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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2009

A Sneak Peek at *Bandaged*

By Lauren Wissot

[*Bandaged* will have its world premiere at the London Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, April 3rd and 5th. Maria Beatty's *Belle de Nature*, *Strap On Motel*, and *Post-Apocalyptic Cowgirls*, and Lauren Wissot and Roxanne Kapitsa's *Un Piede di Roman Polanski* will all be screening at this year's CineKink Film Festival (February 24th -March 1st).]

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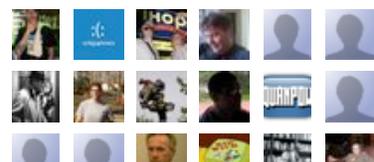
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Bandaged is S&M filmmaker Maria Beatty's foray into the indie mainstream – if one could call a flick best described as *Mädchen in Uniform* meets *The English Patient* meets *Eyes Without A Face* “mainstream.” Fittingly, none other than Abel Ferrara is serving as executive producer, though it just as easily could have been David Cronenberg since Beatty's stunningly visceral cocktail of sex and bodily terror would surely merit that auteur's seal of approval.

The plot revolves around young Lucille (Janna Lisa Dombrowsky), a beautiful blonde but unhappy young romantic with a passion for poetry and Oscar Wilde. Imprisoned in a sprawling mansion by her cold, scientific-minded father after her mother's death, Lucille decides to end it all right before her eighteenth birthday, but instead ends up with third degree burns on her face. Even more unlucky, her mad doctor daddy Arthur (Hans Piesbergen, who appropriately resembles David Bowie) happens to be a plastic surgeon, thus she can be healed at home with the help of his trusty assistant Ingrid (played by Martine Erhel in an Olympia Dukakis-type role). Into this family tragedy steps pretty brunette nurse Joan Genova (a stoic Susanne Sachsse) to insert some hot “mädchen” into Lucille's lonely life.

Though *Bandaged* refers to the dressings wrapped mummy-like around Lucille's head throughout most of the film, a more telling title would have been *Skin*, for the warm touch of a human being, a piece of another, is what Lucille most craves (a point eventually rendered literal when Joan makes the ultimate sacrifice of her own live flesh to her lover). With gorgeous imagery and lighting courtesy of DP Caro Krugmann, and tactile production design by Stefan Dickfeld, what could have been cheap melodrama becomes a meticulous study in detail, from shots of dead lab rats to close-ups of sexy heels. Trying to figure out what period the film is set in (“somewhere in the distant past” a title card teases at the beginning) becomes part of the tense ride. Wristwatches and alarm clocks look shiny and new but Lucille writes with a fountain pen and those medicine bottles Joan grasps in her smooth manicured hands reek of antiquity. Only at the end are we treated to a clue via the announcer on a B&W television set who chirps, “*The Guiding Light*, presented by Ivory soap.”

With minimal dialogue and an unobtrusive, classical, elegiac score by Mikael Karlsson, Beatty delivers an enigmatic film comprised of sultry pacing and slow pans that is wondrously all show and very little tell. The director takes her sweet time,

unafraid to linger on simple pleasures, from an erotic foot massage to the ingénue's expressive eyes that flash longing looks from beneath those sterile bandages – these wordless moments are worth a thousand screenplays. Lucille's nosebleed that begins the film mirrors the red liquid that flows through her father's ominous vials – the color of blood and lust.

This exquisite little movie would be near-perfect if filmmaking were merely the sum of its technical parts. Unfortunately, all of Beatty's talent as a visual artist can't make up for her miscast leading ladies whose line delivery is a bit off beat – not quirky "offbeat," but literally arrhythmic. They would have done better to speak Claire Menichi's sparse script in their own native (non-English) language. Add to this the more problematic aspect that, for all of the graphic shots of tongue kissing and nipple licking, there is absolutely no chemistry between the two. Lucille and Joan's lovemaking feels more like a competition to see who can be the most uninhibited on camera, with each in her own separate sexy world. When Lucille's face starts to decompose as she climaxes (Joan's head buried between her legs!) it's a triumphant moment in the annals of gory art films that would make Cronenberg stand up and cheer – but is it hot?

"Your face should be in a Michelangelo or something," Dombrowsky as Lucille improvises with a clunk while ravishing Joan after tying her to the bed in an inorganically arrived at S&M scene. For one moment Lucille is contemplating slashing her throat with a razor and the next she's topping her nurse. It's one thing to be a switch player, but to go from vulnerable to dominant in mere seconds? Soon after, a scene falls flat in which Lucille and Joan playfully chase one another in the woods surrounding the house because it, too, feels forced. And why even open up the film to daylight and the freeing outdoors when the claustrophobic atmosphere of the confining "haunted mansion" is the only thing keeping the tension (sexual and otherwise) high?

Like *The Guiding Light* program that plays on the old B&W set, the film's ending is rushed and overly soap operatic, though its last image is breathtakingly lovely. And like the portrait of Lucille's dead mom that hangs on the wall, watching over the dining room table as though she too were seated with the family, we're left haunted by a painful reminder of what could have been and of that which is missing.

Brooklyn-based writer Lauren Wissot is the publisher of the blog Beyond the Green Door, the author of the memoir Under My Master's Wings, and a contributor to The Reeler.

POSTED BY LAUREN WISSOT AT 11:55 AM 
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