

The Reflecting Pool - Interview & Review

Written by Laurynn Lowe

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Tin Ape editor Laurynn Lowe gets together with actor and producer Joseph Culp to talk about *The Reflecting Pool*.



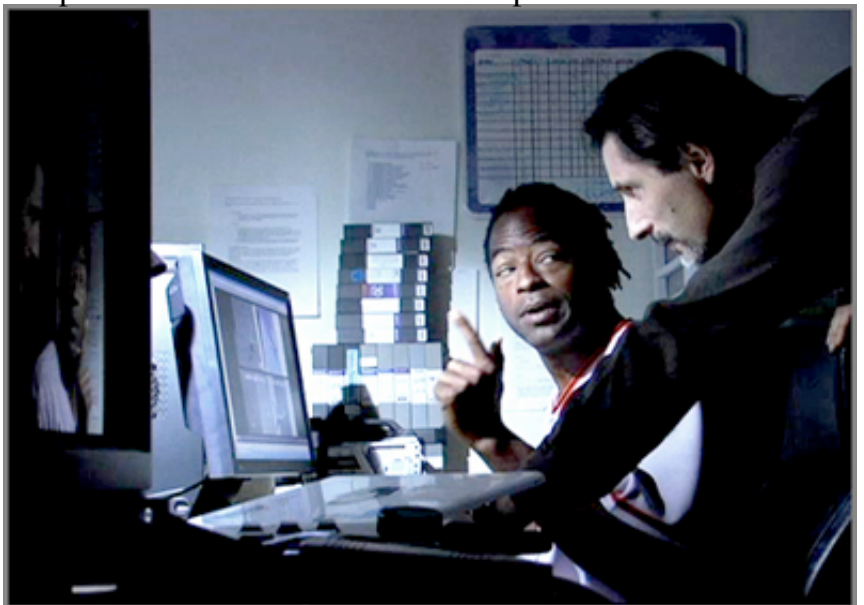
Reflecting Pool

There is a moment in *The Reflecting Pool* when, deep in the bowels of a parking garage, a man emerges from the shadows promising to reveal all he knows about a vast government conspiracy behind the events of 9-11. But before *Deeptoat* has a chance to escape your lips, his mysterious demeanor gives way to agitation and he chatters away about holographic images projected on to missiles. The lead characters tactfully excuse themselves, frustrated by the insanity which emerges when one begins to question the structure of power, but the larger value of the scene lies in how it encapsulates the feelings of many Americans post 9-11: curious enough to listen—until the crazy talk starts.

The Reflecting Pool, which opens this Friday at the Pioneer Theater is part of a growing body of films that seek to deliver truth in new ways, and consequently to a different public. It might be cited alongside *Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden* or *Bamako*, both of which deliver contemporary politics, but with the emotional impact of a narrative structure. *The Reflecting Pool* differs from those other films in that it tackles a subject far closer to home—the attack on America in September 2001. Joseph Culp, who functioned as both an actor and a producer for *The Reflecting Pool*, said that the screen play grew out of director Jarek Kupsc's own research—and longing for story.

"There have been groundbreaking documentaries examining 9-11," says Culp. But the feature films, Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* or *Flight 93*, "have nothing to do with that day. *WTC*, for all intents and purposes, is a mining disaster." As for *Flight 93*, much of the events cannot be confirmed, and some elements, such as the phone calls have been "largely questioned as to their veracity." Even movies that deal with the 9-11 psychological impact, such as *Reign on Me* or *The Great New Wonderful* attempt to confine the impact to one of personal tragedy. The broader significance of *The Reflecting Pool* is that it "examines our capacity to get truth." Culp admits that like many Americans he had, for the most part, accepted the popular version of events presented by the news media—that is until Jarek Kupsc came to his director workshop in Venice Beach.

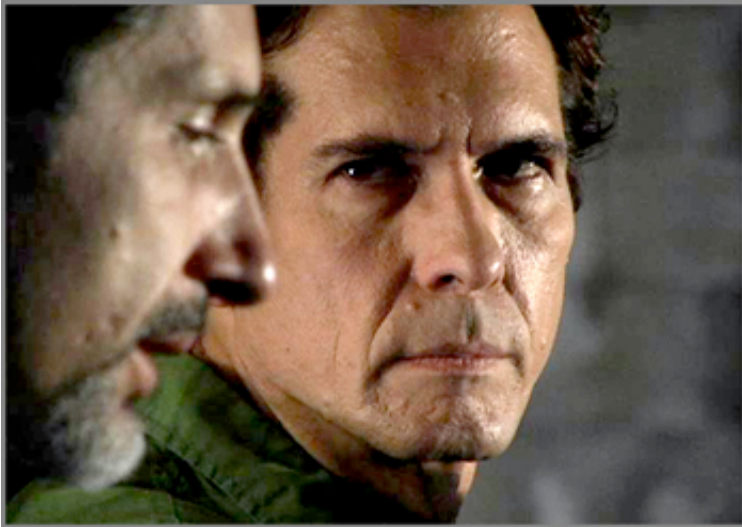
Europeans have a developed muscle for seeing through things. They ask 'who wrote this?' 'what are the power relations at work?' And this is a revolutionary idea to a lot of us." Jarek Kupsc, who comes from Poland, puts much of himself into Alex Prokop, the lead character of *The Reflecting Pool*. Played by Kupsc himself, Prokop is a Russian immigrant and journalist, a man haunted by his upbringing under Soviet oppression and desperate to believe in the American government. The plot of *The Reflecting Pool* follows Prokop as he begins to examine the official version of events. The film is unique, says Culp, in that it presents "a fictional investigation of actual fact."



Much of the evidence presented in *The Reflecting Pool* is familiar: the removal of security cameras, the improbably collapse of the steel beam cores. What's makes the film trickier is that these facts are paralleled with others such as the Navy's manipulation of

the Gulf of Tonkin. That the US government has manipulated the public is no longer news, yet *The Reflecting Pool* breaks ground because it demands the evidence be examined by this generation, not the next, and that the current administration, not an hypothetical imaginary from a sci-fi thriller, be held accountable for the absence of investigation. As one character in the movie suggests, "This is exactly what fuels conspiracy theories, the secrecy that they are creating." And this perhaps is the harder truth of conspiracy theories—that paranoia, even over one's own government—ensures that someone is in charge. Grievous negligence is a far uglier than intentional deception, and ugly not just for the accused, but for the accuser.

In the film this point emerges as a class action lawsuit against the US government, not for murder, but for the "failure to act and prevent" And this is how *The Reflecting Pool* is also part of growing body of new films that seek not a watching audience, but an active one.



Call it Film 2.0: but a growing group of film documentaries, such as *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, which premiered at Tribeca, are created with the intention of soliciting change and action. *The Reflecting Pool* for its part hopes to get enough signatures to an independent investigation.

"The beauty," says Culp of independent cinema, "is that we can. We can create this film." Culp was part of the trio of filmmakers, writer/director Jarek Kupsc, producer and cinematographer Jodie Baltazar, and actor/producer Culp. Shot in 24p with a Panasonic DDX 100B and utilizing mostly natural light, the film has a depth of texture which belies its digital production. The straightforward frame composition and minimal

camera movement hearken back to the days of hardboiled political thrillers, like *All the President's Men*. Culp says that the smallness of the crew and equipment allowed the filmmakers to shoot entirely on location—including LA, NY, DC, and Ground Zero. The consequence is a serious film which relies on the weight of its subject matter and the skill of an incredible cast of actors. Notable among them is, of course Jarek Kupsc and Joseph Culp, but also Lisa Black as Georgia McGuire, the tough editor that commissions the investigation. Most of the actors were hired under the SAG Modified Low Budget Agreement, which allows union actors to work on smaller scale productions.

The significance of these choices, from professional actors to guerrilla shooting, is a film that serves, says Culp, "the material, not the genre." While *The Reflecting Pool* is ultimately political drama and thus invested in the emotional weight of the story and the characters, the filmmakers were conscious that, "the film tread delicately on a subject so volatile and tender." The film does indeed walk a fine line not just in meticulous construction, but also its release in this year of electric with change and possibility.



Lisa Black as Georgia McGuire



The Reflecting Pool opens this week at Pioneer Theater.



Reflecting Pool

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