

The Video-ed Dead, Glenn McQuaid on his foray into found footage, "V/H/S"

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Thursday, 28 June 2012 12:08



This Saturday, New Yorkers have the chance to catch an early peek at one of this year's most anticipated fright films as part of the annual, and annually excellent, BAMCinemaFest. V/H/S, featuring the collected work of Adam Wingard and Simon Barrett, Ti West, Joe Swanberg, David Bruckner, Radio Silence and I SELL THE DEAD's Glenn McQuaid marries the beloved and time honored anthology with horror's current star aesthetic, found footage. Fango spoke to filmmaker/contributor McQuaid about his segment, "Tuesday the 17th" and crafting a cinema scarité slasher, his initial concept and the experimentation the short afforded him.

FANGORIA: One of the things V/H/S does is kind of show the adaptability of found footage, as yours is very much a slasher with an odd conceit. Where did its story come from?

GLENN MCQUAID: Truthfully, I was asked by Brad [Miska, producer] and Roxanne [Benjamin, producer] to submit a slasher treatment, so there was that mandate. I originally submitted a different idea. My first treatment was a fake 1970s television show that never aired because it's got weird kids with ESP who basically killed the presenters. They were like "this is clever! But we really need a slasher." So, for me, I'm not terribly up on any of the modern slasher stuff. I've seen SCREAM, but I haven't seen the rest of them. I just went back to the slasher flicks I love. One of my favorites is FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VI: JASON LIVES. It was before things got so ironic and so self-referential. It was good-humored, it was also gothic. The reference at the start is basically a Frankenstein movie, and it was supernatural. So, I looked back to that movie—I've seen it many times—and tried to inject that kind of style, that little bit of goofiness into the found footage style, or mandate. That's how I approached it.

FANG: Something that's really prevalent in the entire film is the idea of everyone's predatory nature and how that intensifies holding the power of a camera. In yours, there's an idea of we're both victim and perpetrator with the camera.

MCQUAID: Yea, as the project developed, things started to emerge without even seeing the other guys' work, I began to question what's really going on here. Are these kids seeing this figure in real life, or are they only seeing him through the monitor on the camera? As it was coming together in the edit, a lot things started to emerge and I suppose with the endgame situation, for me that was a throwback to a lot of classic horror tropes I'm a fan of. I can't say I went into it with an envisioned sight of what it was going to be, because for me, it was also a great opportunity to work in a new way. I SELL THE DEAD was a very, very structured, old

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school way of making a movie. The script was followed, everything was storyboarded; I had a comic book made before I even went on set. Of course, when I got on set, I did fuck around with it and mix it up a little bit, but this was the opposite of all of that. This, just by virtue of what it is, it had to be improv and super loose. There's scenes in this I wasn't even around for. The scene in the car, I gave the actors the camera and they just drove off for two hours and I didn't even see that footage until I was in the edit room. We had workshoped it, I had a rough idea, but it was so cool. It was such a new way of working. It felt really fresh to be sitting in the edit room, looking at this footage. For me, it was a great way of working because it was so new to my eyes, I found a lot of different options in the edit.



FANG: With *I SELL THE DEAD*, you seem to have these very classical tastes and interests, what was it like porting those into a very contemporary aesthetic?

MCQUAID: I was a little bit worried about it before I saw the other segments. I wasn't sure how po-faced or realistic and somber everyone else was going to go, so I worried I was stretching it with the supernatural element and the believability of what you're seeing. It definitely manhandles that found footage requirement that it be questionable whether it was real or not, but as soon as I saw [David] Bruckner's piece ("Amateur Night"), which tackles that pretty head-on, I was really relieved that was another common motif. Really, when we were offered the gig, there were not too many guidelines, we could really get in there and do what we wanted. So, it was fun to see, apart from some of the other motifs, that fantasy was a big part of what we were all doing.

FANG: Something that keeps coming up, relevant to the current generation of YouTube users and such, is the idea, or need, to validate your existence, or what you're seeing through the lens.

MCQUAID: It's wild, I think one of the more interesting things as a filmmaker, with found

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footage, is in a way you have to leave things ambiguous, you can't tell the entire story, so the audience has to fill in a lot and it can become a lot more of an interactive experience. In Ti's piece, I think it's very interesting that you have to read between the lines and the relationship of Joe [Swanberg] and Sophia [Takal]. Already, that's cool. Already, you're feeling like you're involved and you're invested that not everything can be taken at face value. Regarding the idea of filming our existence to feel validated, it's very interesting to me, I've recently just got a GoPro camera and I'm attaching it to my bike helmet and cycling around Brooklyn and into Prospect Park and all around. It's a pretty wild experience to go back and watch that. It can be a pretty sensory experience, certainly being the guy who filmed it, to go back and relive it. That's becoming more interesting to me. I'm pretty intrigued where that might go in the future. I think it's possible that people can have the camera on for weeks at a time and have everything be filmed.

FANG: Do you know where you're going from here?

MCQUAID: I've written a script with a pal, Ted Geoghegan (SWEATSHOP). It's very broad, it definitely takes off from where I SELL THE DEAD left off. It's set in the 1930s in America. It's stars of the silver screen get lured up to the countryside where they're hunted by celebrity-obsessed vampires. It's bold and it's a big thing that requires a lot of money, so in the meantime, I'm just taking some time. I'm going to head back to Ireland and just walk the moors for awhile and get inspired. I want to start getting into things I can do a lot cheaper. I really need to be on set more. I'm spending so much time writing. I'm a filmmaker, I need to be on set. And that's why people like Joe Swanberg are such a big inspiration. He's active, that's what he does. He's determined to make sure he's on set more often than not.

FANG: Do you think we might still see the 70s television piece you spoke of?

MCQUAID: Yea, I would. I love it! I love that idea. It would be very authentic, kind of weird. Leonard Nimoy had a show in the 70s called IN SEARCH OF..., it's really strange and has a dated, pulpy vibe to it. The idea was to riff on something like that and do something strange and cool about ESP kids in the 70s. Such a weird thing that was going on. I grew up then and was always trying to bend forks with my mind, and so on.

V/H/S plays BAMCinmafest (BAM Rose Cinemas at 30 Lafayette Ave, Brooklyn) this Saturday, June 30 at 10 p.m. For more info and tickets, head right [here](#) .