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## Strange Girls

Rona Mark / United States of America / 2007 / 98 mins  
 Angela Berliner, Jordana Berliner, Andre DeLawrence Rice, Rick Montgomery, Adrienne Wehr, Michael Gilbert

Sun 22 Jun, 20:00 Filmhouse 2 £8.00/6.40  
 Sun 29 Jun, 15:15 Filmhouse 2 £5.00

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Everyone has known a pair of twins who made annoying claims about their psychic bond ("And then we BOTH GOT FLU AT THEM SAME TIME!"). Rona Mark's staggeringly weird, oddly delightful debut examines a more extreme case, zooming in on one of those twinships that involves secret languages, rabid possessiveness and shared psychosis. Played with riveting, dead-eyed zeal by Angela and Jordana Berliner, Georgia and Virginia are released from psychiatric hospital after the mysterious and horrible murder of their psychiatrist, in the hope that they can claw together normal and preferably separate lives. Instead, the girls move in together, and proceed to compete over the attentions of boys; face abuse from their trash-talking harlot neighbours (with whom they establish a high-camp, scatological feud worthy of John Waters) and discover some brand new leisure pursuits, including incestuous S&M role play and trepanation...

The extreme content is attention-grabbing in itself, of course; but it's also apparent that Mark, who shot this on a minuscule budget in the dilapidated rust belt of her native Pittsburgh, is a consummate filmmaker. Her terrific achievement here is to have constructed so economically a film that succeeds on so many separate levels: as a self-consciously trashy paean to the work of Waters, Roger Corman and Jack Smith; as a whacked-out, taboo-breaking horror film; and as a story of lonerdom and dependency that sustains emotional force despite the hysterical register in which it's told. The feminine principle in underground and "cult" cinema has often been confined to pre-defined functions - the hag, the sex kitten, the castrating mother (and even those archetypes have frequently been embodied by men in drag). Strange Girls cheerfully counters this distancing tendency, by allowing Georgia and Virginia to be sirens, tragic victims and radical anti-heroines, all at the same time.

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