

AFF '07: "Flesh and Blood" and "The King and the Clown"



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Tuesday, 24 April 2007

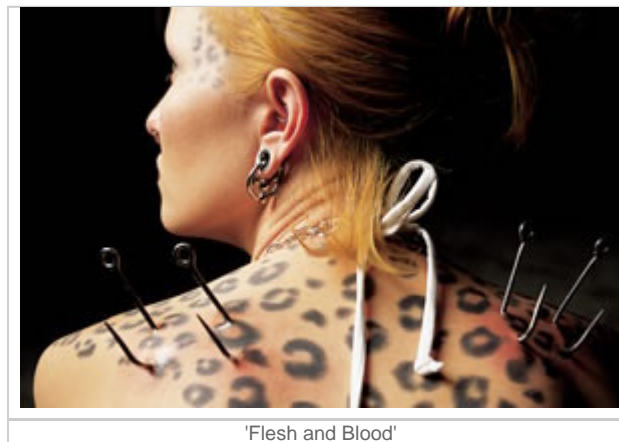
PREVIEWS OF TWO ATLANTA FILM FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

Flesh and Blood

Finally, a documentary that has gone too far. Any information is good as long as it does not hurt, right? Well, maybe. You may find what Steve Haworth does morally dangerous and therefore harmful. But I found the manner awkward at best.

Known for his controversial body modifications, Haworth has gained a cult-like following for what he considers "art," screwing and unscrewing large pieces of stainless steel objects into people's bodies.

What at first seems like a documentary on a fine line between medical science and "art," dwindles into a visit to the dark side of absurdity.



'Flesh and Blood'

Director Larry Silverman takes the tried-and-true traditional approach, by dropping us into the story in the midst of seemingly dark ritual. So we know this is going to be spooky. OK, I'm intrigued and I'm transfixed to the screen.

Next we are given a subdued and underexposed scene where we meet Haworth. Right away, I don't know whether to respect Steve or be alarmed by him and his band of misfits. The director does not give us time to relax and be lulled in to Steve's world. He just plops us right into the operating room with Steve. Blood skin and penetrations a plenty.

After a dose of shock we then get the family history. Perhaps what Steve does is art. Traditional societies did some forms of it. He just got lost along the way? Ahh... he's is ok. Right? We visit his dad, who was a designer of medical instruments. So Steve is not spawned by the devil. But when asked about his son's practices, his dad's words take us back to where we just emerged. So maybe he just made a pact with the devil?

The director seems to find the subjects of his documentary disgusting, yet hides behind the camera as non-judgmental observer. We see the Steve cult come together and we follow them around for what? Where is the controversy? Where is the other side of the coin? Can not we have point/counterpoint about Steve?

Ultimately the documentary leaves Steve where we meet him. Although we are left wondering if the man thrives on the flesh he modifies or feeds on the innocence of those seeking ways to be different.

Suffice to say, *Flesh and Blood* will be among the most whispered about film of the festival. Atlanta's viewers are sure to break out the proverbial bible belts and lash this one as proof that we are all going to hell in a hand basket. But this will not be because of the nature of the subject, but because of how it was handled.

As an African-American I am actually glad this tale from the dark side originated not in the deep

darkest heart of some lost African civilization, but modern day Arizona.

The King and the Clown

Often when I think about writing a preview, I wait until I ramble through my adjectives and stumble upon a gem of a phrase to set the tone of my treatment. *The King and the Clown* (*Wang-ui Namja*) directed by Lee Jun-ik gets this phrase: "*the pageantry of life.*"

The movie, initially released in South Korea in December 2005, is adapted from the 2000 highly acclaimed Korean play entitled "Yi" (You). Whereas the play is about Yeonsan-gun, a Joseon dynasty king who falls in love with a court clown, the movie uses the love interest of the King to weave a tale of human activity at its most base level of political and social upheaval.



What is indeed so amazing is it manages to intertwine this American's imagination (subtitles aside) into its allegorical webs, even while one sits thousands of miles away from its Korean audiences. Such universal appeal is rivaled only by one's love of music.

The movie carries its own clout. Indeed, *The King and the Clown* was the highest grossing (over \$85 million in US dollars) in South Korean history. That is, until it was out done by the horror film *The Host*.

Whether the movie was intended to operate as a historically accurate film is soon lost on the magnificent delivery of the characters portrayed. The director elicits from his fine cast of actors performances that that further Asian film from the heavy handed fight scenes and bold colors that often connect westerners to Asian film.

Among them, Jang-Saeng (Karm Woo-sung) and Gong-gil (Lee Joon-ki) play off each other so well that one begins to wonder if Jang-Saeng does not secretly lust after his partner himself. It takes fine foreign actors to take the American viewer's mind away from the subtitles and feel comfortably lost in the characters.

You'll feel comfortable lost and found in *The King and the Clown*. Catch it now while it appears here at the Atlanta Film Festival. Tissues not included with tickets.

Kevin Stewart is a photographer and writer for CinematL.

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