

Cannes 2015: Love (Gaspard Noé, 2015)



Gaspard Noé bounded down the red carpet last night like a child; filled with excitement to deliver his '3D sex epic' as it has been labelled, to its first audience. There was rapturous applause at the credits; standing ovations, tears and a yell of "Ça c'est le cinema putain! (*This isn't whoreish cinema*)". To be fair to the bold lady in hysterics, she's right. Love may be visceral and enjoy a slight dash of serious smut, but the film isn't as provocative as everyone had initially thought. Love isn't crafted entirely from sex; it has an underlying dramatic relationship study that Noé has blatantly put second.

Now living with his girlfriend and their child, a man recounts his sexual encounters during his younger years with a woman that has mysteriously gone missing.

It's undeniably rhythmic for the first two acts. Ploughing through an admittedly rather flimsy, vague plot structure with enough passion to be rather entertaining. The story veers from trying to be caustic and affecting to having this tongue in cheek, almost admirable sense of humour. At times, Noé is undeniably out to provoke. From his own cameos spattered throughout to an almost comic phallus protruding from the screen, it can be a bold riot to endure; but never really settles itself tonally. It partly manages to salvage its characters thanks to the alluring debut performance of Aomi Muyock, who plays Electra, Murphy's initial object of affection. The film, which mainly consists of flashbacks to the two's relationship, makes the most of her deft and often dirty charm.

Cinematographer Benoît Debie's lurid and unmistakable style lets Love feel like a letterbox into the lives of its characters. The framing, often cutoff by doorways or the character's own photographic lenses, gives it an intimate, rather than voyeuristic sensibility.

This is one of the reasons that we can differentiate the intention's of Noé and his fellow cinema provocateur Lars Von Trier's similarly seedy Nymphomaniac. The latter is proudly perverse and uncomfortable. Here, Noe has created a film in which the explicit use of sex is proudly used to titillate. It may not consistently do that, but there is a twisting, kinetic core to it that makes these naked bodies seem like sculptures rather than simple figures having sex.

Perhaps what is most shocking about his latest work is that, regardless of its plethora of three dimensional private parts and its drug-induced heavy character study, it manages to be almost entirely impenetrable and emotionless. His leading, often lonely trio are rarely given a serious shaking to let their personalities show, and when they do its paired with dialogue so faux-philosophical and dreamy that it just doesn't take effect.

Noé's intentions seem to have been directed towards creating a film about an uncompromising depiction of sex and its intrinsic connection to love. To a certain extent, he's achieved this. Love manages to be aesthetically seductive, but impenetrable underneath.



Love had its world premiere at the 68th Festival de Cannes