

*Philosophy of Arts
Философия на изкуството*

***SHERRY* BY ELIANE LIMA**

(USA, 24 m. 2017)

M. Kennedy Volcofsky

California Institute of the Arts – California

Sherry is Eliane Lima's look at one man's private, domestic – and solo – erotic life.

Sherry's subject is named Robert Sherry.

He calls his female persona *Sherry*.

Sherry's Robert Sherry's 'Sherry' is a sex-doll – white-woman's latex skin (Hollywood stripper curves), wide trauma-eye facemask, blowjob-red pout. This stutter – *Sherry*'s Sherry's 'Sherry' – is both a strength and defect of Lima's film (ostensibly a 'documentary' – certainly the film-festival circuit has agreed) – a stutter making it true to its subject – the undead relationless core of sex, its repetition, its disregard for everything but its own *One* name.

Without voiceover narration or explanatory titles – no location, no biography, no history of Robert Sherry aside from what we see (and mostly diegetic sound; James Perley's atmospheric synth-music accompanying a few montages) – *Sherry* demands direct encounter with an elaborate, monied – and old-fashioned, in its seclusion – fetish life: "Robert Sherry's Fantasy World."

Lima looks, sees, and shows. The film is organized as a sequence of increasingly elaborate, increasingly transgressive erotic tableaux.

We first see 'Sherry' in and by the pool of a large, tile-roof house. She poses as self-timed camera on a tripod shoots. Next, she's in the shower – seen through a glass door – removing her body. Blond wig off, we very quickly see the man in 'Sherry's' skin is not young. Sixties, seventies, eighty? He's ginger and balding, fit, skin showing age. Reaching in, taking out her breasts, struggling to peel off skin, turn it inside out, wash it. He keeps the mask on. 'Sherry' is hung on the faucet, falls in pieces to the tile. A well-composed still-life of remains, on the shower floor – breasts, skin, face.

Then we watch Sherry get back into her skin.

Solos: celebrity-glamor (red dress, red stilettos, red Porsche), poolside *chic* (a series of bikinis).

Then a series of escapes from a closed kitchen cabinet, in both female and male personas. Now we hear Robert Sherry speak: not as 'Sherry', but as Robert, from

behind the mask. About how complicated the logistics of this particular setup was, about the illusion of his rope-bound wrists (each tied separately, then crossed), how the waisteincher *cuts him in half*, and *hurts so much*.

It's also here the Øthers in "Robert Sherry's Fantasy World" make their first appearance: manikins. Every Øther is a manikin. If Sherry wears a different face, a manikin wears 'Sherry's' face. She's always there. At times 'Sherry' herself takes the role of manikin Øther. Who's alive at first can be unclear.

He never takes moving images, only stills.

There's often deeply conservative strata in a fetish, which is one quality of its being not just mere 'play'. The 'Sherry' Robert Sherry becomes is a caricature of the feminine masquerade, and so certainly kindred to drag – but not. 'Sherry' never speaks – and it's this living-sex-doll's absence of voice – absence of a living face – which makes it otherwise than 'play'. Dumbness – coerced, inflicted female muteness – troublingly felt as fundamental to this world, and its meaning.

And Robert Sherry never lets us see his face.

Lima chooses to make us deal with what's there, in front of us. Refraining from editorial (rare moments: a close up of old-man breast & nipple getting into costume, and some fast/slo frame-rate fun), it's up to us to feel Sherry's world as we watch this series of scenes. Lima's sequencing – she's also Sherry's editor – is smart – from the opening postcard scenes, to hot-housewife domestic; from Sherry as the Wicked Witch, in green- and black- striped tights and witch's hat suspended in the air from a cable (this is the first time we hear a *character* speak: *where are the little children?* the witch cackles, *I want to eat them!*); to Sci-Horror (a bloody goat leg is attached to a human amputee, manikin doctors performing the procedure); 'Sherry' as dumpster trash; some cliché BDSM; then botanical Sherry – roped to a stake as a potted bird-of-paradise or fern, green and camouflaged, exposed sex plantlike, manikin-master or -captor nearby.

Sherry moans in intense physical agony after these plant scenes; a sound lush and well-loved.

The final tableau: 'Sherry' on her back, on a bed, toilet-brush inserted handle-first in her vagina, masturbating with hands encased in black toilet-floats (take a look in your toilet tank).

Then Lima becomes a fiction filmmaker.

Linda Martinez (of the late George Kuchar's work) appears, in a thin white nightgown and red lipstick lips – 'surprising' toilet-brush 'Sherry'. Linda (a fit woman in her 70's, with long grey-black hair), poses with 'Sherry'; a still camera heard snapping. Next scene, Linda eventually kneels at, then lies atop blond glamour-'Sherry', making love to her. Sherry's voice is heard in enjoyment – if not pleasure. Afterwards, 'Sherry' stands up and, before she leaves the room, we see Linda's lipstick smeared on this 'Sherry's' pregnant belly. Mask on the bed.

This sequence – powerful – if just for the appearance of a live (but still unspeaking), human – seems out of ‘character’, and performed for the film; not necessarily of Sherry’s world.

The final scene is the only one in which we hear a Sherry *speak to* a manikin. Disguised as a man, face-mask closed-lipped and putty-beige, in a white overcoat and red wig (probably his original color), he walks a path beside an ivy-covered wall, coming upon a dark-haired female [sex-doll] trapped in the vines. In a high-pitched nasal whine, he says

Well hi little lady ... you can't move huh? that's very interesting ... you're sure you can't move?

Feeling her breasts, squeezing. *Are you enjoying this? No, huh. That's too bad. I'm enjoying this a lot ... this is terrific* he says, his face between her breasts. *You've got quite a set on you ...*

The feeling – of witnessing the core of this world – arrives.

Sherry tugs the doll’s pants down, unbuttons his, and moves in.

Lima cuts away – a decision that preserves & protects Sherry’s aesthetic silence – turning the viewer into one of Sherry’s silenced Others. One is left at the threshold of a sensed – nascent and gagged – orininary violence. Ethics and aesthetics, struggling skins.

Sherry opens underwater, in the pool. Looking up through the mildly scummed surface, a large, blow-up, transparent plastic sphere floats nearby. We first see ‘Sherry’ – in a fuchsia bikini – in this shallow depth. This *thing* – this clear, floating, empty sphere, seeming without ‘recreational’ use, emanates mystery, an imitation *lux* – and, as *Sherry* appers not to include orgasm (although one senses the ivy scene eventually), this *thing* seems Robert Sherry’s Fantasy World’s ideal metaphor.

Lima’s decision – elegant, helpless and strong – to allow the pictures to speak and not speak – leaves us to plumb this shallow-deep world – artifact and symptom – in its serious play, in all its layered masks, and doubled skins.

✉ **Mr. M. Kennedy Volcofsky**
California Institute of the Arts
24700 McBean Parkway, Valencia
CA 91355, USA
E-mail: volcofsky@gmail.com