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UN FILM D'OLIVER HERMANUS

SKOONHEID

(BEAUTY)



release: april / avril 2012

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SKOONHEID – synopsis nl + fr

François leidt een net en goed geordend leven in Bloemfontein, Zuid-Afrika. Als vader van twee kinderen en een toegewijd echtgenoot, is hij compleet verrast door een toevallige ontmoeting die zijn nette, perfect geregelde leven helemaal overhoop zet.

François mène une vie bien rangée à Bloemfontein, en Afrique du Sud. Père de deux enfants et mari dévoué, il est pris de court quand une rencontre fortuite bouleverse son existence propre et parfaitement ordonnée.

Lengte 109min. / Taal: Engels & Zuidafrikaans / Land: Zuid-Afrika, Frankrijk
Durée 109min. / Langue: anglais & afrikaans / Pays: Afrique du Sud, France



SKOONHEID – cast

Deon Lotz François van Heerden
Charlie Keegan Christian Roodt
Michelle Scott Elena van Heerden
Albert Maritz Willem Roodt
Sue Diepeveen Marika Roodt
Roeline Daneel Anika van Heerden



SKOONHEID – crew

regisseur / réalisateur Oliver Hermanus
producent / producteur Didier Costet
coproducteur / coproducteur Dylan Voogt
scenaristen / scénaristes Oliver Hermanus, Didier Costet
director of photography / directeur de la photo Jamie Ramsay
décors J. Franz Lewis
montage George Hanmer
muziek / musique Ben Ludik
kostuums / costumes Reza Levy
geluid / son Ian Arrow, Laurent Chassaigne, Xavier Bonneyrat
Productie van Equation, in samenwerking met Moonlighting Films
Produit par Equation, en association avec Moonlighting Films

SKOONHEID – Oliver Hermanus

Oliver Hermanus, geboren in Kaapstad, heeft een bachelordiploma Arts degree in Film, Media and Visual Studies op zak. Na zijn studies werkte hij een tijdje als persfotograaf voor een nationaal persagentschap in Zuid-Afrika en maakt hij zijn Master of Arts degree aan de Londense Film School af, nadat hij een private studiebeurs ontving in 2006.

Zijn afstudeerproject, « Shirley Adams », wordt in avant-première vertoond op het Internationaal Filmfestival van Locarno in 2009. Oliver wordt dan ook genomineerd voor de Sutherland Award op het London Film Festival en voor de Ingmar Bergman Debut award op het Filmfestival van Göteborg. De film oogst wereldwijd veel prijzen; zoals de Grand Prix op het Internationaal Filmfestival van Amiens, en drie prijzen op het Filmfestival van Durban. In 2009 werd Oliver Hermanus geselecteerd om deel te nemen aan de 19de editie van de Cinéfondation van het Cannes film Festival te Parijs.

Né au Cap, Oliver Hermanus est diplômé en Cinéma, Médias et Audiovisuel. Après ses études, il travaille comme photographe de presse pour une agence nationale d'information en Afrique du Sud, et complète son Master en Réalisation à la London Film School, après avoir reçu une bourse privée en 2006.

Son film de fin d'études, « Shirley Adams », est projeté en avant-première au Festival International du Film de Locarno en 2009. Oliver est alors nommé au Festival du Film de Londres pour le prix Sutherland ainsi qu'au Festival de Göteborg pour le prix Ingmar Bergman. Le film remporte de nombreuses récompenses de par le monde, comme le Grand Prix au Festival International du Film d'Amiens, et trois prix au Festival du Film de Durban. En 2009, Oliver Hermanus intègre la Résidence parisienne du Festival de Cannes, dans le cadre de la Cinéfondation.

Filmografie / Filmographie

- 2011 Skoonheid (99 min)
- 2008 Shirley Adams (HD, 92 min)
- 2007 Yumna, kortfilm / court-métrage (35mm, 12 min)
Interior, kortfilm / court-métrage (16mm, 4 min)
- 2005 The Second Floor, kortfilm / court-métrage, documentaire (DV, 26 min)

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 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 with a concern for authenticity, realism and a sober interest 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 colour 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 and geographically 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 years 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 audience 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 'Beauty'.

Christian, the object of Francois' affection, is a man born with a physical 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 turn disarmed and disgusted by Christian's power. He wants to be 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 has built up around him - his wife, his children, his secrets and lies have rendered him lost, without any hope of free.

Oliver Hermanus



SKOONHEID – note d'intention

Cette histoire relate l'autodestruction d'un homme. Le dédain qu'il a pour lui-même. Sa propre haine. Nous découvrons petit à petit les différents aspects de sa vie, très compartimentée, ses secrets, ses désirs. Nous sommes témoins de sa violence, de ses peurs et de sa jalousie.

Le personnage de François ne doit pas être rejeté, ou relégué au rang de « personnage négatif ». Mon intention en tant que réalisateur est d'explorer son existence complexe et tourmentée, avec un souci constant d'authenticité et de réalisme, de dévoiler sa tragédie et sa brutalité avec sobriété, sans le juger.

Dans l'Afrique du Sud post-apartheid, son personnage est le représentant d'un groupe minoritaire, dans un pays qui a été dirigé par cette minorité pendant des siècles, et qui est maintenant dirigé par une majorité. François parle un langage qui n'est parlé nulle part ailleurs sur la planète, il porte un héritage qui est considéré comme raciste et haineux. Il a été élevé dans la méfiance envers l'homme noir, et dans des valeurs conservatrices.

Il habite dans une ville qui a été la capitale du régime et qui reste un bastion de son ancienne gloire. François craint le pays où il vit parce qu'il y est perçu comme coupable : la couleur de sa peau, son langage, le sang qui coule dans ses veines sont autant de symboles d'un passé brutal et injuste. Les Afrikaners conservateurs sont tous les jours aux prises avec cette culpabilité collective, ce besoin inconscient de défendre leur héritage.

En dehors de cet aspect, François se retrouve dans la situation de millions d'hommes à travers le monde : humilié et honteux, en raison de son orientation sexuelle. La combinaison de toutes ces tensions, au bord de l'implosion, et le contrôle qu'il exerce sur ses émotions sont le point de départ du film. Il s'agit de montrer comment sa vie fonctionne, comment il a planifié psychologiquement et géographiquement son existence, ses secrets et ses émotions.

Puis nous le voyons perdre soudainement le contrôle de ses pulsions et enfreindre ses propres règles. Nous le suivons dans un voyage, finalement assez commun – qui n'a pas été la victime un jour d'un amour non réciproque ? –, et nous nous lions à cet homme qui, à l'âge de 45 ans, réveille pour la première fois ses envies personnelles et sa quête de bonheur. Un voyage plein de doutes, traversé par le dégoût de soi-même.

François a l'habitude d'observer les gens, d'être un voyeur, de garder pour lui ses véritables pensées et intentions.

Visuellement, je compte adopter son point de vue et permettre au spectateur de voir les choses « comme s'il était François ».

Je souhaite le connecter complètement à ce personnage, lui donner l'occasion d'émettre les mêmes interprétations que lui dans certaines circonstances.

De plus, mon intention est de montrer des situations et des détails de l'Afrique du Sud contemporaine tels que je les perçois : les standards du conservatisme, qui sont toujours très présents et qui masquent à peine une idéologie raciste dépassée ; le surprenant milieu underground cosmopolite et sexué du Cap ; et surtout, un commentaire sur « la Beauté ».

Christian, qui est l'objet de l'affection de François, est doté d'un physique et d'une beauté qui lui donnent du pouvoir dans ce monde. Cela lui permet de manipuler les gens et d'avoir ce qu'il veut. François est tour à tour désarmé et dégoûté par le pouvoir de Christian. Il veut être lui, le posséder, l'« avoir ». L'aise avec laquelle Christian évolue dans la vie, son charme naturel font enrager François au plus profond de lui-même. C'est ce conflit intérieur qui va devenir la cause de sa chute et sur lequel sont focalisées toutes mes intentions, tous mes regards, en termes social et politique.

Ce voyage est avant tout psychologique : nous assistons de près au fonctionnement d'un homme qui va jusqu'au point de non-retour, et au-delà, qui traverse une barrière morale et se rend compte qu'il ne connaît rien à l'amour, au bonheur ou même à la joie. Au bout du compte, il s'agit d'un homme sans caractère, sans personnalité propre, parce que tout ce qu'il a construit autour de lui – sa femme, ses enfants, ses secrets et ses mensonges – l'a perdu, sans espoir de libération.

Oliver Hermanus



A closeted married man roiling with tension develops a disturbed obsession with his friends' son in Oliver Hermanus' well-modulated sophomore feature "Beauty."

By JAY WEISSBERG

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 strongwilled 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.



SCREENDAILY

By Lee Marshall

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.

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.