Palinoia

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WATCH ON YOUTUBE

Artist Statement

The idea of restrictive and regimented female beauty standards is certainly not a new concept, but rarely are the repetitive, destructive, and exploitive aspects analyzed in a cinematic setting. This realization sparked the idea for Palinoia: a three minute and thirty-four second film dedicated to the artistic exploration of this very topic. Starting with the title itself, “palinoia” is defined as the obsessive or compulsive repetition of an action until it is mastered or perfect – a rather accurate statement when looked at in the context of female actions in response to societal beauty standards and expectations. This definition ultimately drove the direction of this short film, with the piece dedicated to visually and atmospherically depicting the repetition of these societal driven actions as well as the frustration and mental decline that comes along with them. The artistic focus of the film was shifted from a typical fixation on a narrative to an emphasis on a more abstracted and experimental piece which allowed for flexibility in the style utilized as well as impacting the overall message in a positive manner.

The film is broken up into four major parts that each include similar, sequential, and repetitive shots that feature symbolic objects and imagery that exemplify the lurking frustration that develops with every passing moment. The piece begins with a clock animation and the sound of an alarm clock which are consistently utilized throughout
the film as a way to frame each segment and show the repetition of actions. Each of the four sequences begin with a shot of a female shaving her legs, then continue into shots of objects such as beauty supplies, and end with a close up of the female protagonist’s face as she applies makeup. This arrangement assists in demonstrating not only the repetitive theme, but it also crafts a sense of unsettling familiarity due to how common the actions and objects are. While similar shots, objects, and actions are seen throughout all four sections of the short film, they are not portrayed in the same way. Starting with the first segment, each of the shots and actions captured exude a sense of calm normalcy – something that disappears as the film progresses thanks to new shots that radiate desperation, destruction, and frustration, with an example being the shot of nail polish being poured onto a hand. The music, which was arranged specifically for this piece, also contributes greatly to the overall tone and sense of exasperating repetition, as well as adds a mechanical and somber tone that matches the emotional state of the female protagonist.

As previously stated, each shot utilized in the film holds some sort of artistic and thematic purpose due to its placement and what it features within the frame, which leads to the individual pieces of imagery and symbolism that are seen throughout the film. Most of the objects seen within this short film are beauty products and are showcased so often that multiple shots are dedicated to showing a collection of supplies laid out on a flat surface. These materials and products include cosmetics, nail polish, and hairspray; all of these items are luxury products that are unnecessary for everyday hygiene but are, nevertheless, continually advertised to women as essential supplies in order to be beautiful and successful. Throughout the film, cosmetic products are utilized along with office supplies in order to allude to other ideas that relate to the overall cinematic theme. For example, in the second segment of the film, there is a shot that features a tube of tinted lip balm as well as a glue stick, both of which are presented in similar packaging and color schemes. This shot references the notion that women should keep their mouths shut and ideas to themselves, while also hinting to the idea that beauty standards also support a similar ideal. Likewise, towards the end of the film, another shot appears that features Wite-Out and a bottle of concealer which were selected because, in a way, they are the same product. They help to remove mistakes – an ideology that also alludes to the belief that female blemishes need to be removed or covered. Finally, another major piece of imagery utilized throughout the entire film is water, which is seen and heard in the shaving leg scenes and in the scenes with a glass of water that becomes smudged with lipstick prints and swirled with red fluid. Water was selected since it has a feminine connotation due to its linkage with birth, fertility, and pureness, while also being connected to the unconscious. Not to mention, water can be incredibly destructive and, therefore, connects with the film’s overarching idea of female destruction through societal expectations and unrealistic beauty standards.
While each shot is filled with different imagery that all support the film’s theme and idea, arguably the most obvious and consistent piece of symbolism is the use of color. With the exception of the clock animation and title graphics, every piece and shot within the film features a white backdrop with colored objects placed in front of white walls and on top of white surfaces. White is generally associated with purity and perfection, making it an appropriate background for the objects and actions since it not only conveys a sense of innocence and femininity, but it also simplifies the shots and draws attention to the objects. As for the objects themselves, all but a few props are covered in warm hues with most of the important items featuring a range of pinks and reds. Pink represents affection, playfulness, and femininity, while red symbolizes love, danger, and seduction – all of which connect back to female identity, advertising, and expectations in modern-day America. So, due to these correlations and the fact pink and red are so commonly seen in packing, products, and items targeted at women, it was decided that these two hues needed to dominate the screen in order to truly promote the notion of female destruction.

In conclusion, Palinoia is a carefully constructed and artistically focused short film that is dedicated to the visual exploration of how female beauty standards can influence women due to how repetitive, destructive, and explorative they are. Every shot was purposefully crafted in terms of prop selection, framing, on-screen movement, and color usage in order to deepen the message and overall idea. Likewise, the film was edited and paired with original music that compiles the shots into a cohesive sequence that not only exemplifies the idea of repetition but truly captures the frustration the protagonist is experiencing. Overall, Palinoia is raw and imperfect in a conscious manner that artistically conveys the layered complexity of damaging societal standards and the obsessive repetition of actions completed by women in order to meet these expectations. With the hope that by cinematically speaking about these issues, we can begin finding ways to solve them.