

"HALLEY" (Rotterdam Movie Review)

Written by Ronald Simons

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The International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) is known throughout the world for its all-encompassing program: all genres, from all seven continents. Well, to be honest we haven't heard anything from Antarctica for a while now, but they'll be back, rest assured. As always the focus in this year's 42nd edition rests on human interest, but as far as genre films are concerned, there's enough to keep us interested. HALLEY, for example, is a very bleak Mexican horrordrama that will make you think twice about dreaming of life eternal.

If that seems too gloomy for you, it's over before you know it with its fairly moderate length of 85 minutes. A notable exception in a festival like Rotterdam with films like the Canadian LA REGION CENTRALE, which drowns you in four hours(!) of shots from a Canadian mountaintop. I'll take a decaying zombie portrait over that any day of the week.

Our protagonist in HALLEY is Beto, a middle-aged Mexican zombie, who works on his very final strength as a gym's night watchman. Each evening, he drags himself to work just to kill another dreary day. Coming back from the night shift, he plugs in a probe for some fluids. After a while however, being deceased as he is, that doesn't really help his skin and soft tissues from rotting any more. It has been enough already, and Beto knows it.



But change is easier said than done, for a real life zombie. For instance: when Beto once again is left for death and brought to the morgue, he reluctantly listens to the chattering coroner. But Beto doesn't want to talk, to work and certainly not to watch any more television. What can he do? When one of his colleagues asks him out, he agrees shyly, but it's not going to be a crazy night with this guy. Imagine that for years and years, in endless repetition.

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Writer/director Sebastián Hofmann succeeds in stretching his bleak point of departure, giving us a tight 90 minute portrait of a dull, tired, decaying and even rotting Mexican man. There is the question of what Beto could do with a character trait or two, because as long as he can work and commute, he would still have a personality, a past or opinion, right? This shortcoming makes HALLEY a bit less intense than it could have been, but—apart from the guy who went to see an epic Canadian mountaintop film—who's complaining?

