

## “L.A. ZOMBIE” (Film Review)

Written by Karen Oughton

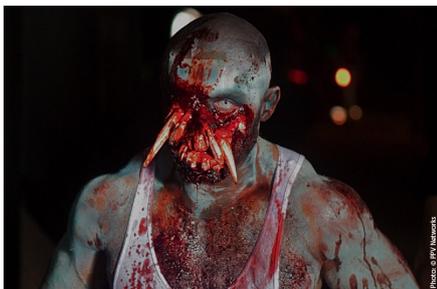
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The camera surveys the scene: a desolate beach, save the cries of a few gulls...until a muscular man in conspicuous, contour-exaggeration makeup appears in the surf. Is this a Fulci-esque killer-corpse movie in the mold of ZOMBIE? No, it's Bruce LaBruce's take on the ghoulish genre, L.A. ZOMBIE, a film that forces the audience to feel the tension between two of horror's favorite themes: death and sex. To get the gore—and the heart—of this strangely introspective indie film, we have to follow our undead hero through a story that consists almost entirely of situations in which he sexually stimulates male cadavers back to life, often in salacious close-up.

Something of a hybrid, the film has enough blood and guts to feed the gorehounds among us and enough action (including disastrous drug deals) to satisfy thriller fans, but it also has a rather gentler, personal aspect. The unnamed zombie protagonist is not a brainless body-muncher, but a creature who genuinely seems to crave human contact, with Francois Sagat extremely believable in the role. In the first few scenes, a series of first-person perspectives engage our empathy during the peculiar sights of him hitching a ride on a lonely road and simply staring silently and somewhat awkwardly at the young male driver. A few seconds later, we hear a crash and may naturally assume the young man is his first victim, particularly when the camera cuts to reveal the unfortunate lying dead on the road, a bloody gash in his leg, with the zombie standing nearby. But instead of chowing down on the corpse, the zombie maneuvers his manhood into the hole before “projecting his pleasure” (an eerie black goo) all over the young man's face. The latter opens his eyes and, later, watches awestruck as the zombie walks off into the distance. The joy of the film is that it doesn't do what you expect it to, yet it always seems sincere.



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In this sense, L.A. ZOMBIE is something of a twisted morality tale. Periodic bookmarking sequences show the ghoul walking down isolated city streets, blood dripping from his mouth. But when he has brought his lifeless lovers back to consciousness, he too can change. Gone is the zombie getup and even the extremely grim surroundings, replaced by a clean body, the comfort of a comrade and sometimes a community.

But far from giving us a tidy tale ostensibly about other people, writer/director LaBruce seems to want to test our reactions to our own desires as horror consumers, and the film is a strangely sensory experience. It's a zombie flick, so we expect our man to bite. To see the gore, we have to watch for the fantastic teeth he periodically grows—but the camera then guides our eyes from his fangs to different parts of his and others' bodies. We feel the coffee he sips in solitude after a rather funny scene in a cafe, and we imagine the feeling of flailing on the floor in a blood-drenched bondage room. It'll make you think long and hard when you wish for the next gratuitously gory moment.

L.A. ZOMBIE (which has been playing the fest circuit and is available on DVD at the [official website](#) ; both the movie and the site are adults-only) is perhaps not a film for all tastes, particularly given its extremely full-on sexual shenanigans. It is, however, a very well-done and thoughtful film.



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