



The World of Film in Australia - on the Internet



Updated Thursday January 24, 2008 - edition No 568



Home Page <a href="#">free</a>
Search <a href="#">free</a>
Movie Reviews <a href="#">free</a>
Video Reviews <a href="#">free</a>
DVD Reviews <a href="#">free</a>
Soundtracks <a href="#">free</a>
Trailers <a href="#">free</a>
VisionStream <a href="#">free</a>
Interviews <a href="#">free</a>
Features <a href="#">free</a>
News <a href="#">free</a>
Forum <a href="#">free</a>
Upcoming Films <a href="#">free</a>
Box Office <a href="#">free</a>
Competitions <a href="#">free</a>
Awards & Brag book <a href="#">free</a>
Privacy Policy <a href="#">free</a>
About Us <a href="#">free</a>

Newsletter Options - Registration is FREE

Help/Contact

## LIBERTY IN RESTRAINT – FETISH UNFETTERED

### FOR WHOM THE PELL TOLLS

Michael Ney's debut doco, *Liberty In Restraint*, takes a tour around the controversial and forbidden world of sexual fetish in Sydney, through eyes of fine art fetish photographer Noel Graydon. Graydon also satirises the child abuse scandal that involved the Catholic Church and Cardinal Pell recently, on the eve of voting in which Dr Pell is said to be a Papal contender. The film is due to screen later this month at Brisbane's Queer Film Festival. Andrew L. Urban reports.

It's hard to imagine a more explosive scenario in today's Australia than the juxtaposing of a sexual fetish tableau based on the crucifixion, with real life characters from recent scandals involving priests and children. Just such a scenario is included in *Liberty In Restraint*, Michael Ney's debut doco, which follows art photographer Noel Graydon through the underworld of BDSM – bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism. Made with the best of motives – to illuminate the subject and help our understanding of this aspect of the human condition – the film is neither cheaply exploitative nor offensive – although some people will take offence, for all the wrong reasons – and some will find the film's graphic content extreme and shocking.

Graydon's tableau (intended as part of an exhibition of his photographic works), titled *Suffer the Little Children*, is a satire on Ruben's religious painting, *Coup de Lance*, depicting the crucifixion with a soldier's long lance piercing Jesus' ribcage. Graydon subverts this image by employing a fetish motif.

Wearing body tight black latex and rope bound, Graydon takes the Jesus position on the cross, his forehead pierced by fetish needles to replicate the crown of thorns; either side of him, similar figures in latex, and an assistant dressed as a nun in a gasmask. His wife Annette is dressed as a nurse, cradling their baby girl, "representing all innocent children, and to a great extent, hope..." She, too has a (child's) gasmask, symbol of the dangerous, "fearful world" we live in, says Graydon.

Graydon, a lapsed Catholic, was nevertheless angered by what he calls the "Pell / Hollingworth paedophiles in the church" scandal in 2002; "Pell accused the gay community of being what he called ungodly; not welcome in his church and certainly not receiving communion. Why do I feel perfectly comfortable to leave my child with any of my queer friends, but there's no way I'd leave her with a catholic priest..." Graydon's title, *Suffer the Little Children*, leaves the viewer in no doubt as to what he believes that object to be.

"an eye popping, jaw dropping and mind bending essay"

This piece of satire adds yet another layer to a film already layered with a rich mix of personal and social exploration. It's an eye popping, jaw dropping and mind bending essay on a 'scene' that is never seen and totally misunderstood. Illumination comes in many guises; one guy thinks he likes being trussed up because it reminds him of the feelings of comfort and being loved as a toddler "wrapped in swaddling" ... for a woman brought up as a strict Catholic, being restrained in a sexual context releases her from feelings of sex related guilt. For others there is catharsis, pleasure through pain, creative fulfilment - especially in the striking Japanese rope bondage work - and for some it's simply fun to play submissive / dominant sex games. We discover DV8 House and mingle with costumed participants at fetish play parties like the Hellfire Club.



Japanese rope bondage



Graydon's controversial *Suffer the Little Children* tableau



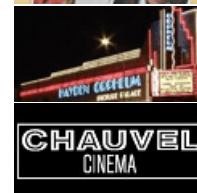
Noel Graydon – photographer



Noel Graydon prepares for a controversial shoot



Noel Graydon on the cross, in the explosive *Suffer the Little Children* tableau



All through the film we track Graydon's progress through his career and his personal life. He took his first erotic photo at age 15, but soon needed some reason for people (his subjects) to be photographed naked. When he began photographing the BDSM scene, he quickly realised that he wanted to "look from the inside out, not from the outside in". He put down the cameras and immersed himself in BDSM even becoming a male sex worker / BDSM Master for four years.

Through his life, Graydon went through some painful lows, including chronic addiction to drugs like smack and speed, and has come through it with a sense of achievement, and is now a devoted father and loving husband.

We see him at work – the moving images capturing his struggle to capture his vision in stills. Given the subject matter, there are inevitable images of naked bodies being whipped, pierced, smacked, bound tightly and elaborately in ropes and tackle. The camera never shies away from images that out of this context would be regarded as shocking. It's a kind of controlled sensual and sexual extremism, set in a context of people united by a common bond, as it were.

### "Bondage and Discipline"

And these people we meet do not seem especially bizarre, unless you call Puck's bright red hair bizarre. Perhaps surprisingly, the practitioners seen here are characterised by gentleness and caring; if this seems contradictory, it's Puck (a BDSM - or Bondage and Discipline - Master who prefers the title 'assistant') who articulated the central mantra: it has to be safe, medically as well as physically. Indeed, there is surgical precision in some of the practices, such as nails hammered gently into flesh, piercing through the skin, garrotting of genitals, binding breasts into grotesque shapes and so on.

Why would Michael Ney be allowed to film them? "I had been going to Hellfire for a while and that led to some private BDSM play parties. From inside that group, which I got to know well, I found my subjects and over time made it more widely known that I was doing a documentary. Many people are exhibitionists - so that's great - but on the other hand many are very protective of their privacy and hate having cameras around. So I set up specific shooting sessions..."

And he took that inclusive approach one step further. "As the film started to take shape I showed various versions to them with private screenings... everyone had already signed releases, but I also wanted their input. Generally, everyone is very happy with the way they are portrayed. They all knew that I am not out to scandalise, humiliate or make freaks of them – and they trust that I know the subject and activities well enough to be fair and accurate - if not sympathetic even."

So the film is a safe way for you and me to visit the pursuit of inner liberation through the restraint of bondage in the unhysterical environment created by a sincere filmmaker with a natural cinematic eye (who has sampled the forbidden delights of BDSM himself). Whether we think of Graydon's photographs are art or exploitation is irrelevant: they don't sell in porn shops, but are hung in galleries. In a way, seeing this world through Graydon's work is a filter that director Michael Ney has added to his own filtering process, which makes the film all the more interesting. And probably more accessible.

The 90 minute version of Liberty In Restraint has only had two screenings so far: in February, it was screened (sight unseen by the organisers) at the Mardi Gras Film Festival, and at Melbourne's Queerscreen Festival in March. The invitations to these festivals came directly from the film's entry in the New York Cinekink Festival in October 2004, where a 35 minute work in progress won the Best Short Documentary award.

A slightly re-edited version, the final picture locked off version, screens at the Brisbane Queer Film Festival (April 27 – 30, 2005).

### "not a pubic hair in sight"

But the film is still unfinished, as far as sound and music are concerned, and Ney and producer Frank Shields are desperate to find some funds (an estimated \$30,000) to clean up the sound and add final music, which is composed by Ney's collaborator, Barton Staggs, who has also helped edit the footage. His minimalist score (still undeveloped, he says) uses metal percussion and gongs to convey a sense of ritual, or dance music associated with the leather

scene, when appropriate. And ritual it is: every detail is ritualised, down to the details of dress – or undress. And not a pubic hair in sight.

For all the film's achievements with a challenging and socially valid subject, the filmmakers are broke. "We can't seem to get Government funding," says Shields, and he guesses that it may be due to the film's controversial and highly graphic content. But the ritualisation of the graphic acts takes away much of the titillation factor, imbuing the scenes with a strange, other worldly tone. Other practices, those which involve piercing the flesh or drawing blood, are almost surgically performed.

"It's very frustrating not having this last bit of money," Shields says, "because we are now inundated with invitations to festivals who've heard about the film." At last count, there were 16 festivals keen to have the film, ranging from specialist events like the Verzaubert International Queer Film Festival in Germany, to major league festivals such as the International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam (both Nov/Dec 2005), and HotDocs in Toronto (April 2005).

For Michael Ney, it's been a fascinating learning curve, after a career of making shorts, corporate and educational videos. "I was drawn to the forbidden ...after dabbling in BDSM, I began to flirt with the idea of making a doco as an exercise. It wasn't until I was introduced to Noel Graydon and he invited me to shoot the photo creation of his shoot of Suffer The Little Children that I began to see how it could work as a doco – through his eyes."

That was almost three years and \$150,000 ago. Most of the crew worked on deferral, and Liberty In Restraint has restrained Ney from money making work for the best part of the past year - but he continues to work regularly on filmmaker community programs such as OZDOX - the Australian Documentary Forum and also Popcorn Taxi, for little pay. He is now out of credit (every card he's been sent is maxed out), and his secondary source of funding, his mother, is deceased. Shields (a filmmaker himself) is hoping to find an astute investor who can see the commercial value of the film; "it's not my scene, but when Michael showed me the 8 minute short (that now makes up Suffer The Little Children sequence) I liked its aesthetic quality. And the 35 minute work in progress knocked me out." The film has also started to generate interest amongst distributors, and Shields believes "it has two markets: mainstream, and the alternative lifestyle market..."

#### "Art, sex, life, politics and sheer kinkiness"

Art, sex, life, politics and sheer kinkiness come together, as it were, in a film that has it all; even bondage mannequins – girl dolls in archetypal submission poses, bound (beautifully) in rope.

You can explore the world of fetish photography at:  
<http://www.libertyinrestraint.com/>

*Published April 21, 2005*