

Experimenta-se

Jorge Cruz Jr – 10/09/2020 (translated from Portuguese)

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In “**Autumnal Sleeps**”, filmmaker **Michael Higgins** takes us on numerous audio-visual trips. Among them, the History of Cinema, its embryonic stage and the paths of surrealism and oneiric, transforming tools of this language. Almost like a symbol-film to be part of **Festival Ecrã**, the Irish feature film may have gone unnoticed among great companions such as the celebrated national productions **Cavalo** and **Sertânia** and the double James Benning with **Telemundo** and **The Inner Truth**. However, thinking from a presentation perspective to an audience less fond of experimentalism, it is one of the most fundamental works in the program.

The film takes us to the set of Dr. Epstein's experiences. The protagonist, a sleeping woman, has been here for so long that she doesn't even remember anymore, allowing the viewer to form a conviction about being inside dreams, projected memories or a faithful biographical portrait of the character. Until a man, just like a director, turns on his camera and yells "action!" Higgins, then, uses that central figure as his own wheel, commanding through them all the movements sequenced in the work. It takes advantage of the beginning of the arc of visual constructions in cinema, taking us directly to the dawn of the medium.

Conceived as an experimental horror, “**Autumnal Sleeps**” didactics all the symbology of the genre. A dazzling production takes us to a luxurious mansion as images of stuffed animals and *freak show* characters’ flow across the screen. It seems to want to transport us to a *nickelodeon* of the beginning of the 20th century, opening new possibilities for the audio-visual in parallel to what was envisioned by the pioneers. The digitisation of this artistic activity served us almost as a refoundation of Cinema (some prefer to call it death). It is curious that, increasingly, these reinterpretations of images – not only with original files, but also from recreations – are gaining ground among contemporary filmmakers.



Here there are passages of time, in valuable costume work and the use of photographs. The director initially places us at some point in the late nineteenth century, but when we realise it, we get closer to the 1920s. The language of the feature film follows this “updating”, moving towards a more expressionist horror. Dr. Epstein acts as a conductor of the images, using the play of light and shadow, at which point the film's sound work is even more impressive.

It is as if we arrived at a comfort zone of cinematographic enjoyment that the general public seems to have never left. Higgins then builds little *gags*, a *foxtrot act*, and ends his oneiric reference book with colourful shadow makeup and an erotic look that reminds us of two eighties pop divas, Cyndi Lauper and Madonna. “**Autumnal Sleeps**” is a world of dreams, produced more by the spectator internally than from the referential collages by Michael Higgins, who positions himself as a facilitator of the experience with our own past in art.