

TALK OF HORRORS

HORROR AND EXPLOITATION REVIEWS AND THOUGHTS, AND MORE

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House of Flesh Mannequins (2009)

In the field of independent horror, it's usually refreshing to see something that's original. There are so many slasher movies, zombie movies, vampire movies, "Saw" clones-the list goes on and on-that when you see something different, you can't help but really take notice. Domiziano Cristopharo's "House of Flesh Mannequins" is just that-a very different movie. Too bad the end result doesn't hold up as well as it should.

Sebastian Rhys had a rough childhood. As a kid, his dad tortured him-mentally and physically-and filming the actions. Now an adult (Domiziano Arcangeli), Sebastian likes to work with cameras, and unsurprisingly, is a bit fucked up. He finds solace-or at least at first-in Sarah (Irene A. Hoffman), who has a blind father (Giovanni Lombardo Radice.) However, her relationship with Sebastian leads to a downward spiral in which the line between reality and fiction blurs, and Sebastian begins to go crazier.

First things first: "House of Flesh Mannequins" is not what one could call an easy viewing experience. This is largely due to the titular place, which hosts sex, self mutilation, and other such acts. The thing that adds to the disorienting experience is the fact that these acts are all real. When people fuck and perform oral sex, they are really doing it, and the torture and scarification is done by real body performers. That being said, most of the gore is fake (such as a nasty scene with a power drill), but the subject matter-voyeurism, abuse, snuff movies and much more-makes for an uneasy time.

I certainly don't hate this movie. In fact, I appreciate that Cristopharo has made an indie movie that is more ambitious than so many other titles. Here, the influences are extremely diverse. Sure, we expect some to be influenced by the garish cinematography of Dario Argento and the nihilism of Lucio Fulci, but the voyeurism of Michael Powell's "Peeping Tom"? The surrealism of not only David Lynch, but Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel? The extreme violence of Fred Vogel? The more artistic side of pornography? That I wasn't expecting. This is a movie made by a man that really loves movies, and it's a bit refreshing to see something directed by someone whose more than just a fan boy.

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That being said, while he can create some really striking images, Cristopharo's Achilles heel seems to be directing actors, writing dialogue and offering a compelling narrative. Outside of Radice, none of the actors here are what you'd call good. Arcangeli in particular is weak, coming off as stiffer than wood and offering little reason to care about him other than his past. The dialogue is also often bad, and comes off as a really poor attempt at being poetic. Worst of all is the fact that the narrative isn't all that interesting. Sure, this is a movie in which the imagery is meant to take center stage, but after a while, Sebastian's downward spiral starts to feel tedious, and the conclusion the film reaches doesn't hold up to snuff (pun intended.)

In the end, more adventurous horror fans with extra strong stomachs might like what "Mannequins" tries to accomplish, but I can't say that they'll fall in love with the end result. This is ultimately a film that's easier to appreciate than like.

Rating: **5.5/10**

POSTED BY JOSEPH HOWELL AT 10:37 AM

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ABOUT ME



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A Wright State
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Joseph Howell has been an avid horror fan since he was seven or eight years old-he has Godzilla movies to thank for that. He's now devoted some of his time to watching (and at times suffering through) horror and exploitation fair to review for your reading pleasure. Oh, and he loves Cherry Coke Zero, and he recommends eating popcorn while watching older genre movies.

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