The AFI FEST Interview: THE EYES OF MY MOTHER Director Nicolas Pesce

Description

Beautifully lensed in black and white, Nicolas Pesceâ??s debut feature THE EYES OF MY MOTHER immediately immerses the viewer in its Gothic atmosphere with a jarring act of violence that disrupts the seemingly bucolic life of a Midwestern Portuguese-American family. Francisca, the young daughter of a farmer and his surgeon wife, carries the effects of witnessing this terrible event into adulthood and perpetuates the cycle of violence to a chilling degree. Played with magnetic intensity by Kika MagalhÃ£es, the character of Francisca provides an uncommonly personal look at psychosis. While Pesce never pretends to understand or explain the roots of her actions, by planting the film squarely in Franciscaâ??s point of view, he gives us an uncomfortable yet enthralling experience with this unique horror film.

AFI spoke with Pesce about the film.

Nicolas Pesce
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AFI: This is an austere, minimalist horror movie fable told from the point of view of an increasingly extreme serial murderer. How did you make your protagonist sympathetic?

Nicolas Pesce: There was a constant balance we all had to maintain to tread this line between sympathy and disgust. For us, it was all about showing the audience every aspect of the characterâ??s life, good and bad. You may not agree with Franciscaâ??s actions, but a glimpse of understanding helps to make the character more sympathetic. The film is not about an evil woman. Itâ??s about a lonely woman, and thatâ??s how we always handled it.

AFI: Why shoot in black and white? Itâ??s interesting that, though there are period elements in the film, the time and place are never immediately clear.

NP: The black and white instantly tells the audience what type of horror movie is in store for them. It puts the film into a different lexicon of movies, and whether youâ??re familiar with American Gothic or not, the visual style creates a moody atmosphere thatâ??s an extension of the main characterâ??s psyche.

AFI: While THE EYES OF MY MOTHER is indeed disturbing, much of the violence takes place off-screen. Why?

NP: If I showed the violence on screen, you could look away and protect yourself from the imagery. But if I only give you a hint as to whatâ??s happening, youâ??re mind fills in all the gaps, and suddenly without even trying, youâ??ve got this horrible image in your mindâ??s eye, and you canâ??t look away from that. Itâ??s about making the audience scare themselves rather than me doing it for them. Weâ??re all the best at scaring ourselves in exactly the way that scares us. I set up the scare, and you do the rest.

AFI: You wear your influences on your sleeve â?? David Lynch, David Cronenberg, Takashi Miike and even Michael Haneke. What attracts you to this kind of extreme filmmaking?

NP: All those filmmakers have one very important thing in common. They have the ability to make the most banal, ordinary thing frightening. Whether itâ??s the actorâ??s performance or the music or the movement of the camera work, these filmmakers manage to unsettle in really abstract ways, manipulating the audienceâ??s mood unknowingly and in oddly ordinary ways.

AFI: THE EYES OF MY MOTHER was the first project of Borderline Presents, the collective of established indie directors Josh Mond, Sean Durkin and Antonio Campos. How did this collaboration begin?

NP: I met Josh Mond while he was in post on his film JAMES WHITE. I helped him edit for a few weeks, but we became fast friends. I was soon welcomed into the family and they helped me put this film together. They saw a like-minded collaborator in me, but also a filmmaker who had a different voice than the three of them. They oversaw the project every step of the way from prep to production to post. Their experience, advice and opinions were invaluable. To have such brilliant filmmakers, whom I respect so much, looking out for the good of the film was more than I could ever ask for. They did everything in their power to help me make the best possible movie I could make, always trying to find the core of what I was trying to do, and getting the best version of it out of me.

THE EYES OF MY MOTHER screens at AFI FEST 2016 on Tuesday, November 15 and Wednesday, November 16 as part of the festivalâ??s American Independents section.

(Source:www.blog.afi.com)

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