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Short List

"GÜNTER GRASS: GRAPHIC WORK, 1972-2007":

Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.



Günter Grass's etching "Self-Portrait with Dead Flies," from 1992, at Kasher.

through a series of mishaps, they become tabloid fodder. Though the movie trades on every gay stereotype in the book, it also pointedly lampoons them: the couple, who adapt to their newfound identity with a self-interested enthusiasm, soon inspire closeted gay men to come out. The result is a heartfelt yet painfully sincere liberal social-problem film that even offers a ringing endorsement of gay marriage but, playing to its target audience, avoids any hint of gay sex. Sandler, however, plays Chuck with an imposing comic vigor: in a tuxedo, with his hair slicked back and his Brooklyn accent thickened, he resembles a young Tony Curtis.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

JOSHUA

In George Ratliff's psychological thriller, a family of wealthy Upper East Siders is slowly driven crazy by their brilliant, unearthly son, Joshua (an appropriately unpleasant Jacob Kogan). Vera Farmiga is convincing as Abby, a rebellious mother whose unraveling results in pill-popping and worse; Sam Rockwell is excellent as the affable father who knows he is not nearly as smart as his son; and Dallas Roberts keeps his cool as the gay uncle who benevolently commiserates with Joshua when everyone else is fawning over the new baby girl in the house. A baffling dénouement, however, spoils an otherwise fairly absorbing film.—*Shanna Lyon* (In wide release.)

MAIDSTONE

Norman Mailer's third movie, shot in 1968—a three-ring circus of psychodramatic improvisations with himself at the center—exerts an extraordinary extra-cinematic fascination. In the first ring, Mailer stars as Norman T. Kingsley, a celebrity art-house movie director who is making an improvised "sexploitation" psychodrama about a male brothel for female clients, and who is also thinking of running for President. The second ring involves Kingsley's entourage of revolutionaries, the Cashbox, headed by his half brother Rey (Rip Torn). The third concerns a para-governmental agency that, fearing Kingsley's loose-cannon candidacy, is plotting to assassinate him. Keeping the camera largely on himself, Mailer lets fly with apocalyptic speculations on politics, sex, marriage, and metaphysics, yet he saves the best for last. Mailer convenes the cast for a group discussion of the work they did together, and then, as the troupe begins to disperse, Rip Torn, reverting to character, attacks Mailer with a hammer in the presence of Mailer's wife and children. The horror version of home movies is both terrifying and irresistible, as is the spectacle of a great writer playing lightly with his genius.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; July 26 and July 31.)

RATATOUILLE

For Remy (Lattin Oswald), the restless rodent who is the leading figure in Pixar's brilliant new animation feature, the omnivore's dilemma can be solved only by eating well. Rejecting the usual

rat's feast of garbage, Remy realizes that he needs to cook. Though "Ratatouille" starts out as a minor conceit about a rat who turns himself into a connoisseur, it becomes a gripping comic fable about the implacability of an artist. Washed into a sewer, Remy lands in Paris, where he makes himself known to a young man, Alfredo Linguini (Lou Romano), who has inherited a famous restaurant but cannot crack an egg. Quietly, he rides under Alfredo's toque and pulls tufts of his hair, controlling the young man's chopping and sauce-stirring techniques like a master puppeteer. Brad Bird's animation crew is good at so many things (for instance, the geography of the restaurant kitchen where much of the movie takes place) that one is released into the pleasures of the story and the details of culinary lore. With Peter O'Toole providing the voice of the feared food critic, Anton Ego, and Janeane Garofalo as a tough-minded sous-chef.—*D.D.* (7/23/07) (In wide release.)

RESCUE DAWN

Ten years ago, Werner Herzog made an extraordinary documentary called "Little Dieter Needs to Fly." This recounted the exploits of Dieter Dengler, a German-born pilot in the U.S. Navy, who was shot down on a secret mission over Laos in 1966, imprisoned in the jungle for many months, and finally, after an audacious breakout, picked up and brought back to safety. Now Herzog retells the tale as a feature film, starring Christian Bale—first chipper, then cadaverous—as the indestructible Dengler. Many of the highs and lows remain intact, including the hero's immersion in a well, the wooden stocks that were used to restrain him at night, and the eventual triumph of his return to the aircraft carrier from which he had set out. Yet the film lacks the hypnotic strangeness of the original, and the dramatized Dengler, however heroic his survival, feels like a watery imitation of the real thing. With Steve Zahn as Duane, a fellow-inmate of Dengler's; the highlight of the movie consists of the two starving men reciting frigidfuls of imaginary food.—*Anthony Lane* (7/9 & 16/07) (In wide release.)

SICKO

In the beginning of Michael Moore's attack on America's health-care system, he records heartbreaking interviews with families who have been betrayed or neglected by H.M.O.s and insurance companies. But then Moore hauls off three ailing Ground Zero rescue workers and other seriously ill people to Guantánamo Bay, where the detainees allegedly get good (and free) health care. The sick Americans are turned away, of course, and the joke seems insensitive. Moore does find some help for the rescue workers in Havana (the other sick Americans mysteriously vanish), and the rest of the movie is devoted to the wonders of health care in Canada, England, and France as well as in Cuba. But Moore accepts what doctors and patients abroad say at face value—as a report on national health services in different countries, the movie is worthless—and he doesn't interview a single American who might have ideas about reforming our own system. Since the majority of Americans want some form of national health care, Moore, for once, seems behind the curve.—*D.D.* (7/2/07) (In wide release.)

SUNSHINE

Reviewed this week in *The Current Cinema*. (In wide release.)

THE TENANT

Filmed in Paris with a French and American cast, the third of Roman Polanski's evil-apartment movies (following "Repulsion" and "Rosemary's Baby") is creepy, funny, and perilously misshapen. Polanski hit it about right when he wrote in his autobiography that the insanity of the anthero, a gentle immigrant bank clerk (played, sympathetically, by Polanski himself), "doesn't build gradually enough. His hallucinations are too startling and unexpected." The movie has its moments, though, both as a comic nightmare about the horrors of renting and as a Kafkaesque farce about a personality too weak for urban living. With Isabelle Adjani, Shelley Winters, Melvyn Douglas, and Jo Van Fleet. Released in 1976.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; July 30.)