

SKOONHEID

Een film van Oliver Hermanus



Nederlandse release 23 februari 2012

SKOONHEID SYNOPSIS

Gevangen in een verstikkend huwelijk en een onderdrukkende samenleving is Francois (Deon Lotz) te bang om eerlijk naar zichzelf en de wereld te zijn. Totdat hij verliefd wordt. SKOONHEID is een indringend meesterwerk over een hartverscheurende zoektocht van een man naar liefde.

Het Zuid-Afrikaanse SKOONHEID beleefde zijn wereldpremière op het filmfestival van Cannes 2011 (Un Certain Regard) en kreeg er staande ovaties en lovende recensies. Hoofdrolspeleer Deon Lotz won voor zijn rol op het filmfestival van Zürich de Golden Eye for Best Performance. Op het internationale filmfestival van Durban won de film de prijs voor Beste Zuid-Afrikaanse Speelfilm en de Juryprijs. Het is de eerste Afrikaans-gesproken film die in Cannes te zien was en won daar de Queer Palm. Elisabeth Quin (jury-voorzitter): 'Skoonheid is a disturbing, radical film, real cinema...'

Skoonheid/99 minuten/Zuid-Afrika, 2011/Afrikaans en Engels gesproken



SKOONHEID wordt in Nederland gedistribueerd door ABC/ Cinemien. Beeldmateriaal kan gedownload worden van: www.cinemien.nl/pers of vanaf www.filmdepot.nl
Voor meer informatie kunt u zich wenden tot Gideon Querido van Frank: +31(0)20-5776010 of gideon@cinemien.nl

SKOONHEID CAST EN CREW

Deon Lotz
Charlie Keegan
Michelle Scott
Albert Maritz
Sue Diepeveen
Roeline Daneel

Francois van Heerden
Christian Roodt
Elena van Heerden
Willem Roodt
Marika Roodt
Anika van Heerden

Director
Producer
Co-producer
Executive producer
Writer
Director of Photography
Editor

Oliver Hermanus
Didier Costet
Dylan Voogt
Marvin Saven
Oliver Hermanus
Jamie Ramsay
George Hammer



SKOONHEID OLIVER HERMANUS

De in Kaapstad geboren Oliver Hermanus behaalde zijn Bachelor of Arts voor Film, Media en Visuele Studies aan de Universiteit van Kaapstad. Na zijn afstuderen werkte hij als persfotograaf bij een nationaal persbureau in Zuid-Afrika. In 2006 bood Hollywoodregisseur Roland Emmerich (INDEPENDENCE DAY) Hermanus een beurs aan, zodat hij zijn Master kon behalen aan de Londen Film School. Zijn afstudeerfilm SHIRLEY ADAMS, die Hermanus al op zijn 15^e schreef, ging in première op het Locarno International Film Festival van 2009.



Filmography

- 2011 Skoonheid
- 2008 Shirley Adams
- 2007 Yunna (korte film)
- 2007 Interior (korte film)
- 2005 The Second Floor (documentaire)

SKOONHEID DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This story is very much the exploration of one man's self-destruction. His disdain for himself. His hatred. We are privy to the different, compartmentalized sections of his life, his secrets and his desires. We witness his violence, his fears, his anger and his jealousy.

Francois should not be easily dismissed or relegated to being a 'negative character'. My intention as the filmmaker is to explore his contorted and troubled existence in showing his tragedy and his brutality without judging him. The reality of this character in post-apartheid South Africa is that he represents a minority grouping in a country that was ruled by the minority for centuries and now is ruled by the majority. Francois speaks a language that is not spoken in any other part of the world, he has a heritage that is stigmatized as being racist and hateful. He was raised to be wary of the black man and to embrace conservative values. He lives in a city that was once the capital of this regime, and is still a bastion of its former glory. Francois fears the country he lives in because he is perceived as the guilty party, the color of his skin, the language he speaks, the blood that runs through his veins are all symbols of a brutal and unjust past. The collective guilt and subconscious need to defend their heritage are what most conservative Afrikaners battle with everyday.

And beyond this, Francois, like millions of men around the world, is humiliated and ashamed of his sexual preference. The combination of these imploding tensions and the mastery of his ability to control his emotions is the starting point of this film. Seeing how his life works, how he has psychologically mapped his life, secrets and emotions.



Then, we witness as he suddenly loses control of his boundaries and breaks his own rules. We follow him on a journey that is not uncommon – we have all been the victim of unrequited love, and are bound to a character who, at the age of 45 year old, is exploring his wants and pursuit of happiness for the first time. A journey that is conflicted and laced with self-loathing.

Francois has the habit of watching people, of being a voyeur, always guarding his true thoughts and intentions. Visually I would adopt this character trait and allow the audiences to witness moments and sequences as Francois. To be completely connected to him and given equal chance to interpret moments and gestures as he does.

Furthermore, my intention is to document situations and details of contemporary South Africa as I see them – the still very present double standards of conservatism, that masks outdated racist ideologies, the cosmopolitan and almost surprising sexual underground of Cape Town and then most importantly a comment on 'skoonheid'. Christian, the object of Francois' affection, is a man born with psychical form and beauty that gives him power in the world. It gives him currency to manipulate and take from the world what he wants. Francois is in turns disarmed and disgusted by Christian's power. He wants to be him with him, own him, 'have him', yet the ease with which Christian floats through life, the charm of his form enrages Francois to the core. It is this conflicted reaction in Francois that becomes the centre of his downfall and the element of this situation that is most central to my intentions socially and politically.

This journey is psychological above all else, we are privy to the workings of a man who goes beyond a point of no return, who crosses a moral barrier and who realizes that he knows nothing of love or happiness. That he knows nothing about joy, and in the end, a man who has no character, no true self, because everything that he built up around him – his wife, his children, his secrets and lies have rendered him lost, without any hope of freedom.



SCREEN DAILY

An impressively controlled study of a macho Afrikaaner and the secret he hides from his family, his friends and himself, *Beauty (Skoonheid)* is a slow-paced but effective portrait of a kind of apartheid of the mind. It's also a dour and uncompromising arthouse product which will play to a wafer-thin audience at home in South Africa - where the director's debut, *Shirley Adams*, barely made a dent in the box office. Further festival action looks like the most obvious next step after the film's Cannes premiere, though resilient audiences in Europe and elsewhere may also be persuaded to take a look.

His is a refreshing new voice in a territory known up to now more for its township dramas.

Reminiscent of a certain strain of austere Latin American cinema that includes Carlos Reygadas (*Silent Light*) and Rodrigo Moreno (*El Custodio*), the film derives much of its force from the way structure, rhythm and framing play the same tense waiting game that the protagonist himself is engaged in. A lot of weight is placed on the performance of Deon Lotz, and he rises to the challenge, investing Francois, the frustrated family man at the centre of the story, with a thermonuclear mass of repressed energy.

Lotz is Francois, who lives in Bloemfontein, in South Africa's Afrikaaner heartland. He's a big, bullish guy who we first see at a wedding reception, also attended by Christian (Keegan), the son of an old friend. It's only in retrospect that we realise that the camera's slow prow through the room, and its predatory focus adjustment and zoom in on pretty-boy Christian, is Francois' point of view: even after we've identified Francois as the film's centre of attention, he gives little away.

He's married to Elena (Scott), though they seem not to have a physical relationship. He owns a lumber company and sawmill, and from certain comments he lets drop we suspect he might be a racist. When he drives to a farmstead meeting with a group of tongue-tied roughnecks, we assume it's a white supremacists' hoedown, especially when one of the group is turned away because he has broken their "no faggots or coloureds" rule by arriving with a fey black boy in tow.

So it comes as a shock when in the very next scene we see Francois and his beer-swilling pals engaged in an orgy while gay porn plays on the TV. They're hard, homophobic men who like to have sex with each other, before (like Francois) going back to their families, going to church and behaving like regular guys. But Francois' can't stop thinking about Christian - a trainee lawyer whose sideline as an advertising model leads the older man to convince himself that he too may be living in the Afrikaaner closet.

The film's dramatic tension lies not in the explicit content of many of the scenes but in the set of the protagonist's mouth and his alert, needy but downcast eyes; or in little details in the corner of the scene, often out of focus - a mixed-race couple on the beach, a happy gay couple flirting in a gay bar where Francois sits drinking, filled with self-hatred - or the archive newspaper cutting on the wall of a restaurant that reads FREE AT LAST. It's still a testing ride for the audience, and Hermanus doesn't quite know how to end the film; but his is a refreshing new voice in a territory known up to now more for its township dramas, at least on the international festival stage.

VARIETY

A closeted married man roiling with tension develops a disturbed obsession with his friends' son in Oliver Hermanus' well-modulated sophomore feature, "Beauty." In contrast with several Cannes 2011 titles, this time the object of attraction is legal, though power dynamics are very much present in the way the protag behaves toward the young man and the world -- an especially South African world. Displaying satisfying progress from his award-winning debut, "Shirley Adams," Hermanus demonstrates a firm grip on the subtleties of strong-willed folk in turmoil. "Beauty" needn't get trapped in the gay ghetto.

Producer and co-scripter Didier Costet is also behind Brillante Mendoza's last few titles, which means his arthouse connections could help "Beauty" find a modest spot on specialty screens, notwithstanding the difficulty of launching South African films in the international market. One relatively graphic sex scene however may make Stateside release difficult without a tiny bit of trimming.

A marvelously controlled opener signals Hermanus' decision to privilege his lead's voyeurism, as the camera slowly tracks through a crowded wedding party and alights on Christian (model Charlie Keegan). Though Francois (Deon Lotz) has known him for years, something about this sighting strikes a chord. Returning to Bloemfontein, in central South Africa, after his daughter's wedding in Cape Town, Francois and wife Elena (Michelle Scott) get on with their lives, characterized by a paper-thin facade of familial contentment.

Beneath Francois' taut manner lies an emasculated figure, an angry white man in South Africa, no longer a member of the ruling elite, maintaining his racism along with a disgust for homosexuals that barely masks his self-loathing. Francois satisfies his urges with a small group of older, like-minded closeted men, but as an outlet for his overall anxiety, these orgies don't do the trick. Instead he pretends to go on a business trip to Cape Town, where he meets up with Christian's parents and begins spying on the young man.

"Beauty" is an oddly generic title, especially as Christian, through the voyeuristic lensing, becomes more than merely a pretty body. Though presumably straight, his physical ease around other men, no matter their color, is an element that inspires an angry envy within Francois, who watches his obsession with the realization that Christian's palpable comfort within himself cannot be a part of his world or generation. As Francois' frustration builds, so too does his resentment, leading to inevitable violence.

Hermanus doesn't dwell too much on the unhappiness of suburban life, although it's an inescapable element that adds to Francois' bitterness. Lotz gives a quietly intense performance, very much the observer rather than participant -- a concept strikingly matched by Jamie Ramsay's watchful lensing, handsomely shot in Scope on a Red Mysterium. Attractive lighting provides a honeyed glow to most settings and especially Christian, while Francois is lit with an appropriately steelier gleam. Sound and music are used with a sophisticated sense of counterpoint and cover.