least semi-tragic. We know that a lot of what he does is horrible and wrong but because we understand his upbringing a bit, if we don't exactly forgive him we're at least given a reason for his being the way he is. His childhood screwed him up, we get that - but we can't like him. Irena Hoffman fares considerably better, she comes across as sexy and alluring and far more interesting than Archangeli does and she goes a long way towards making a lot


CONTENT

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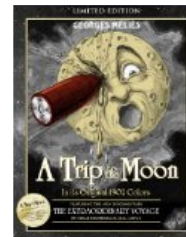
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of this work. The great Giovanni Lombardo Radice also pops up in an odd supporting role that's amusing enough to be worth a mention.

Had the film spent a little more time on character development and wore its influences a little less obviously on its sleeve, it probably would have wound up making more of an impression than it does but as it stands, it's strange and grisly enough that horror fans with a taste for the bizarre will want to give it a shot.

The DVD:

Video:

House Of Flesh Mannequins looks pretty good here in 1.85:1 anamorphic widescreen. The image is colorful and clear showing pretty strong detail for a standard definition presentation save for a few murky scenes here and there. Black levels are usually good but not always the most consistent, sometimes leaning towards dark grey. There are no issues with compression artifacts except in a few of the darker scenes and there's only some mild shimmer here and there to not. Print damage, dirt and debris are never an issue - yeah, the picture is nice, not much to complain about at all.

Sound:

The English language Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo track, the only mix offered on the disc, contains optional Italian subtitles but there's no English subs, closed captioning or Italian language options present. Overall the 2.0 mix is fine, but there are spots where the dialogue is a bit buried in the mix which can make a few bits and pieces a little unintelligible. This isn't a constant issue, just an infrequent one but it does happen. Those issues aside, the movie sounds fine.

Extras:

Elite have thrown in a few extra features on this disc that are worth checking out, starting with a behind the scenes featurette that clocks in at roughly thirteen minutes. A lot of this is just random and assorted footage shot on the set while the production was under way but it's marginally interesting and it does give you a glimpse into what was involved in making this picture. A six minute featurette called *It's Just Flesh* is a bit more focused in that it checks out the effects work that is featured so prominently in the movie - this is a very interesting piece, the only complaint here is that it's too short and could have gone more in-depth than it does. Also included here are a handful of interviews with the principal cast and crew members. Clocking in at a combined twelve minutes in length these offer some insight into why various people were cast in various roles and what their on-set experiences were like. If you dug the fake snuff movies that appear in the feature, the uncut versions of all five of those nasty little vignettes are also included on the disc, as are menus and chapter stops.

Overall:

An effectively grotesque fable of blood and guts, *House Of Flesh Mannequins* is disturbing and gruesome enough on a surface level that it'll win some fans for the gore effects alone. That said, the film lacks the staying power of some of the films that likely influenced it, simply because the script just doesn't get as involving as it should be. The good outweighs the bad though and those horror fans out there who appreciate a good gore film will get a kick out of this one, and Elite have done a decent job with the DVD. Recommended for gore hounds, a solid rental for the curious.

Ian lives in NYC with his wife where he writes for DVD Talk, runs [Rock! Shock! Pop!](#) and has contributed to AV Maniacs. He likes NYC a lot, even if it is expensive and loud.

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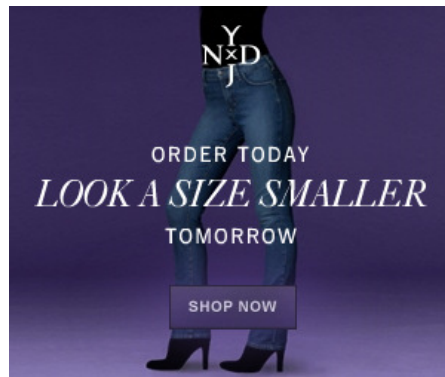
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