

In Lust We Trust: 8mm Films by the Kuchar Brothers

Kuchar Brothers 2

A Woman Distressed

Director: George Kuchar

USA 1962

12 mins

Pre-dating Sam Fuller's *Shock Corridor*, the Kuchars bring us this tantalizing tale of the inner workings of a very, very insane asylum.

Night of the Bomb

Director: Mike Kuchar

USA 1962

18 mins

Teenage lust and deranged delinquency combine to create a cautionary tale for the ages. The Chernobyl of comedy!

The Confessions of Babette

Director: Mike Kuchar

USA 1963

15 mins

An early masterpiece by Mike Kuchar in which Babette tells all, leaving no turgid stone unturned.

Anita Needs Me

Director: George Kuchar

USA 1963

16 mins

'All the horrors and guilt of the human mind exposed! It reaches deep into the workings of a woman's cravings. Your emotions will be squeezed.' (George Kuchar)

I Was a Teenage Rumpot

Directors: George Kuchar, Mike Kuchar

USA 1960

10 mins

'A documentary about people like you and me, people with a zest for life.' (George Kuchar)

Slasher

Directors: Mike Kuchar, George Kuchar

USA 1958

21 mins

An insane, deformed killer stalks the grounds of a resort house, bringing sudden violence to those of easy virtue and godlessness.

An interview with George Kuchar

You and your twin brother Mike started making films in the late 1950s and I was wondering what got you started.

Well, we went to the movies and either enjoyed or got scared by what we saw. From that point on we wanted to make pictures. At that time 8mm movies were being made by normal people; it was a home movie medium. My mom realized that we wanted to make pictures and we were borrowing our aunt's camera. And she didn't want me to see my aunt much – they had ill feelings towards one another – and so she bought us the camera so we could be more independent.

You started before the price of silver went up, so film must have been cheap.

It was really cheap... and you could send it through the drug store for processing. But eventually what would happen is that the film would turn green and crack like a fresco. Kodak processing was much better, it had cleaner chemicals.

In the beginning, did you have any dreams of grandeur like making films for Hollywood?

Yes, but in our version, in 8mm. And of course watching Hollywood pictures was an inspiration that also provided technical knowledge and insight on how scenes were put together. We watched the movies and would notice the different shots, when the music came in, and the different lighting effects. Then we would try to duplicate them with the stuff we had.

I know you were influenced by Douglas Sirk. Were there any other filmmakers who grabbed your attention back then?

A ton of them! A lot who made garbage pictures that we had seen, low-budget stuff. Mike and I would go to the movie theatre and see a lot of pictures one after the other. The very early Roger Corman pictures, horror pictures, foreign pictures, anything I'd see would influence me. I'd absorb everything.

How early on did you meet Jonas Mekas (Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Anthology Film Archives, New York)?

That was in the early part of the 1960s. He was a nice man, quiet. I think he wore a corduroy suit. I met him in filmmaker Ken Jacobs' loft.

Did he have an instrumental role in shining a light on your work?

Yeah, cause he was one of the few people, maybe the only one who was reviewing those movies in New York City. Therefore, his reviews were read and considered interesting, though some people thought he was some sort of a strange crank or something. He was very passionate. His columns were always looked forward to and read. The favourable reviews brought people to look at the movies that he wrote about. So he had a powerful influence in those days to get people out of the house.

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Thu 6 April 18.10 NFT3

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Sat 8 April 12.15 NFT3; Sun 9 April 16.15 NFT2

Silenced! LGBT Struggle for Human Rights around the World

Sat 8 April 14.00 NFT2

20/20 Vision: The Incredibles

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Brief Lives

Sat 8 April 20.30 NFT3

The Ex-Factor

Sun 9 April 14.00 NFT2; Wed 12 April 18.20 NFT1

Bad Object Relations

Sun 9 April 20.30 NFT3; Mon 10 April 14.00 NFT1

Body Politic

Tue 11 April 20.40 NFT2

Why Do Straight Boys Do Gay Boys?

12 Apr 18.15 NFT2

With film, your time is limited because the editing space is rented and the next group will be coming in...

Now the only reason you want to get out is because all the wires are all over the floor and you want to turn it back into a living room! You also want to finish the thing so the same kind of pressure is on, but at least you can go easily to the refrigerator, or if you have a pet you can keep the pet company. You don't have to feel guilty.

Weather comes up a lot in your work, as do UFOs and sex.

Well, the sex thing you can't help; it's the driving force to make movies. You can't dampen that or you lose the desire to make pictures. It's a fuelling thing that helps give you the energy to make pictures and do everything else. It is a motivation. The weather is just an interest of mine, aesthetically and scientifically. You make pictures of what you're interested in and then that becomes your world.

And then things with flying saucers... maybe extraterrestrial, maybe not... but just the idea of a strange mystery or enigma happening is something that captured my imagination. You develop certain subjects that interest or fascinate and do a series and follow it through. That leads to research and that spurs you to go out to different events, and then things that happen get placed into pictures.

George Kuchar interviewed by Scott Trotter, eurounderground.org

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National Film Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 8XT.
Box Office 020 7928 3232. www.bfi.org.uk/nft.

The NFT bar is open from 11am to 11pm Monday to Saturday and 12 noon to 10.30pm Sundays. Enjoy riverside views, fine food and drinks.

Programme notes and credits compiled by Filmographic Services, [bfi](http://bfi.org.uk) National Library.
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20TH LONDON LESBIAN & GAY FILM FESTIVAL

Sunday 2 April 2006, NFT 3, 16.15

IN LUST WE TRUST: 8MM FILMS BY THE KUCHAR BROTHERS PROGRAMME 2

A WOMAN DISTRESSED

Dir George Kuchar/USA 1962/12 min

'The movie club put out a newsletter and one of my early 8mm films, *A Woman Distressed*, was the only picture that they ever panned in the pages of their cinematic rag. The film was a brash, reckless, comic-drama about the drug Thalidomide and its deforming effect upon the offspring of a big-city maternity ward. Stories of the horrors caused by the drug were permeating the newspapers at the time and I used the reported material as a basis for the comic-drama (or dramedy as it is now called by prime-time practitioners of the TV medium).' (George Kuchar)

NIGHT OF THE BOMB

Dir Mike Kuchar/USA 1962/18 mins

Teenage lust and deranged delinquency combine to create a cautionary tale for the ages. The Chernobyl of Comedy!

'The bomb in *Night of the Bomb* was a vehicle to use as a spectacular image – people in conflict – otherwise it's hard to make a narrative if something drastic doesn't happen.' (Mike Kuchar)

THE CONFESSIONS OF BABETTE

Dir Mike Kuchar/USA 1963/15 mins

Following on the heels of Powell's *Peeping Tom*, it almost matches that film classic in progressing truly disturbing psychological horror in contemporary cinema. (www.imdb.com)

ANITA NEEDS ME

Dir George Kuchar/USA 1963/16 mins

'As one man learns of another man's troubled relationship, he understands how to handle his own troubles at home. The only film to have any dialogue, this tale of tragedy and the scars it leaves on the human psyche is wonderfully told through a voice-over monologue that dives into the deepest shades purple prose.' (Ryan Sarnowski)

'All the horrors and guilt of the human mind exposed! It reaches deep into the workings of a woman's cravings. Your emotions will be squeezed.' (George Kuchar)

I WAS A TEENAGE RUMPOT

Dirs Mike & George Kuchar/USA 1960/10 mins

With the birth of *I Was A Teenage Rumpot*, George and Mike Kuchar stumbled upon something big: their names were Arline, Edie, and Harry. Sensing the tremendous physical potential embedded in this trio's glands, plans were immediately drawn up to star them in two new films: *The Flesh Is Plentiful* and *Butterball*. 8. Arline and Harry's divorce shattered all future films and Arline went on a drunken binge which ended with her head being shaved by a French woman on grounds of 'husband-stealing'.

'A documentary about people like you and me, people with a zest for life.' (George Kuchar)

THE SLASHER

Dirs Mike & George Kuchar/USA 1958/21 mins

'An insane killer stalks the grounds of a resort house, bringing sudden violence to those of easy virtue and godlessness.' (George Kuchar)

AN INTERVIEW WITH KUCHAR BROTHERS

Question: Why are you wasting celluloid, why are you making movies ? Anybody can make a movie!

Mike Kuchar: I love to make movies because it's the bread and butter of my life. But if I was to lose my arms and legs or go blind I'd throw myself on a bread slicer. There's more to life than just movies ... There's still radio.

Question: Have you anything to say about your fantastic cast ?

Mike Kuchar: Some film-makers are afraid to work with a big cast because they think that the group will get out of hand. But we love working with a lot of people. You can round them up like cattle and make them stampede to moments of cinematic glory. Animal instincts are unleashed and watching a film with a large cast is like going to the zoo.

Question: How did your film career really start ?

George Kuchar: We're twenty-one now, but for many years our films have been scorned. At the age of twelve I made a transvestite movie on the roof and was brutally beaten by my mother for having disgraced her and also for soiling her nightgown. She didn't realize how hard it is for a twelve-year-old director to get real girls for his movie. But that unfortunate incident did not end our big costume epics. One month later Mike and I filmed an Egyptian spectacle on the same roof with all of the television antennas resembling a cast of skinny thousands. Our career in films had begun.

Mike Kuchar: At a special showing we prepared in high school for the Newman Club (a Catholic organization), our work was screened and labelled "Violent – Devilish!". The teacher was very nice, but she couldn't tolerate the bludgeoning, stabbings, and climactic hatchet slayings that punctuated the programme at frequent intervals.

Question: How is your work received now ?

George Kuchar: Last week *A Woman Distressed* was played at the New York 8mm Club and mistakenly labelled as a tear-jerker on their programme sheet. The only one that shed a tear after the movie went off was me, when it was criticised viciously as "sex-loaded" and "in bad taste". It wasn't sexy, but it was in bad taste, like they said. Their words rang with truth. I must have been depressed when I made that film. Coming home from the showing I prayed and began making a film all about goodness. A film that will mirror the godliness of man and woman.

I came across the idea of a beautiful ballerina who dances not for fame but only to please God. Suddenly the story began to change and I pictured her doing a leap and accidentally falling out the window. With both legs paralysed, she marries another dancer who loves her terribly. He becomes famous and she gets jealous. One night her mind snaps, and she saws his legs off after chloroforming him. To my horror the story had transformed itself from a mirror of God to a cesspool of human hatred and insanity. I walked down the subway steps and as I entered the train the ending of the film came to me: The ballerina's invalid husband kills her by ramming his wheelchair into her while she's cooking pot roast and her hair catches fire.

After discussing that screenplay with the two actors I chose for the parts, we unanimously decided to ditch it since it got way off the theme of God and love. So we arrived at a story that hit closer to home. One about a nun who's addicted to show biz and becomes a rock and roll sensation, leaving the church and God only to return with renewed faith after a series of incidents. It will touch on the theme: Does God punish the hurt ?

Written by Jonas Mekas and first published in the Village Voice 'Movie Journal' column, 5 March 1964.

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