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THE FLESH CONNECTION**A Ladyfest film screening showcasing American short films by ladies**

Reviewed by Yoko Kumano

Awkward silences and choosing between tampons and pads were some of the dilemmas I encountered in fifth-grade sex ed.

Grade-school sex education films seemed to be the theme of only some of the pieces in *The Flesh Connection*. As part of the Ladyfest Bay Area Film Festival 2002, this film screening of eleven shorts was projected for a small audience in San Francisco's Artist Television Access. The attempt to place the films under the umbrella of flesh was problematic throughout the show. The films jumped again and again to unrelated subjects. For example, Kerry Laitala and Isabel Reichert's *The Escapades of Madame X*, celebrated the aesthetic elements of 1920's style, black and white film photography through close-ups of the female body, while Mirah Soleil-Rose and Mark Karbuscky's *G-Sprout* provided a mockumentary on vegan-eroticism. The connections between these pieces were few and yet the show suggested a forced insistence to bind them together. A show which deals with commonplace issues such as consumerism, geneticism and commercialism and then throws in more obscure issues including sentimentalism, Baroquism, 16mmism, humorous cancerism and growing-upism is bound to feel like a meteor shower - shooting off in different directions, fast.

Perhaps the most vivid *ism* explored was in Amy Hicks' aptly titled *Hatching Beauty*, where she contemplates how genetic engineering collides with consumerism. Hicks explores the life of a paper-mache-clay single mom in a paper-mache-clay-stop-motion world. The film reveals that in a world which spins on money, desired characteristics (in the eyes of humans) take precedence over nature. Apples provide the nutrition of tomatoes, beans taste like bananas and, ultimately, Hicks' single mom contributes to the craze by birthing desired "babies" which are packaged and sold. A very memorable scene occurs when the character is seen on an assembly line, giving birth to perfect cherry tomatoes cesarean-style over and over again. Apparently in the world of this film, function and desire cease corresponding completely and veggies become metaphors for babies. In addition to a thoughtful consideration of her subject, Hicks also houses a distinct visual style that contains creative paper-mache metamorphosis and delivers a great sound design full of effects which clash energetically with her images.

"Humorous cancerism?" you ask yourself . . . Why not ask Nina Paley instead? Paley's animated short, *The Wit and Wisdom of Cancer*, starts with the bleak image of a woman lying down in a hospital bed. A fairly rapid zoom focuses on her head, taking us layer by layer by animated layer into her brain, and ultimately into a brain-cell nightclub. Cracking jokes in the far end of the club's interior, a nebulous blob of a cancer-cell comedian, jokes on the fast-paced, division-oriented lifestyle of his species. The short takes us to several parts of the body, allowing the viewer to eavesdrop on the hardships of being a cancer cell. The short offers a zesty idea - funny, personable cancer cells - and formally challenges itself by creating a relatively simple animation which looks new and lively (think *Ren and*



Nina Paley
"The Wit and Wisdom of Cancer"



Kerry Laitala and Isabelle Reichert
"The Escapades of Madame X"



Amy Hicks
"Hatching Beauty"



Stimpy over Disney).

Although, the films in *The Flesh Connection* were all valuable in communicating each filmmaker's worldview, it was hard to accept all eleven films as one cohesively curated show. Attempting to relate these pieces to the guise of flesh and education pulled them farther apart from each other. I felt yanked around, yelled at and appeased with no transitions in between. My verdict? There are too many *isms* these days and nothing to round them up harmoniously.

For a complete list of artists included in *The Flesh Connection* go to LadyFest Bay Area site

Yoko Kumano is a Berkeley-based filmmaker/musician/writer and recent graduate of the UC Santa Cruz Film and Digital Media Department.
Contact her at yokokumano@hotmail.com.

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