



Randy Hughson in *THE FEELER*

SWEEP

Directed by Philip Hoffman and Sami Van Ingen, 1995, 32 min., 16mm

One of Canada's most consistently engaging and incisive experimental filmmakers, Philip Hoffman's latest can be best described as an episodic, temological buddy picture/road movie. Made with Finnish filmmaking contemporary, Sami Van Ingen, Sweep is also a hybridized updating of Hoffman's earlier films *The Road Ended at the Beach* (1983) and *?O, Zoo! The Making of a Fiction Film* (1986). They travel to northern Ontario, as Hoffman tells us, "to make a film about where Sami's great-grandfather had been." The great-grandfather's name? Legendary *Nanook of the North* director, Robert Flaherty. Along the way, the duo also sojourns in Kapuskasing, where Hoffman's mother's family first settled in Canada. Merging multiple personal reminiscences with newsreel footage of the north, images of Flaherty, family photographs, home movies, and the ephemeral images of television, Hoffman and Van Ingen weave together investigations into documentary film practice, the cinematic process itself, the intersections of personal and collective memory, and the devastating incursions of white Europeans into northern Cree landscapes and dreamscapes. Somewhat overburdened by its vast themes, *Sweep* is nonetheless a poetic, oddly exhilarating examination of relentless processes of change and erasure which we cannot elude but whose outlines, with the extraordinary and limited powers of film, we can at least begin to describe.

STRIKE ME SILLY

Directed by Brett Bell, Big Dumb Films, Regina, 1995, 27 min., 16mm

It's not Dwayne Axford's night. First, his father gets sick; then he has the mantle of managing the family bowling alley thrust upon him. This is no mean feat at the Bolodrome, truly one of Canada's most bizarre bowling establishments (that in itself is no mean feat!). In addition to a wisecracking assistant manager and a decidedly disturbed clientele of cowboys, hairdressers and blind accordion players, Dwayne's managerial skills really get tested when Satan himself arrives and challenges him to a Faustian winner-take-all bowling match. Things get even hotter when the staff learns that their satanic visitor is actually an escaped mental patient who's wired with explosives. Although the end credits proudly announce that the production was shot in "Bow-O-Rama," *Strike Me Silly* is, visually speaking, disappointingly conventional. The film's pedestrian style puts a drag on its game attempts at anarchic humour. Still, with self-consciously witty lines like, "Boy, talk about your deus ex machinas!" it is hard not to give this promising writer-director his due. Even with its occasionally awkward performances and sophomoric indulgences, *Strike Me Silly* remains a likable half-hour slice of prairie absurdism. So, while Brett Bell's film may not be a strike, it's definitely a solid spare.

THE FEELER

Directed by Colleen Murphy, Canadian Film Centre, 1995, 25 min., 16mm

Long before the *Exotica* strip club opened its fictional doors, Canadian cinema had been home to legions of the lonely, the perplexed, the troubled, the marginalized and the alienated. Produced at the Canadian Film Centre in Toronto, Colleen Murphy's *The Feeler* offers a perceptively kinky, erotically charged variation on those characteristically Canuck motifs of solitude and marginality. This claustrophobic drama revolves around Danny (Randy Hughson), a lonely blind man who likes inflatable sex dolls and hires women to read to him, and Lina (Victoria Snow), a new reader who finds being in Danny's presence strangely liberating. With each successive visit, they discover that more than words are passing between them. Murphy's screenplay is intelligent, literate and darkly elliptical, and the film features potent performances and an authoritative visual design. Obsessive and strangely moving, *The Feeler* is an unsentimental, searching drama of two solitudes: the one you can see and the one you can't.

TENANTS AND LANDLORDS

Directed by Cory Lussier, the Winnipeg Film Group, 1994, 8 min., 16mm

Finally, a Canadian film that asks the eternal, transnational question: "What do we need landlords for, anyway?" When a cretinous, cellular-toting landlord threatens to evict his struggling young tenant, Joe, and then puts the sweaty squeeze on an elderly woman in the building, he encounters more than the usual Canadian deference to authority and polite stoicism. A lot more! Written and directed by newcomer Cory Lussier, this clever, brutally concise, and amusing short drama knows that its narrative and thematic ambitions are modest, and works effectively within them. Featuring assured and well-directed performances by Bill Jarand as Joe, Barbara MacDonald as the surprisingly savage senior, Ms. Crane, and Stu Levitt as the thoroughly thuggish landlord, this short work from the fabled Winnipeg Film Group is a satisfying revenge fantasy for anyone who's ever had a bad landlord. Cinematic merits aside, that alone should guarantee this film a large audience ●