



Paul J. Bracco: Photograph (c) by Tammy Thederge.

# Art Zone

## THE COURT

By Gary Azon

"The Court", a gritty urban crime drama, by first-time director Paul J. Bracco, is a quality film that will surely appeal to fans of Martin Scorsese's "Goodfellas" and Abel Ferrara's "Bad Lieutenant". It was produced by Bracco's company, Red Hook Productions.

It's main attraction, to this viewer, is Bracco's engaging script. The writer/director, who also stars in this film, playing the lead role of Paulie - an all-purpose Mafia debt-collector and goon - has conceived of numerous scenes depicting the comedic banality of our quotidian life. These moments of comic relief are interspersed between scenes showing brutal acts of sadistic violence perpetrated by the pathological character, Paulie.

Paulie, well-played by Bracco, is a low-life member of a stereotypical Italian mob based in the Red Hook/Carroll Gardens area of Brooklyn. He has few redeeming values. He is a drug addict, a thief, a gambler, and an abuser of women. And he is quickly spiraling downward in a cocaine frenzy totally out of control.

Except for his devotion to his bed-ridden mother, Paulie is an utterly despicable personage who deserves his inevitable fate.

The bearded Bracco, who at times resembles a young John Turturro, is a cinematic triple-threat, in the mold of an Ed Burns, who can write, direct and act with obvious skill and talent.

This well-filmed, noirish tale, shot by Peter Wiehl, is surely good enough to attract investors in Bracco's future movie projects.

Though owing allegiance to bygone B-movies of earlier eras, "The Court" is a compelling story of a pathetic individual's self-destruction. It could also function as a cautionary tale preaching against associating with superficially cool but decidedly badass characters.

On another level, the film also makes a point about selecting wisely when choosing a mentor. A decision that goes horribly wrong with Paulie's naive younger cousin, Joey.

Paulie is like an evil tornado sucking those closest to him to their destruction.

Paulie's relationship with Joey is most Shakespearean in its tragic dimensions. He inexorably draws the engaging teenager, sympathetically acted by Fred Berman, into his web of mayhem, malevolence and murder.

Joey tags along for a good time and gets far more than he could have imagined. Theft, robbery, assault and, finally, cold-blooded murder are his rites of passage.

Other good roles worth mentioning are the luncheonette owner Blaise, played by the veteran actor Vinny Vela, and Joey's over-the-top suffocating mother, acted by Lucy Dell'Aquila. They both add different notes of human interest to the tragic story.

"The Court" had its premier at the New York International Independent Film And Video Festival in April, 1998. The packed screening of the film at NYU's Cantor Film Center was enthusiastically received by an appreciative audience. And Bracco, by the way, won the festival award for Best Young Director.

## NUDITY

The five nude women were languidly standing on their high heeled shoes before an assembled mass of voyeurs. They were interspersed among fourteen maroon bikini-clad cohorts. The bikinis glittered quietly.

Many men in the well-dressed crowd sized up the naked women and mentally made love to them one by one. Was this a scene at a chic upscale topless club? No. It was the public unveiling of Italian artist Vanessa Beecroft's performance piece entitled "Show". The event was produced by Yvonne Force, Inc., and presented at the uptown Guggenheim Museum.

Held in early May, the performance lasted about two hours. The models posed as if in a life drawing class. The poses slowly changed with some of the women eventually kneeling or sitting down. The mostly blonde group of white females were apparently selected for their similarity in physique - tall, mostly flat-chested mannequins.

Unlike most art events, this one stimulated much conversation among the fashion-conscious onlookers. Discussions of sexism and the issue of exploitation of women were frequently overheard. One female art dealer said the performance as "Deeply unsettling." And a disheveled man cried out, "You fools!" as he ran out of the building.

All in all, it was a night of unparalleled public voyeurism.

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