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Blood, Guts and Art: The Hallucinatory Horror Double Feature

12:16 PM May 11th, 2007 by [AP Kryza](#)

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A blind man's seeing-eye dog unexpectedly attacks him, tearing out his throat. A scientist is murdered, only to become a vessel for the voice of Satan. A woman is stabbed repeatedly in the chest until her sternum breaks, exposing her heart (which is then stabbed repeatedly). A classic rock icon impales a guy with a disassembled bike, which sends an arterial spray across a dark alley.

Fucked-up shit. But it's art on film, and the films *Suspiria* and *Prince of Darkness* have served well for artist Arnold J Kemp, as entertainment and as inspiration—sort of.

"It's not inspiration so much as a different way of looking at the world," says the soft-spoken Kemp. "When I get filled up with different things, I create different experiences. I've gone shooting guns at rifle ranges. Taken long walks in the woods. Sometimes I have studio days when I watch crazy movies on my computer."

A native San Franciscan whose work is internationally known, Kemp has come to Portland to start his residency for PICA's Time-Based Art Festival, taking place Sept. 6-Oct. 8.

While in the area, Kemp is seeking submissions for his SuperNatural exhibit, and local artists will be featured concurrently with Kemp's Daydream Nation works (a name inspired by a Sonic Youth album).

His DN works are mostly black, abstract dreamscapes and hallucinogenic imagery.

Kemp's mind is open to submissions, but he has some criteria. "We're looking for all media, but things that are supernatural, or hard to understand," he says. "The incomprehensible, the uncanny. Things that have to do with outer space or inner space. We're trying to keep it really open."

To kick off his tenure in PDX, Kemp held the Hallucinatory Horror Double Feature, featuring *Suspiria* and *Prince of Darkness*, at the Clinton Street Theater Thursday night. After a short introduction by Kemp, the carnage began. The good-sized audience was young, and many members winced and covered their eyes as the bodies piled up.

First up was *Suspiria*, an underground masterpiece from 1977 by trippy horror demigod Dario Argento. *Suspiria* is a highly cerebral film, bathed in starkly

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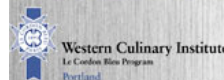
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colored lights and tripped-out backgrounds. It's also utter nonsense—in a great way. The film follows American dancer Susie, who travels to a ballet school over in Europe. Soon, Susie finds she's in a nightmare when she discovers that the school is actually a coven of witches being stalked by a mysterious entity with a taste for elaborate, preposterous slaying (seriously, this is a very creative monster).

Nonsense, yes, but Argento's seminal work is nonetheless a horrific masterpiece, a psychedelic, psychopathic fever dream with some beautiful Hitchcockian camera work, amazing colors and disturbingly grisly death.

The second feature, John Carpenter's 1987 film *Prince of Darkness* (which Kemp used as inspiration for a political piece about a certain boy-President) is equally grisly. Theologians and scientists converge on an abandoned church that houses a bottle of green slime with a mind of its own—the mind of Mephistopheles' son. Before you can say "bad acting," the local homeless population has been possessed and walled the scientists in, and the goo has begun taking over our heroes.

The creepy, atmospheric campiness of *Prince of Darkness* is the key to the greatness of this semi-obscure Carpenter flick. It's a joy to watch the cast—clad in the pinnacle of 1987 style and moustaches—get taken by the dark side. When the slime gets into one woman's mouth, she proceeds to go on a killing spree, puking into her victims' mouths and turning them to evil. But the cheesy Lovecraftian film is also quite frightening, particularly in its demonic overtones and hallucinatory imagery.

The link between the two—and the reason Kemp is inspired by them—is their intricate use of the unconscious and the self-conscious. In either film, it's hard to tell whether we're watching dreams or reality, and because of that each film becomes a bizarre, stream-of-consciousness journey into madness, psychedelia and mysticism.

Suspiria's heroine is constantly drugged by wine, making her perspective skewed with hysteria. All eyes stare at her. Everyone wants her dead. Walls crawl and blood sprays—and you never truly know what you're seeing.

Prince of Darkness features a twist that reveals that all characters share the same prophetic dream of a dark figure emerging from a building, which creates a dreary foreboding that splinters the reality of the film.

And to Kemp, that's inspiration.

"These two films feature people who are always having dreams, and they can't tell reality from the dream—or it's a message from outer space," says Kemp. "They have a weird connection to the big, abstract paintings I have that are almost completely black."

Submissions for SuperNatural, both traditional and video, are due by July 7. Email PICA kristan@pica.org for submission guidelines.

View some of Kemp's Daydream Nation art at www.worksarnoldjkemp.com.

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