

**FILM**



Alberto (top) is "not like that," but he sure acts like it in *Second Skin*

## Seconds, anyone?

New Spanish film offers real emotion and dazzling sex

BY GARY MORRIS

"I'm not like *that!*" says Alberto (Jordi Molla) to his secret lover, Diego (Javier Bardem), in *Second Skin*, which opens Aug. 16 at Hollywood Theatre.

"That," as you might guess, is queer—a comment that's especially alarming after Alberto's earlier wistful declaration of love. Gerardo Vera's steamy film presents the classic dilemma of the faithless husband with a gay twist.

Hunky engineer Alberto is married to Elena (Ariadna Gil), and they have a kid from the long-gone days when they were still having sex. He is understandably bored to death with middle-class hetero life, though he also clings desperately to it.

Alberto has discovered his gay side and pursues it furtively with the even hunkier Diego, a surgeon. Inevitably, the pressure of trying to have the social approval and ease that come with straight life along with a sweaty queer romance on the side causes our protagonist to become both crazed and careless. He can't help but leave a little trail of cell phone messages and hotel receipts, which Elena, of course, discovers.



Ariadna Gil is great as Alberto's tortured wife

From there it's a dizzying spiral of accusations, unmet demands for love and commitment among all parties, breakdowns, other liaisons and a final tragedy that removes one member of this triangle without making it easy for the remaining two to be together.

One of the lures of *Second Skin* is its candor in treating the details of Alberto and Diego's liaisons. Queer viewers so often have to contend themselves with fadeouts, drawn curtains, a nervous camera that shifts to a window or a seascape rather than honestly witness the troubling tableau of man on man. This movie shows how far we—or at least Spain, where the film was made—have come from those days and how unnecessary such subterfuge is.

Alberto and Diego are porn-star sexy, and their love scenes are presented as natural and, indeed, desirable, with Diego's pleasure at

falling in love palpable and the tormented Alberto gaining a sense of peace—if temporarily—by acting on his true desires.

Hot straight actors playing gay men seems to have become a staple of Spanish cinema lately, and Bardem, whose charms first surfaced on the international scene in 1992's *Jamon Jamon*, is the poster boy for this movement. (Penis spotters were well rewarded by the film's much-remarked midnight "bullfighting" scene.) As Diego, he's alternately passionate and submissive and mostly convincing as the uncloseted gay man trying to forge a life with a tortured bisexual.

The almost indecent good looks of Molla, another alumnus of *Jamon*, threaten to capsize his characterization—or at least distract the viewer into an uncritical stupor of lust—but his unabashed emotionalism gives Alberto the gravitas necessary to convey his dilemma.

Like any self-respecting actor, Bardem hasn't hesitated to "play gay" in his career—most notably in *Before Night Falls*—though he apparently did have some trepidation about the love scenes in *Second Skin*.

"In the stronger scenes," he's quoted as saying, "I could easily have felt a bit uncomfortable—they're pretty explicit—but luckily, we were amongst friends. I don't know whether I could have done this role with another actor. Between Jordi and me, there is trust and friendship." So convincing is their chemistry that one can imagine trust, friendship and more outside the set.

Director Vera has said the film is autobiographical, which might account for the sense of engagement in its issues. No pat answers are offered, though. None of the characters is presented as villainous, though Alberto skirts it during a party when he's publicly dismissive of Diego.

Gil as the suffering wife manages to sidestep the role's soapier aspects, bringing a sense of entrapment and confusion to Elena. Cecilia Roth (memorable in Pedro Almodovar's *All About My Mother*) also registers strongly as Diego's boss, Eva, a strong, sexy woman whose unrequited love for Diego filigrees the work.

The one area where *Second Skin* suffers is in its syrupy score, which uses swirling violins relentlessly to underscore the notion of the characters' drift. Such melodramatics are irritating and unnecessary in a film that works hard to avoid the soap opera inherent in the story. **✪**

GARY MORRIS is a Portland free-lance writer who most definitely is like that.

## Swan House

Caring For People Living With HIV/AIDS

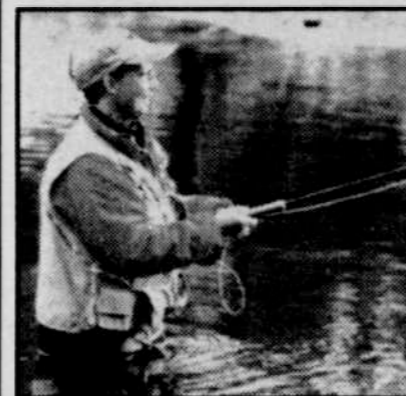
Invites you to our 2002 fundraiser  
at Creation Gallery & Design • 8419 SE Clatsop Court  
August 24 1-5pm

Creation Gallery is the most unique art gallery in Portland. With over 400 pieces of original art from around the world, each beautifully framed. Contribute to Swan House and purchase original art at a very inexpensive price. Prices range from as low as \$50-\$500.

Wine, punch & food will be available as you view this wonderful collection of art. For more information call Pamela - 503-786-4829

## "REEL WOMEN" Fly Fishing 101 Seminars

Sept 20-22



Lodging for 2 nights on the Metolius River  
1-1/2 Day Flyfish Seminar & Hands-On Instruction  
Reduced rate for non-fishing partner (\$95)  
Equipment provided  
Meals

For information & reservations  
Call "Cee"  
toll free: 1-866-752-9822  
email: cee@playtimevacations.com

**\$170pp**  
Class sizes are limited  
we recommend early  
reservations



## WENTWORTH SUBARU

# COME IN FOR A NO HASSLE PRICE!



## IF WE'RE NOT THE CHEAPEST... WE'LL MATCH ANY ADVERTISED PRICE IN OREGON\*

503-232-2000

SUBARU   
The Beauty of All Wheel Drive.

**WENTWORTH  
SUBARU**

\* On an exact MSRP in stock

www.wentworthsubaru.com

107 SE Grand • 4 Blocks South of the Convention Center • 503-232-2000