

Terror that you don't see coming

Goddard, Peter . Toronto Star ; Toronto, Ont. [Toronto, Ont]19 Oct 2006: G8.

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RESUMEN (ABSTRACT)

The bare old biddies are flying around in Haxan, the 1922 silent Swedish film written and directed by Benjamin Christensen. For tonight's screening, Haxan appears under the title of Witchcraft Through the Ages, just one of the film's many alternative titles, with new music and a narrative in English added to give it some extra oomph.

The original Haxan is held in high regard in many quarters. It was the source for Haxan Films, the company title created by the producers of The Blair Witch Project. Tonight's Haxan departs from the original, though. Tonight's Haxan is even more multi-layered, which is saying something. The original is about seven different film genres all wrapped around the same old wives' tale.

Toronto artist Michele Stanley's Self Portrait # 1 (2006) contrasts frothy imagery with so many reiterations of the word "imagination" that it eventually sounds demonic. I am Not Myself (2006), by Glasgow's Lucie Potter, is as sharp as a tack as it plays an old card trick on the viewer. Iowa-based video maker Anne Haydock creates a creepily pretty garden in Fear of Being Eaten (2006). Break of Dawn (2006), by Oregon's Carl Diehl, is a virtuoso manipulation of perception with recognizable imagery shuddering in violent spasms.

TEXTO COMPLETO

The horrible thing about horror - those fictional shocks we make up in order to live through our daily dose of televised horror - is that there's actually an awfully bad way of doing it, where no excess is ever enough and the gore is piled as high as an elephant's empty eye socket. This is pretty much what's popping into movie theatres as Halloween approaches.

The other way to go is to be found at the bluntly titled "Horror & Terror" show from the Pleasure Dome tonight at Cinecycle. Horror here is the unimaginable thing you don't see or hear coming.

The Pleasure Dome collective has been particularly active this year. But this show - curated by Joann Maplesden - may well be the best of the lot, particularly if you like the idea of droopy witches - one shock horror you do get to see coming your way - getting buck-naked to party down with the devil.

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Pumping the original up a notch, *Witchcraft Through the Ages*, re-cut in 1968, depicts roly-poly medieval friars scampering after buxom housemaids to a modern, dissonant-rich score by French jazz fiddler Jean-Luc Ponty. Haxan purists hate the music.

Then there's the narration by William S. Burroughs, junky beat poet muse who, for this film, is doing as good an interpretation of Edward R. Murrow as you'll find. Just hearing Burroughs solemnly intone the words, "powerful magic brews," adds far more layers of irony than are bearable for a film experience already carrying an extra heavy load of ironies. Haxan purists can't figure Burroughs out.

In its time, Haxan probably was thought well of. It certainly was an ambitious film, with the best flying witch bits before the 1939 release of *The Wizard of Oz*. And it probably served as a warning to many respectable, God-fearing Swedish husbands. As part of the evil ritual their wives went through to become card-carrying witches, they had to kiss Satan's butt. Imagine! They would never think of stooping so low at home.

No less ambitious is *Shadows Choose Their Horrors*, (2005) by Jennifer Reeves. The New York writer and filmmaker's creepily gorgeous, 31-minute-long shadowy vamp on early silent horror flicks was made originally for a recent performance of Aaron Copland's early ballet music, *Grohg* (1922-25) by the American Ballet Symphony Orchestra.

Grohg itself was inspired by Copland seeing *Nosferatu*, F.W. Murnau's 1921 German silent film masterpiece. Reminding us of all the connections - I mean ones other than vampire teeth needling into ladies' swan-like necks - Reeves begins *Shadows* with a shadow clip of Murnau's vampire climbing the stairs.

The short subjects - and there are a lot - are every bit as strong as the two longer works.

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A number of the pieces - *Blocking* (2005) from Pablo Marin of Buenos Aires, for instance - could have been left off the program to no one's loss. But not Christopher Rohde's *The Pink Ghosts* (2006). The Ottawa-based artist has concocted a cotton candy-coloured toy world with a good many dark undercurrents. Swooping through it all is a flock of spectral pink figures, which look like tiny three-fingered versions of those pink plastic gloves used for scrubbing stove ovens.

pgoddard @ thestar.ca

Check out Peter Goddard's video- and slide show on the visual arts at thestar.com/whatson

WHAT "Horror &Terror"

WHERE Cinecycle, 129 Spadina Ave.

WHEN 7 p.m. tonight

Illustration

A scene from Shadows Choose Their Horrors, (2005) by Jennifer Reeves.

Credit: Toronto Star

DETALLES

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|--------------------------------------|---|
| Personas: | Reeves, Jennifer |
| Título: | Terror that you don't see coming: [ONT Edition] |
| Autor: | Goddard, Peter |
| Título de publicación: | Toronto Star; Toronto, Ont. |
| Páginas: | G8 |
| Número de páginas: | 0 |
| Año de publicación: | 2006 |
| Fecha de publicación: | Oct 19, 2006 |
| Sección: | What's On |
| Editorial: | Torstar Syndication Services, a Division of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited |
| Lugar de publicación: | Toronto, Ont. |
| País de publicación: | Canada, Toronto, Ont. |
| Materia de publicación: | General Interest Periodicals--Canada |
| ISSN: | 03190781 |
| Tipo de fuente: | Newspapers |
| Idioma de la publicación: | English |
| Tipo de documento: | NEWSPAPER |
| ID del documento de ProQuest: | 439073940 |
| URL del documento: | https://search.proquest.com/docview/439073940?accountid=34622 |
| Copyright: | (Copyright (c) 2006 Toronto Star, All Rights Reserved.) |
| Última actualización: | 2017-11-16 |

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