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FILM

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# Spanish Extremes

Genre-Hopping at SIFF

by KRISHANU RAY



You won't find any straightforward rom-coms or family dramas at the 2012 Festival of New Spanish Cinema, landing at SIFF September 27-30. The seven films vary widely, and all concern themselves with beyond-the-norm subjects—one takes place entirely in a bathroom.

*Carmina or Blow Up* is a salty, colorful comedy about a working-class bar owner, Carmina, and the supporting cast of her life: her daughter, her goat, her real and imagined debts, her wino husband, her pantheon of Catholic saints, and, perhaps most consequentially, her claims adjuster. But it's mostly about Carmina, who's a tough old turkey. Brash, lively, crass, disgusting, playful, and always human, she elbows her way through life fueled by grit, humor, and what appears to be no less than a pack and a half of Pall Malls every day. The well-paced 70-minute film is structured around interview-framed monologues from her and others in her brood, as well as various boisterous episodes in Carmina's life. If you're looking for a cultural snapshot of a subsection of Spain, this is it.

## TOOLS

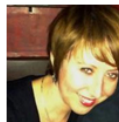
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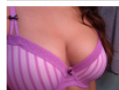
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*Sleep Tight* isn't for everyone. It's the story of César, a lonely apartment concierge who just wants to feel happy for once in his crummy life. Unfortunately for one unlucky tenant of his building, César's happiness can only be derived from gradually, clinically tormenting and torturing her in some of the more disturbing ways imaginable over a period of several weeks. Confiding only in his dying, unresponsive mother about his nightly intrusions, César develops a sadistic routine that grows to a gradual crescendo, despite the efforts of a nosy 11-year-old and an encroaching police investigation. It's one of those dimly lit, green-tinted thrillers that's awash in the buzz of fluorescent lighting, but there are unexpected kinks in mood and tone that inject freshness and unpredictability into this piece, and there's plenty of real tension, if you can stomach it, owing in large part to a very strong lead performance by Luis Tosar.

Representing the culture clash genre is *Wilaya*, in which a young woman named Fatimetu returns home to her family, which is living in a refugee camp in the Algerian Sahara, after spending 16 years in Spain with a foster family. Her Western sensibilities are constrained by the conservative patriarchal society and the general refugee-campness of the refugee camp, but she maintains her independence by getting a job as a delivery truck driver. The film is light on plot and heavy on angst, and dialogue delivered to Fatimetu is routinely answered only with a

thousand-mile stare out into one of the world's largest deserts. The striking landscape is certainly worth more than a glance, though, and the atmosphere of sepia monochrome it creates is perhaps the most compelling aspect of this film. ★

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