

Bubbles Galore

It's Trash Culture VS. the Status Quo!

By Greg Klymkiw

For those who have basked in the glow of the Croisette, eat your hearts out, for surely none of those lofty sojourns to Cannes could have compared to the spring of 1997 when I attended the Freakzone International Festival of Trash Cinema in France, where my latest production, *Bubbles Galore*, had been selected to compete amidst a veritable cornucopia of subversive cinema.

And yes, it is with considerable fondness that I recall the Bosch-like opening night *soiree* of the Freakzone. After a successful press screening of *Bubbles Galore* at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, and with visions of Henri Langlois dancing through my head, I wandered through the Freakzone fete, and first, feasted my eyes on a display of photographs that lovingly detailed a bevy of male hustlers on Santa Monica Boulevard. I next stumbled through an art installation where at least two dozen male mannequins wrapped in gaffer tape hung upside down with oozing viscera pouring from their plastic torsos. This, of course, was an ideal aperitif to the body-piercing room. After watching the bloody handiwork in that temple of flesh and metal, I settled in front of a tiny stage where a beautiful young man performed a slow-and-easy striptease. Soon, he was joined by two nude women who proceeded to shove a dildo up his rectum and pull him around the room by a string wrapped tightly around his testicles. On all fours and with a candy dish on his back, the lovely lad was, in essence, being paraded about as a human coffee table.

You might wonder why I am in this reverie about these events which occurred a long time ago, in a country far, far away. Well, like *Star Wars*, *Bubbles Galore* was front-page news for awhile. In the merry month of May, thanks to a tip from the Reform Party of Canada, the *National Post* broke a three-year-old nonstory. The headlines screamed: "Lesbian Porn Funded By Government" and Reform MPs Chuck Strahl and Monte Solberg vigorously queried the esteemed Minister of Heritage and Culture Sheila Copps on the matter. Sheila, always on the ball, fired back with the convincing missive that the funding for *Bubbles Galore* was the fault of former PM Brian Mulroney. I have no doubt that the juries of independent artists and critics who coughed up the funding for *Bubbles Galore* were pleased to know they had been personally appointed by Mr. Mulroney. It was certainly news to me.

All that said, I spent several weeks in the eye of a media hurricane. A most wild ride, indeed. However, in the midst of this frivolity, all I could really think about was the Freakzone, an event that was mentioned in the media and House of Commons with bile and derision—as if the fact that the film played there and actually won the Audience Award for Best Feature Film was some sort of dubious distinction.

Well, a dubious distinction to the Status Quo, perhaps, but *Bubbles Galore* was not made for the Status Quo. If there is to be government subsidy of the arts at all, then it must be for work that would never be



Shauny, Pig, Nina and Wendy in *Bubbles Galore*

made in the Status Quo's arena of free enterprise. And maybe, just maybe, it should be utilized for work that seeks to subvert and challenge not only the Status Quo itself, but the Status Quo's notions of what is and is not art. And most definitely, this work should be funded at a considerable arm's length from the government which provides the funding, in spite of Sheila's astute notion that she and her ilk be the ultimate arbiters of what art should be.

While attending the Freakzone, I was amazed by the scope of films playing there. When I commended Jean-Jacques Rue, the festival's artistic director, on the lack of cinematic kitsch at the festival, he smiled and said, "You North Americans have such a limited view of Trash Culture. For you, trash is simply trash, but in France, we embrace and define trash as subversive art of the highest order."

This was music to my ears. After all, *Bubbles Galore* was a painstakingly faithful homage to a variety of pornographic styles, celebrating the trash culture of pornography in all its sordid glory. Jean-Jacques' words keep playing in my head like a joyous symphony of reason whenever I'm reminded of the cowardly words and actions of Sheila Copps and the petty closed-mindedness of the mainstream television critics and editorial writers who savaged *Bubbles Galore* when Showcase aired the film in June.

But most of all, I dream a little dream. During the Closing Night Gala of the Freakzone, I witnessed a performance art piece by Ron Athey wherein a 400-pound man by the name of Divinity Fudge had his back carved into a variety of geometric shapes while the surgeon/artist blotted paper towels over the open wounds and clothes-pinned them to a series of clotheslines which spanned the breadth of the Freakzone auditorium.

And this is where my dream comes in. I have this image of Sheila Copps kneeling before Larry Flynt, and in the ultimate act of forgiveness, she washes his feet before taking her place in the front row of the Freakzone Closing Night Gala. Joining Sheila at the festivities, I see Claire Bickley, the *Toronto Sun* television critic—abandoning her *Chatelaine* recipe-clippings which she has, no doubt, steadfastly regarded for years as feminist literature. Also taking a hallowed place are John Allemang and his colleagues in the editorial department of *The Globe and Mail*. They have managed to remove the poles from their respective rectums and they too are sitting with Sheila. In fact, the audience is full of the Status Quo. They have all embraced the value and virtue of subversive art. Is that Monte Solberg on stage with Divinity Fudge? Is that Preston Manning presenting the award to *Bubbles Galore*? Is that Sheila Copps beaming with pride as I thank the government of Canada?

And this is where my little dream turns into a nightmare. Who invited these people here anyway? ●