



John Waters: Interviews (Conversations with Filmmakers Series)

James Egan

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The films of John Waters (b. 1946) are some of the most powerful send-ups of conventional film forms and expectations since Luis Bu-uel and Salvador Dali's *Un Chien Andalou*. In attempting to reinvigorate the experience of movie-going with his shock comedy, Waters has been willing to take the chance of offending nearly everyone. His characters have great dignity and resourcefulness, taking what's different or unacceptable or grotesque about themselves, heightening it and turning it into a handmade personal style. The interviews collected here span Waters's career from 1965 to 2010 and include a new one exclusive to this edition.

Waters began making films in his hometown of Baltimore in 1964. Demonstrating an innate talent at capturing the hideous and crude and elevating it to art, he reached international acclaim with his outrageous shock comedy *Pink Flamingos*. This landmark film redefined cinema and became a cult classic. Appearing in this and many of Waters's early films, his star Divine would consistently challenge gender definitions.

With *Polyester*, Waters entered the mainstream. The film starred Divine as an unhappy housewife who romances a former teen idol played by Tab Hunter. Waters's commercial breakthrough, *Hairspray*, told the story of Baltimore's televised sock-hop program, *The Corny Collins Show*, and how one brave girl (Ricki Lake) used her platform as a dancer to end segregation in her town.

From *Serial Mom* and *Pecker* to *Cecil B. Demented*, Waters continued to infiltrate the mainstream with his unique approach to filmmaking. As a visual artist, he was given a retrospective at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 2004, which was shown at galleries around the world.

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