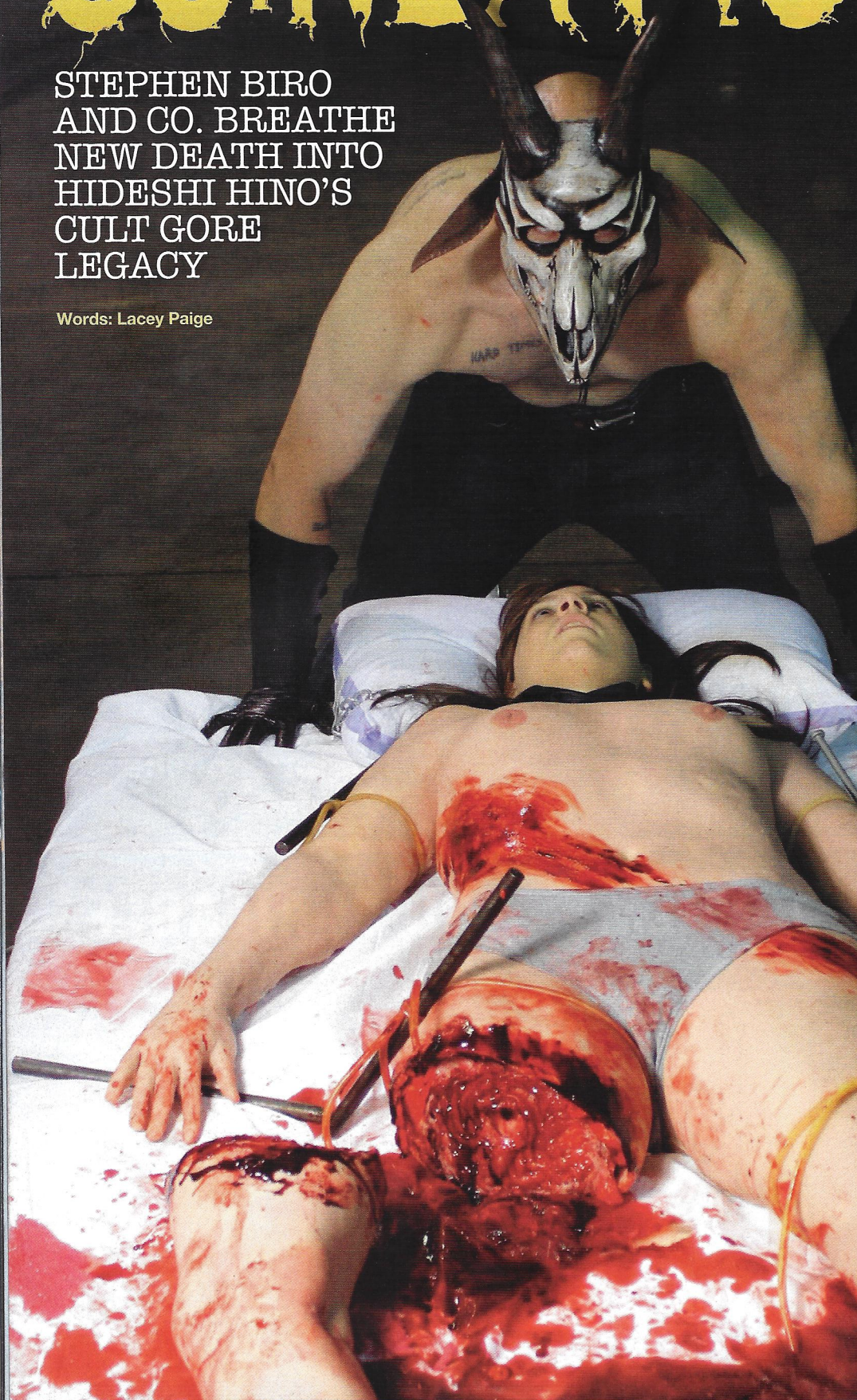


AMERICAN GUINEA PIG

STEPHEN BIRO
AND CO. BREATHE
NEW DEATH INTO
HIDESHI HINO'S
CULT GORE
LEGACY

Words: Lacey Paige



Above all other genres of cinema, horror upholds the age-old adage of “different strokes for different folks.” Horror encompasses an endless array of character archetypes, human emotions, degrees of psychological disturbance, and dire circumstances. But perhaps most importantly to the genre that many of us are so enigmatically enthralled by is the vast spectrum of viscera that extends from the very little on-screen bloodshed of classic Universal Studios monster movies, to gore flicks such as Hideshi Hino’s infamous GUINEA PIG series.

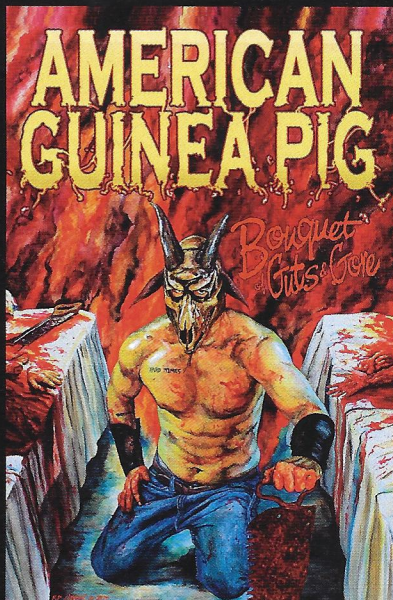
The 1985 release of GUINEA PIG: THE DEVIL’S EXPERIENCE saw Hino’s inauguration into the gritty underbelly of subterranean shock cinema and marked the excruciatingly graphic birth of a film series that has endured over three decades in the ever-evolving milieu of cinematic horror, and garnered a monumental level of notoriety that has withstood the test of time. The unveiling of the second installment, FLOWER OF FLESH AND BLOOD (released later in 1985), paved a path of perversity that, along with its predecessor, had not yet been traversed in underground film.

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But perhaps Hino’s greatest accomplishment—and greatest downfall—with his cinematic GUINEA PIG experiment was the level of controversy the series brewed in the wake of one of Japan’s most heinous true crime cases, that of serial killer Tsutomu Miyazaki. Upon Miyazaki’s arrest in the early ‘90s, he was discovered to have owned a copy of the latter-released DEVIL DOCTOR WOMAN among his film collection of over 5,000 titles, and was falsely reported to have designed one of his murders after a specific scene from the film. Moreover, FLOWER OF FLESH AND BLOOD—often cited as the most gruesome and hyper-realistic of the series—attracted even more negative press after actor Charlie Sheen allegedly viewed the film and contacted the FBI under the false conviction that

he was indeed witnessing an actual snuff film. It is Sheen's particular tall tale involving the authorities that has aided the series in defying the test of time and outdated special effects, as it gave rise to one of the greatest urban legends in the history of cinema—one that remains to this very day.

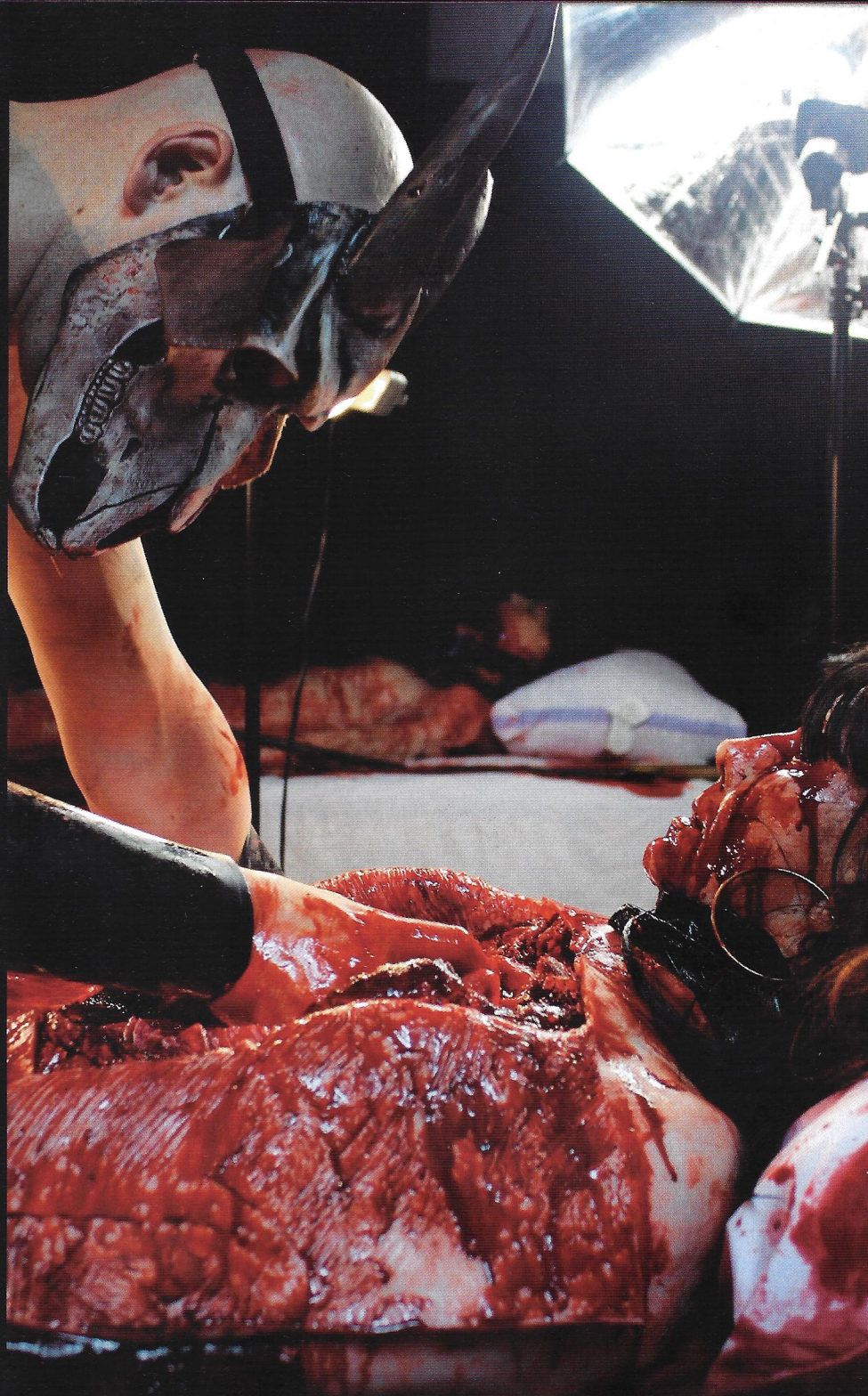
If the enduring legacy of Hino's work has proven anything it is that even 30 years later, the level of repulsion that the GUINEA PIG series spawned is still a hot commodity within the horror genre—one that only a certain breed of horror hound craves with an insatiable appetite. As the current landscape of horror remakes and re-imaginings created in homage of classic fright fare demonstrates, there is indeed an incessant eagerness to recycle the old while embracing the new. Thus it was only a matter of time until someone came along to seize the reins and step up to the intimidating



task of re-creating the most explicit gore saga in the history of underground cinema. And who better to fill those gore-drenched gloves than the founder and CEO of the legendary distribution company behind the release of such cinematic grotesqueries as Marian Dora's CANNIBAL and Nacho Cerda's AFTERMATH?

Unearthed Films founder Stephen Biro and his sidekick in sinister cinema, special effects savant Marcus Koch (100 TEARS, ROT), have teamed up to breathe new death into the series that they owe a great amount of credit to for igniting their passion for extreme underground cinema.

"I love them because they were just so vicious and so different than what normal movie making was," Stephen



Biro enthuses. "They went for the throat; it was just like a potpourri of stories—kind of like THE TWILIGHT ZONE but for gore hounds. I just love that aspect of [the GUINEA PIG series]."

After over a decade-long crusade to acquire the rights of the original series, Biro finally made his first strides towards pursuing his ultimate gore-oriented goal.

"I had been trying to get the remake rights since 2002, and it took a long time," Biro explains. "When the president of the company retired he just didn't care, so I got the rights and was like 'yes, let's move ahead and do this.' I knew exactly where I wanted to go with the whole series."

Biro's first order of business was to

recruit a revered mainstay in the field of underground horror special effects: Marcus Koch.

"I've known Stephen Biro almost 15 years now," Koch says. "A couple years ago we were talking about trying to continue the series, but it was a matter of working the rights out with the original Japanese producers. When [Biro] finally got the green light on it, we partnered up because he likes my effects work. With the new series, Stephen was really going for the more visceral throat punch and really wanted this to be as realistic as possible."

Although the first installments of the Americanized re-imagining boast some significant similarities to the original



Japanese films, Biro aims to up the ante in his no-holds-barred approach to re-creating the sadistic scope of GUINEA PIG with his own unique ideas as the main writer of the new series.

"I knew the first one, *BOUQUET OF GUTS AND GORE*, was the connection between the original Japanese series and the new American one," Biro reveals. "That's the full hardcore snuff one. SPOILER: It connects [with the original series] because in the background at the end of the movie, if you pay attention, one of the envelopes has Hideshi Hino's and Charlie Sheen's name and address on it. I wanted this to be the snuff movie that Hino talked about seeing before re-creating it to make *FLOWER*."

As a series that primarily focuses on the explicit exhibition of hyper-realistic gore gags, and effectively creating the experience of submerging viewers into the uncompromising philosophy of the ever-elusive snuff film, Biro took special care in developing the graphic scenes with as much detail and realism as possible while writing the script for *BOUQUET*. One could assume that the cast, crew, and set production were of secondary concern next to the invention of cutting-edge carnage.

"Stephen wrote everything out, but of course there's way more visceral detail in the writing of things than you can actually

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show on camera," Koch laments. "Some things don't translate well, like someone's heart beat outside of hearing it. He just wanted to do a bunch of gags that he had not really seen done too often, like the skinning and the cutting of the rib cage. So I just took everything that was in his script and was like, 'okay, this is possible; I don't know how I will do this. This I will figure out...' He definitely presented a challenge because once the bodies were cut open we couldn't glue them back together to do a second take, so everything really had to happen in one take. That was probably the most challenging part of it all."

As for the second installment in the AGP series, *BLOODSHOCK*, Biro endeavored to take a different approach to shocking viewers by tackling the material from a more psychological angle. For this segment, Koch took over directing duties.

"*BLOODSHOCK* is my take on

relationships," Biro divulges. "The whole idea was to have a man who is just going through pure hell, and he's just desperate; he's drowning in life and torture. Basically what it boils down to is two people who love each other, but they still tear themselves apart. I've been in relationships like that. Many people have. So I think when people dig through the guts and gore and they see that there's deeper meaning to it, it will really resonate because they're not expecting anything like that. So that's what I'm going for. Luckily Marcus loved the idea for it, so we went with that."

Koch has been at the helm of such previous obscure cult horror offerings as *100 TEARS* and *ROT*.

"I'd like to direct more," he enthuses. "There's another film I did after *100 TEARS* called *FELL*, which sort of just went under the radar—maybe because it's more of a bleak, depressing, dark drama than it is a horror film. The first person to ever see the full copy was Jim Van Bebber (*THE MANSON FAMILY*). He came over to my house and I played it for him, and I actually had Jim Van Bebber on my couch in tears after watching it. Stephen kind of felt the same way so he was like, 'you need to direct the next AGP film because this one [*BOUQUET*] is a gore film, but we want to pack another punch in a different way—in a more psychological way.' He felt like I was the best candidate to do that with *BLOODSHOCK*."

Although the narrative angle of *BLOODSHOCK* is of greater essence to the film as a whole compared to its AGP predecessor, Biro exercised the same level of care to focus on fleshing out (pun intended) lurid gore gags that had never before been done while writing the script as he did with *BOUQUET*.

"Marcus has been amazing because I've been throwing him all these gore gags that have never been done before," Biro says. "I'm really pushing him and he actually loves it. I think it is a wonderful partnership that Marcus and I have going right now. With *BLOODSHOCK* I actually wrote out the whole treatment and all the gore gags,



and was like, 'well what do you think?' And Marcus was like, 'well I've never done that so it's going to be challenging!' And it was just a wonderfully collaborative effect."

Filling the role of director while also leading the special effects department came with its own set of challenges on production of a film that was already challenging to begin with, so Koch brought in common collaborator and effects extraordinaire Cat Bernier to lead the effects creation when needed.

"Cat Bernier is kind of my red right hand," Koch dotes. "Any time I can work with her on a film with a bigger budget I will bring her in. For [BLOODSHOCK] I knew that I was going to have to split duties between directing and effects. So I brought her in to kind of oversee and pick up whenever I couldn't handle something she could handle it. And she's also another huge gore hound so she knows everything I know and I don't have to babysit her. She's amazing."

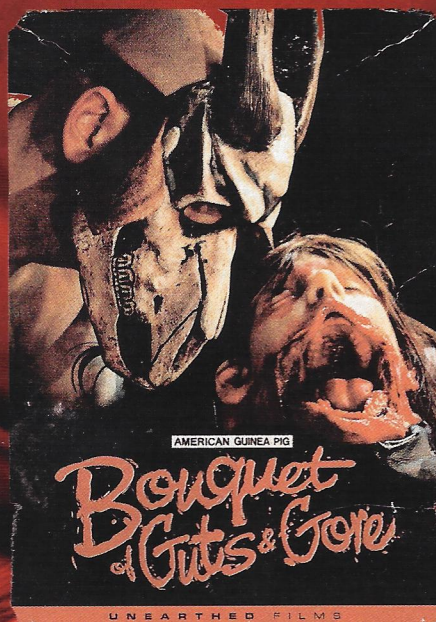
As far as preliminary preparation and procuring of insight for the realistic nature of the graphic gore designs in AGP, Biro and Koch look to a variety of outlets for inspiration, most of which they don't encourage the average horror fan to seek out. It is through readings and photographs of real medical procedures, surgery videos, and the gore websites that hide within the darkest recesses of the Internet that Biro and Koch use as reference guides for their ghastly artistry.

"I try and research a lot of real bodies, like what the skin would do if it was peeled back," Koch reveals. "Some of it is sort of an artistic liberty we have to take, but I definitely research as much as I can. There's a lot of awful, gross, graphic videos online that I don't recommend people seek out and watch, but that's the kind of stuff I'll watch to try and mimic when I'm creating—you know, the real stuff. Oddly enough, in real videos there's actually not as much blood as you would think. I mean, there is a lot of blood but not really horror movie blood. So it's trying to skate that fine line of not going too over the top with the amount of blood pouring out."

For Koch, making BLOODSHOCK was a particularly strange experience like no other, as the idea that life imitates art became a reality for him as production of the film wrapped and his body succumbed to a terrifyingly immobilizing mysterious ailment.

"I came down with a blood infection after being bit by some kind of weird bug while coming home from Georgia," Koch discloses. "I didn't see what bug got me but about three weeks later my immune system started attacking me. It hit my extremities first, so my feet and my hands went. It was

painful; it felt like I was walking on broken bones and holding things with broken bones in my hands. I started coming down with these symptoms in the last four days we were shooting BLOODSHOCK, and it was so weird. When I was in the hospital, they put me in the identical gown we had for Dan Ellis [on set]. There's a Wartenburg wheel that we used in the film, and they had to bring in a neurologist to run those up and down my feet and hands checking for nerve damage. They took out so much blood and stuck me with needles in the stomach. It was like,



'wow, we just made this and now I have to endure it myself.' So it was kind of bizarre."

Koch and Biro emphasize that while the premise of the film may seem plausible, BLOODSHOCK isn't entirely true to life; however, they did reference videos of medical procedures to keep the visuals as realistic as possible.

"As far as the effects stuff, we definitely watched a lot of videos of medical procedures—and medical procedures are bizarrely bloodless, just in how [doctors] cut and cauterize," Koch elaborates. "That was probably one of the hardest things to duplicate. Again, we're making horror films so we want lots of blood. But in order to see all the stuff we had to keep the blood at a minimum so you could see all the details, because a lot of times you put all this work into it and then cover it in blood and it just doesn't read anymore."

Maintaining that level of realism and effectively pulling of the gore effects wasn't the only difficulty presented during filming of an AGP production thus far. Biro and Koch faced several other issues involving conflict with cast members and the loss of one of their key shooting locations during production of BOUQUET.

"On the set of BOUQUET, we got kicked

out of the warehouse that we were initially shooting in because once people saw what we were doing they panicked," Biro exposes. "It was funny because they were trying to sell the warehouse so they had real estate agents coming in during the morning, and meanwhile there were two fake bodies tied up to the beds, dismembered, with blood everywhere. [The real estate agents] were like, 'well we can't have our buyers see this.' So we only got to shoot there for two days. Luckily for us, one of our friend's houses was being foreclosed on and it had a three-car garage, so he was like, 'yeah, shoot there. I don't care! Screw Bank of America!' So the last day was shot in a three-car garage instead of the warehouse where we started, but you can't tell when you watch the movie. Luckily, that's movie magic. One actor blew up on the set of BOUQUET...but for the most part, all the actors have been thrilled and happy to be in something of this nature. I don't think we'll have any more problems with actors, we just have to make sure that we pick the right actors that can actually be put through extreme circumstances of extreme gore, extreme prosthetics, extreme effects, extreme makeup. And they'll be able to handle a grueling non-stop schedule of getting it shot and done and in the can."

Thus far, BOUQUET has been released as a three-disc Limited Edition box set by Uearthed Films, which includes a healthy dose of special features sure to whet the appetites of those insatiable gore hounds, as well as two versions of the Limited Indiegogo Edition release that are only available through the Uearthed Films web store. BLOODSHOCK saw its world premiere at former Pantera frontman Phil Anselmo's third annual Housecore Horror Festival last November, made its rounds throughout the festival circuit, and has since been released on DVD via Uearthed. As for audience reception, Biro and Koch boast that the film has been surprisingly well received, with reactions spanning the gamut of repulsion to the intended psychological trauma that the pair set out to achieve upon producing the film.

"It's been amazing," Biro gleams. "People are just stepping up and saying, 'dude I cried during a GUINEA PIG film. I've had people with OCD and ADD saying that the movie screwed with them so bad they were actually close to walking out because they couldn't handle it anymore. People are coming out and going, 'wow, holy shit, there's nothing like this that has been done before.' I'm amazed that people are just digging it for what it is, and what it is just an out-of-control train that I think the gore hounds have been missing for so long." ❖