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Title: Profane
Also known as:
N/A
Year: 2011
Genre: Drama / Experimental / Arthouse
Language: English
Runtime: 78 min
Director: Usama Alshaibi
Writer: Usama Alshaibi
IMDb: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1671695/>



Plot:

Muna is a young Muslim living in Chicago as a dominatrix. Her already complicated life becomes even harder when she begins to think that she is possessed by a Jinn. We follow her through her everyday life and crisis.

Our thoughts:

One of the best things about running Film Bizarro has been to become familiar with the work of Usama Alshaibi. And add to that, becoming an acquaintance to him. I look up on his work as something completely free, but at the same time very aware. His short films alone are of great variety, where some are just experiments in color, some are wildly erotic, and some are just plain weird. But then you look at his feature length projects and you see "Nice Bombs" and the coming "American Arab" - two documentaries about him and his homeland. These two I haven't ventured into myself simply because it doesn't wake interest in me - I've also skipped reviewing them here since I'm not the right person to judge that kind of work. This is why I have been so excited for "Profane" for about 2 years now, though. It's a film that takes the style of his experimental and erotic short film, but puts it in a very personal light for himself. It's the perfect mix of everything he has done so far, and ultimately works as a way for me to understand where he is coming from, and doing so in a form that's not simply a documentary but an artistic expression.

This is a story of Muna, a young Muslim woman living in America. She has worked as a prostitute before, but has now go onto working as a dominatrix. She's a very free soul, who is enjoying life in every way she can. Be it partying or having sex, she does everything her own way. But she can't deny her heritage and religion, and she's constantly reminded that the things she does go against everything she is supposed to believe in. The film is about Muna's personal and spiritual crisis. She is hearing voices whispering to her, and she believes that it might be a Jinn possessing her, telling her what to do.

She's not alone on her journey through the crisis. Although alone in the midst of the crisis, she's not physically alone. Closest to her is her best friend Mary, an American girl who is right next to her on every party, and on most dominatrix jobs. But she's soon introduced to another person, the cab driver Ali. Ali is a traditional Muslim, and Muna eventually wants his help through the crisis. The question is - has the Jinn driven her too far already? I think it saves the movie that it never goes too out there with the "possession". It's a horror movie in a lot of ways, but not traditionally. It's a horror film purely psychologically and in what Muna is experiencing, and not as much in what WE experience. Make no mistake on that, and don't expect another bland exorcism movie (damn you, 00's Hollywood) when this in fact is more a psychological drama dealing with a personality crisis, religion, taboos. And art.

The story is told in a strictly fictional fashion, with heavily experimental parts here and there, but at the same time it carries a very docu-feel where she's even interviewed in certain scenes. The timeline isn't always the strongest point of the film but ultimately it doesn't weaken it in the slightest. It's very clear what the storyline is and we always know what to focus on, even if it's jumping in time to a present where she's telling us about the crisis, or if it's jumping to another time of her crisis.

The story is actually rather simple when you look at it from a distance, but here it's the execution and what it all means that is the focus. Not what it means as in depth, but realizing how important the issues are, what they represent in the Muslim world, and how bold it is to create a film like this when you're part of that world. It's impossible for someone like me to fully understand and grasp what "Profane" does, but there is no doubt that it's an extremely challenging portrayal of very taboo issues. Drawing a line between the Muna character and the director Usama Alshaibi is inevitable, and it doesn't hurt the film that this is something that should be considered upon watching it. The film is strong on its own merits, but when you start considering what really went on behind it, it's a lot more powerful. Usama Alshaibi himself has moved to America and is making taboo art - whether it's the erotica or his open opinions of Iraq and religion. "Profane" is a story of exorcising a Jinn, but I also see Usama's own exorcism in it. And it's an extremely bold film for Usama to make.

When I said Usama has ventured into a variety of styles I failed to mention that his work has often carried a comedic tone - "The Amateurs" being my favorite of these. His comedy is something that made "Profane" so

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comedy tone - The Amateurs being my favorite of these. His comedy is something that made Profane so refreshing. No matter how bold the film is, no matter how graphic it gets in its sexuality, and no matter how dark it might seem at times, it's always near a healthy dose of comedy. Which is weird, as I would've loved a pitch-black take on this, but at the same time it made it so much more entertaining. There are a number of conversations that are so important yet so funny. To class it as comedy would be a stretch, but you can't deny that it's there, that it works and that it makes a hard movie fun. Where's the wrong in that? Nowhere, that's where!

Another side to "Profane" is the experimental style, which you can see is relating to his most abstract previous work. He has a series of short films called "My Painting" and I just couldn't help but think of that when watching certain passages of "Profane". There are also jumps into strange nightmares that are setup almost as performance art or even paintings. My favorite being of a naked Muna out in a beautiful, green nature. She's posing, but still has a very intense, almost painful expression on her face. It's one of those things that just give a film, that essentially is a drama, another layer. I'm all for it - Usama's an artist and it's so apparent in scenes like these.

This isn't the greatest examination of "Profane" that you will stumble upon, as I'm simply not the right person for it. But I have seen a lot of Usama Alshaibi's previous work and I'm a great fan of his short films. "Profane" takes everything Usama has learned about filmmaking and himself over the years and made a feature about it. I feel both anxious and liberated, all at the same time, after this film. Its story might not always be the most developing and intense you'll stumble upon, but you simply can't miss how powerful the film and the exploration within it really is. And the acting is solid through it all, which is quite impressive considering what Manal Kara has to pull off. I simply adored her character, and she works perfectly in Usama's world. Because "Profane" deals with certain things I can't fully relate to, I can't say the film comes off as perfect. But it's a film every arthouse fan needs to watch, and the faults are relatively tiny in comparison to what the movie actually does pull off well. "Profane" is up there with my favorite films by Usama, "Convulsion Expulsion", "Ass" and "The Amateurs", and it's somewhere between them in content as well.

Positive things:

- Shows everything great about Usama Alshaibi.
- A very taboo film overall.
- Superb acting by Manal Kara and Molly Plunk!
- Intense and impressive visuals.
- The comedy is a savior at times!
- The creepy exorcism flashbacks.
- Great experimental "nightmare/dream" sequences.

Negative things:

- I can't fully relate to it, and therefore it's impossible not to miss certain things.
- Not always eventful enough, and almost repetitive at times. Though I think it comes off great in the end.

Rating:

Gore: 0.5/5
 Nudity: 3/5
 Story: 3.5/5
 Effects: 3.5/5
 Comedy: 2.5/5

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Ronny



