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PIERRE HUYGHE: 'The Host and the Cloud'

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

Marian Goodman Gallery

24 West 57th Street

Manhattan

Through March 12

Maybe we're all captives in someone else's movie. That's one conclusion to be drawn from [Pierre Huyghe's latest show](#), a beautiful downer that consists of a sometimes ravishing but long, over-brainy film, "The Host and the Cloud," and three extraordinary color-coordinated tanks populated by exotic fish, anemones and other forms of sea life.

That the action in the tanks is livelier and makes more sense than most of what transpires on-screen is the first sign of trouble. In any event, the silent, slow-moving sea creatures definitely echo the rhythms of people who drift through the movie, which was shot with a cast of actors on three holidays — [Halloween](#), [Valentine's Day](#) and [May Day](#) — in a building in Paris that once housed the National Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions. The museum functions as a kind of aquarium whose inhabitants do the bidding of the artist (or host) or at least respond to conditions he created. Frequent clouds of mist, several kinds of puppetry and a lone animated hare hint at previous Huyghe works and suggest that the film is a kind of retrospective.

It is also a slow form of strangulation in which an artist's pretensions, while not without interest, are extensively indulged. Bits of museum business blend with performance art, holiday rituals and notions of display and presentation. For example, people in witches' garb carve pumpkins in what may have once been a conservation lab; Valentine's Day culminates in a fake, dimly lighted orgy; caterpillars and butterflies welcome spring. A lone model conducts an intermittent fashion show in the lobby, her entrances and exits noted mostly by a small pack of yapping puppies. People wearing

metal masks (something like lighted cheese-graters) stage some kind of aborted trial but otherwise march around in black capes.

The film comes briefly, almost shockingly to life only once, when, back in the lobby, a young Parisian street dancer outdoes Michael Jackson to the tune of "Thriller." The brief burst of vitality may make you gasp. It is like coming up for air and remembering the pleasure of breathing. The fish in their tanks come much closer to viable art.



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