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MCN WEEKEND March 8, 2012

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MCN Columnists

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Posted Thursday, March 8th, 2012 - [No Comments »](#)



House of Flesh Mannequins

Domiziano Cristopharo's debut feature, "**House of the Flesh Mannequins**," feels very much like the work of a recent film-school graduate attempting to make a movie whose influences, motivations and references will be parsed by connoisseurs of slasher flicks. Domiziano Arcangeli plays Sebastian, an artist, filmmaker and photographer, whose specialty is recording the final positions of victims of automobile accidents and violence. He does this at the behest of a sleazy magazine-stand operator, who sells the photos to death-fetishists. Sebastian doesn't seem to enjoy his work much or respect himself for getting involved with such scuzzballs. What he does enjoy is eavesdropping and spying on a pretty young neighbor, Sarah (Irena A. Hoffman). Once they connect, the movie takes a turn for the truly bizarre and unnerving. Viewers are taken on a tour of an underworld populated with sadists, masochists, body modifiers and torture freaks. What happens in the S&M dungeons in many cases is real, performed by actual fetishists. Cristopharo seems to making a point about fake and manufactured violence and the media's willingness to confuse the two to sell tickets and boost ratings. He asks us to measure how far we would go to find out makes a friend, neighbor or stranger tick. "Flesh Mannequins" isn't an easy picture to watch, even for those with strong stomachs. Interestingly, the most disturbing moments come in watching real people act out their tortuous desires.