

Movie City News

Because There Are Enough Stooges In Hollywood



Of Dolls and Murder

Any documentary about cops and killers that's endorsed by John Waters is one that demands our attention. "Of Dolls and Murder" describes how an heiress, denied a college education by her overprotective father, changed forever the way police detectives and forensics experts would do their jobs. By re-creating crime scenes in intricately detailed "nutshell" tableaux, Frances Glessner Lee allowed police to formulate opinions based not solely on first impressions or notes, but from visualizations exact to the brands of miniature products in the victims' cupboards. More than a half-century before the first airing of "CSI," Lee founded Harvard's Department of Legal Medicine, the first program in the nation dedicated to forensic pathology. The original recreations still are used as training tools for police in Baltimore and Washington, some of whom are interviewed extensively in Susan Marks' film. She also interviews one of the creators of "CSI" and takes us on a graphic tour of the FBI's "bone farm" facility. Waters introduces the cases described in the "nutshells" in his usual way of making murder sound like fun. "Of Dolls and Murder" delivers on the documentarian's commitment to introducing audiences to something of which they weren't aware and making as enlightening as it is informative.

– Gary Dretzka

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