



Trash Humpers

Harmony Korine

USA/UNITED KINGDOM, 2009
English

78 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: O'Salvation Cine Ltd/
Alcove Entertainment
Executive Producer: Amina Dasmal,
Robin Fox, agnès b.
Producer: Charles-Marie Anthonioz,
Amina Dasmal, Robin Fox
Screenplay: Harmony Korine
Cinematographer: Harmony Korine
Editor: Leo Scott
Production Designer:
Sound: Alex Altman
Principal Cast: Rachel Korine, Brian Kotzue,
Travis Nicholson, Harmony Korine
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Tired vocabulary like "enfant terrible" and "provocation" is a constant threat when writing about Harmony Korine and his films. *Trash Humpers* is no exception: creepy masks, low-grade torture, frequent public urination, senseless vandalism and the title, acted out on defenseless garbage cans, all have a confrontational panache about them to be sure. But the film is also full of poetry, dance, song and moments of aching poignancy.

Such is the dilemma with Korine and his remarkable career; for all the fireworks, there is an impressive coherence in the subject matter of his work. His four feature films all seek to shed light on a certain class of people: unique and bizarre individuals usually lumped under the heading of "sub-culture." Poor but not destitute, subject to state disinterest, anti-social and often violent, these are the contemporary equivalent of Brothers Grimm villains, the scary witches in America's woods. Vilified by the right and condescended to by the left, their official narrative is one of cliché and fake melodrama in Hollywood cinema. Korine reclaims them as individuals through the lens of an unironic but corrosive wit and a bracing sense of the macabre. They are like the denizens of an overly familiar cautionary tale, the post-apocalyptic now.

His portraits come from many angles – the baroque stillness of *Gummo* contrasts radically with the rough-hewn melodrama of *Julien Donkey-Boy*. His last film, *Mister Lonely*, had an epic quality and interest in

celebrity that *Trash Humpers* disdains, preferring instead a low-end surveillance-video look with frequent in-camera lighting distortions and a cinema-vérité authenticity.

Although Korine is often compared to (his frequent collaborator) Werner Herzog, another curious observer of humanity's darker impulses, *Trash Humpers* feels more akin to the work of William Eggleston, especially his prescient seventies video piece *Stranded in Canton*. In both films, friends and associates create unique and particular universes that seem borne of a different time and subject to different rules. But the ability to explore such avenues is the mark of any artist who matters, "provocative" or not, isn't it?

■ Noah Cowan



Harmony Korine was born in Bolinas, California, and raised in Nashville. He wrote the screenplay for Larry Clark's *Kids* (95), which launched him to notoriety, and directed his first feature film, *Gummo*, in 1997. He has since directed the video installation *The Diary of Anne Frank Part II* (98), several music videos and the television documentary *David Blaine: Above the Below* (03). His other feature films are *Julien Donkey-Boy* (99), *Mister Lonely* (07) and *Trash Humpers* (09).