

Three kids with cameras



AVIGIT, 2004

Power of the Camera

Children's world through photography

BORN INTO BROTHELS (Documentary, 2004): Directed, produced and filmed by Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski. Executive producer GERALYN White Dreyfous and Pamela Tanner Boll. Editors, Nancy Baker and Ross Kauffman. R. 83 minutes. HBO/Cinemax. ThinkFilm, 2004. **Winner 2004 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Audience Award, 2004 Sundance. Audience Award, 2004 Amnesty International Film Festival.**

Beginning in 2000, London-born, New York-resident documentary photographer Zana Briski began holding photography workshops with children of prostitutes living in the brothels of Calcutta, India. In 2001, documentary film

editor and cinematographer Ross Kauffman joined her. They won grants from the Sundance Institute, the Jerome Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts to finish the film. Many sources of funding were necessary for this years-long project. While ultimately bearing Briski and Kaufmann's imprint, the film belongs to the amazing children you meet.

Briski lived in the dangerous slums that make up Sonagachi, the red-light district of North Calcutta, where she photographed the lives of the women sex-workers. But after meeting the kids, Briski brought cameras for

them and taught them to use the cameras to shoot pictures on the street, in their rooms and hallways and rooftops. She ran a workshop where the kids learned everything about photography she could teach them. They shared their pictures, evaluated them, learned from their mistakes. And the work they created is very good.

Briski selected some of the best work to go into an exhibit she took to New York, London and eventually to Calcutta, where the kids saw their own work on the walls of a gallery. The sale of prints goes into a fund to help the young photographers. Briski found schools to take the eight most talented boys and girls. She advocated on behalf of the kids with their families, who were often reluctant to put them in boarding schools and spent uncounted hours assembling the necessary documents for the schools.

Along with a growing sense of a photographer's way of seeing the world, the children come to believe in possibilities for a different life. It is doubly hard to hear the most talented among them, 12-year old Avigit, say that hope is not in his future. Yet against formidable familial, economic and class-related odds, a few children who received cameras from Briski are now pursuing their education.

Some say there is an ethical question about whether any person outside the culture should come into a community and actively help disadvantaged children to aspire to a better life. It's asking a great deal of both the child and the family. But neither Briski nor Kaufman seem to have unrealistic expectations for the children. Briski shows respect to the kids' mothers and grandmothers — prostitution often spans generations within a fam-

ily — and she does not alienate them. But the girls, ages from 10 to 14, are vulnerable to being swept into being "in the line."

As boys Avigit, 12, Gour, 13, and Manik, 10 have difficult economic expectations laid upon them. Avigit, the most promising natural artist, has a terrible time emotionally when his mother dies. He has developed a maturity that belies his age at the cost of having a childhood. With a big smile and a big heart, Gour wants to attend college. He has tender feelings for his best friend Puja, an 11-year-old tomboy, and wants to get her out of Sonagachi. Puja's photographs are mostly of her room, which she shares with her mother, great-grandmother and pet parrots.

Manik is a quiet boy who loves to fly kites. He lives with his sister Shanti and their mother. Shanti, 11, is a budding cinematographer, who filmed one of the classroom scenes. Kochi, 10, is a shy girl who takes pictures of her family, animals, gardens and parks. She says she wants to change her environment. Suchitra, 14, the most gifted girl photographer, is also the most at-risk. Her photo of her sister's friend was chosen as the cover of the Amnesty International 2003 calendar. Tapasi, 11, photographs the hard reality of her life and dreams of being a teacher and taking her younger siblings out of the red light district.

Born Into Brothels shows children finding within themselves a creative force that liberates them, however briefly, from a life they seem fated to live. These youngsters use the experience of discovering self-expression to show us their world. They are joyous and utterly unforgettable. Film opens Friday at the Bijou with my very highest recommendations. **EW**

Fresh-Squeezed Pulp

No shades of gray

SIN CITY, Frank Miller's: Directed by Frank Miller, Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino. Written by Robert Rodriguez, based on stories from *Sin City*, Frank Miller's graphic novel series: "The Hard Good-Bye," "The Big Fat Kill," and "That Yellow Bastard." Cinematographer, Robert Rodriguez. Editor, Robert Rodriguez. Music, John Debney, Graeme Revell, Robert Rodriguez. Special effects, CafeFX; The Orphanage. Starring Jessica Alba, Rosario Dawson, Elijah Wood, Bruce Willis, Benicio Del Toro, Michael Clarke Duncan, Carla Gugino, Josh Hartnett, Michael Madsen, Jaime King, Brittany Murphy, Clive Owen, Mickey Rourke, Nick Stahl, Marley Shelton, Powers Booth, Devon Aoki, Alexis Bledel and Rutger Hauer. Produced by Elisabeth Avellan, Frank Miller, Robert Rodriguez. Executive producers, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Andrew Rona, Brad Weston. Dimension Films, 2005. R. 126 minutes.

In Robert Rodriguez's highly stylized version of three linked stories, the noir sensibility of Frank Miller's graphic novel is never absent. None of the film's killers suffer remorse. The male heroes — a used-up, renegade cop, John Hartigan (Bruce Willis); a beserk street fighter hell-bent on revenge, Marv (Mickey Rourke); and a physically altered former physician, Dwight (Clive Owen) — kill, torture and dismember with impunity.

Some women are their victims, such as Marley Shelton, The Man's first prey; Nancy (Jessica Alba), who was abducted as a child; Lucille (Carla Gugino), Marv's parole officer; Shellie (Brittany Murphy), a bar maid; and Goldie (Jaime King), Marv's prostitute lover. Some women aren't victims. They do all of the same things the men do but with more flair: Gail (Rosario Dawson), Miho (Devon Aoki) and Becky (Alexis Bledel). They relish killing.

Welcome to the world of *Sin City*, where everybody is a potential killer or worse. In this black-and-white world, you're either with the good guys (and gals) or else you're dead or soon gonnabe. There's no middle ground, no second chances, no way out. The rules are: There are no rules.

If this sounds suspiciously like an adolescent fantasy, well, there you have it. But if you think that means it isn't entertaining, you're dead wrong. This flick entertains even when it repulses, which is frequently. Shed blood is most often a silvery, wet

stands out. Although he's sorely lacking ethics, Marv's a simple guy. Someone killed his girl. He's going to find out who did it and kill him slowly. Don't get in his way. From the time he wakes up in a heart-shaped bed with the beautiful, dead blonde, Goldie, Marv's on a mission. He helps Goldie's twin sister, Wendy, settle things with the political family behind the killings, the Roarks. It's an ugly business, but Marv's willing to wade in and set things right with the morally lapsed Senator Roark (Powers Booth) and Bishop Roark (Rutger Hauer), but he saves the good stuff for a nasty piece of work, Roark Jr. aka the Yellow Bastard (Nick Stahl). Gruesome, yes.



Jackie-Boy (Benicio Del-Toro)

RICO TORRES, DIMENSION FILMS, 2005

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF SIN CITY, WHERE EVERYBODY IS A POTENTIAL KILLER OR WORSE.

The bad guys — The Man (Josh Hartnett), a suave lover/killer; the demented Jackie Boy (Benicio Del Toro); and a nutcase named Kevin (Elijah Wood) — also murder, torment and tear bodies apart. In addition, they also hurt women.

looking puddle, occasionally white, yellow or even red. But it never looks like blood. Likewise, most of the film's minor thugs, villains and heroes look and sound alike.

Only gravelly voiced Marv (Rourke)

Extreme, right. But deserved.

Well, you see how easy it is to be corrupted by a piece of clever filmmaking. We gave up our collective cherry for *Pulp Fiction* and have been rewarded by the various Tarantino blood baths that followed.

Righteousness wears thin. To be a mega-popular hit, we only ask that our vicious killers and brave victims be cool and look good. *Sin City* is now playing at Cinema World and Cinemark. Don't hurry. It's going to be around for awhile. **EW**