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A REAL BALL TIGHTENER

Blood-drinking leopard women, fungus, skinheads and the Chrysler Building all add up to a whole lot of trouble for filmmaker Matthew Barney

words: roger demarco pictures: matthew barney



Since 1995, American artist Matthew Barney has been making his *Cremaster* cycle of films, named after the 'cremaster' muscles that tighten the balls during sexual arousal. Barney has described his cycle of films, a fine-art mutation of Alejandro Jodorowsky and George Romero, as "a sexually driven digestive system". It consumes the detritus of American pop culture and regurgitates



A gory episode of dental malpractice features a double-ended dildo sculpted from extracted teeth

it as myth. Zombieified racehorses and rhinestone cowboys, Mustangs, Mormons, serial killer Gary Gilmore and the Goodyear blimp all make appearances in Barney's creation myth.

The final three-hour instalment, *Cremaster 3* (the five films in the cycle were produced in random order), begins in the foundations of the Chrysler building in New York. An emaciated girl with an ashen complexion is loaded into the plastic-covered interior of a hearse-like, vintage Chrysler. A jet-black eagle is perched on the roof rack. The girl's skin is peppered with fungal growths. >



Her eyes and left breast are pierced and bleeding like stigmata. As the lights dim, five Cadillacs converge on the Chrysler, crushing it into a twisted shard of rubber and metal. A society dame wearing fox fur and white gloves, picks it up as if transporting a holy relic and ascends with it in an elevator.

Barney then climbs the levels of the Chrysler building, which has been reconfigured as a monument to Masonic ambition, taking in shots of brooding pin-striped gangsters and a gory episode of dental malpractice featuring a double-ended dildo sculpted from extracted teeth. The film then cuts to an interlude at the Saratoga racetrack – covering a derby of putrefying horses (filmed in the style of *Dawn Of The Dead*) – before switching to the Guggenheim Museum.

With his mouth still bleeding from the dental appointment and dressed in an orange kilt and fluffy pink bearskin, Barney manoeuvres his way up the museum's spiral construction, as if chancing his way through levels in a video game. He encounters a parade of high-kicking, Busby Berkeley show-girls wearing bunny ears, two tattooed skinhead bands (Agnostic Front and Murphy's Law) and their fans engaged in a face-off. A final confrontation with his nemesis takes place at the museum's summit, where Barney's freak fixation is manifested by amputee athlete Aimee Mullins. She appears as a virginal debutante with glass limbs and a spindle-legged leopard girl with a taste for blood. □

The girl's skin is peppered with fungal growths. Her eyes and her left breast are pierced and bleeding like stigmata





Stills from the book
of the film *Cremaster 3*
by Matthew Barney,
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