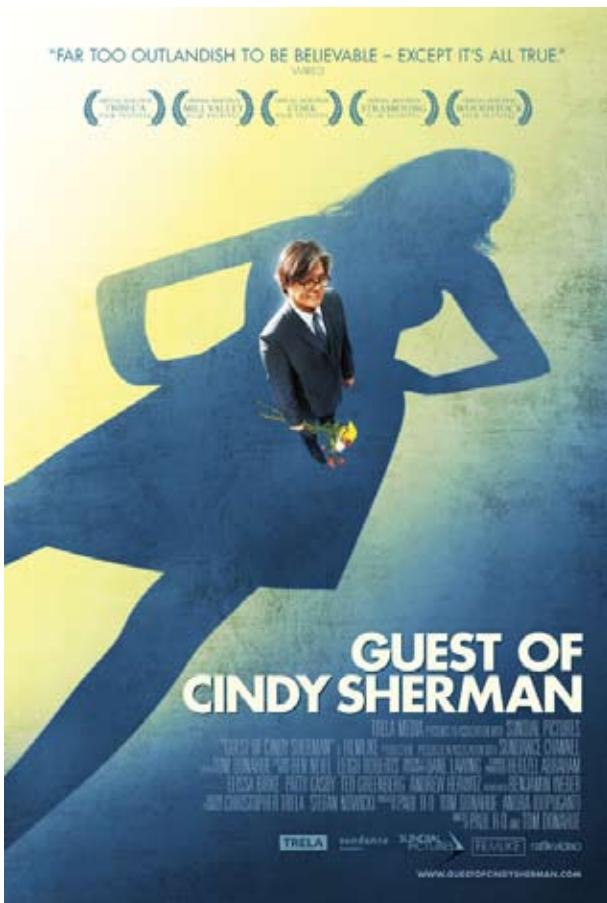


GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN



A Feature Documentary

by

Paul H-O and Tom Donahue

"I found it sweet, disturbing, awkward and romantic all at once – and one of the most revealing portraits I've ever seen of the mistress of camouflage "

-Elle Magazine

" ★★★★☆... brings the art world of the '80s and '90s down to an accessible level."

-Time Out New York

"If a doc manages to inform and entertain, it's ahead of the competition. And if it manages not to lose its assets while dipping its toe into murkier issues... then it's really a work of art. Such is Guest of Cindy Sherman"

-Variety

"Far too outlandish to be believable – except it's all true"

-Wired

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"Delightful...a fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpse, bittersweet autobiography and witty trip down art-world memory lane."

-Nathan Lee; The New York Times

GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN

A Feature Documentary

Directed by Paul H-O & Tom Donahue

In 1979, Cindy Sherman rocked the NYC art world at age 26 with her "Film Stills." The haunting photographic series appears to chronicle actresses in the midst of dramatic and evocative film scenes, but is in fact the artist herself posing as the different subjects. Hailed for her play on media and identity, the shy and reclusive Sherman almost always uses herself as the model in her photographs and always in disguise.

Today, at age 54, she is internationally acknowledged as one of the world's most gifted and significant visual talents -- in May 1999, ARTnews named Sherman, alongside Matisse and Picasso, as one of "The 20th Century's Most Influential Artists." Although Sherman's work is collected by every major art museum in the world, she has proven elusive as a media personality. She is not a self-promoter and leads a quiet private life. Sherman rarely does interviews and never explains the meaning of her work. Fans, desperate for a glimpse of this art world celebrity at her 2003 opening in England's Serpentine Gallery, could not recognize who they were looking for.

Enter her complete opposite -- Paul H-O, a former artist-turned-opinionated host/creator of the public-access series, *GalleryBeat*. In the nineties, Paul's weekly show developed a cult following, chronicling often-inexplicable happenings in the contemporary art world. Produced on a shoestring budget with help from Art in America magazine editors Walter Robinson and Cathy Lebowitz, the program was a labor of love, driven by a strong affinity for art and its creators. Subjects ranged from the Russian conceptual artist Oleg Kulik (who, performing as a dog, bit an art critic); to profiles of artist-luminaries like Sean Landers and Cecily Brown. By the late nineties, Paul had become a recognizable fixture in the art scene, picking up fans and detractors: artist Julian Schnabel, entangled in an on-camera argument with Paul, called the program "idiotic."

In 1999, Paul learned that Cindy Sherman counted herself among his fans. At once, he set out to capture the ultimate prize in art world journalism -- to tape a series of interviews with the elusive artist. Cornering her at an art gallery opening, Paul asked for her participation. Surprising many (including Paul), Sherman agreed. As he started the series of interviews, fun banter turned into harmless flirting, and harmless flirting turned into something more - Paul and Cindy were falling in love. Soon after they started dating, Paul faced a series of personal crises, including illness and bankruptcy. Cindy stood by him, providing her love and support. In 2001, Paul moved into her SoHo loft, becoming further enmeshed in her world.

Guest of Cindy Sherman takes an eye-opening look at what happens when a skeptical outsider finds himself romantically involved with the ultimate insider. Paul's assumption that dating a famous artist would be a piece of cake was quickly proved wrong. "As a writer, I thought it'd be great to be a fly on the wall in some of the most elite salons in the world," he relates, "but as a person, it really sucks to be treated like one."

GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN

A Feature Documentary

Directed by Paul H-O & Tom Donahue

In 2003, he has a rude awakening - invited to an A-list dinner party with Cindy, Paul can't find his name among the place settings. A sinking feeling sets in as he realizes his place card reads, simply, "Guest of Cindy Sherman," and is located on a table far away from his date. Woefully, he comes to realize he has lost all that had given him his sense of worth – his show, his money, and now even his name.

Through it all, he continues to turn his camera on Cindy, chronicling their life together. With unprecedented access, *Guest of Cindy Sherman* places us in the intimate company of a great artist. It asks the central questions – how could such a seemingly sweet woman create such dark and uncompromising work? How does the artist continue to reinvent herself and her work without the round-the-clock management, publicity and stylists that accompany other stars in their chameleon-like transformations?

The documentary combines rare, intimate vérité of Sherman with anecdotes by friends and associates (filmmaker John Waters, writer/performer Eric Bogosian, artist Eric Fischl, Interview Magazine editor Ingrid Sischy, actors Danny De Vito, Carol Kane, Jeanne Tripplehorn and Molly Ringwald, producer Christine Vachon, New York Times art critic Roberta Smith, collector Eli Broad, fashion designer Muccia Prada, among others) and dozens of hours of *GalleryBeat* footage. Also interviewed are Cindy's relatives and college friends, and the documentary includes Super-8 home movies shot by Sherman's father. Paul and his video camera went with Cindy to every opening she's had in the last five years, on their vacations, to summers at the beach, recording the glamour of being a celebrity artist and the more mundane aspects of her everyday life.

Guest of Cindy Sherman is both a quirky valentine to one of the greats and an uncompromising look at the art industry itself, seen through the penetrating gaze of a man who discovers that while he's finally found a happy, fulfilling relationship, somewhere along the way, he lost himself.

FESTIVALS & SCREENINGS

(As of April 2009)

- 2008 Tribeca Film Festival (World Premiere)
- 2008 Provincetown International Film Festival
- 2008 Rhode Island International Film Festival
- 2008 Downtown Film Festival – Los Angeles
- 2008 Woodstock International Film Festival
- 2008 Mill Valley International Film Festival
- Maryland Institute of Contemporary Art
- Cleveland Institute of Contemporary Art
- 2008 Cucalorus Film Festival
- 2008 Starz Denver International Film Festival
- 2008 St. Louis International Film Festival
- 2008 Berks Movie Madness Film Festival
- Ojai Film Festival 2008
- 2008 Strasbourg Film Festival
- 2008 International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film
- 2008 Dallas Video Festival
- Cork Film Festival 2008
- 2008 Bergen International Film Festival
- 2008 Santa Fe Film Festival
- 2009 Goteborg International Film Festival
- 2009 Big Sky Film Festival
- Northwest Film Center, Portland OR
- Doc Soup, Toronto
- Cantor Film Center, New York University
- 2009 Bermuda International Film Festival
- 2009 Riverrun International Film Festival
- Documenta Madrid 2009
- 2009 Melbourne International Film Festival



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REVIEW QUOTES

(As of September 2008)

"If a doc manages to inform and entertain, it's ahead of the competition. And if it manages not to lose its assets while dipping its toe into murkier issues... then it's really a work of art. Such is Guest of Cindy Sherman"

-Variety

"Riveting, witty and quite sophisticated portrait of three overlapping subjects of varying depths."

-Premiere Magazine

"5 Stars... brings the art world of the '80s and '90s down to an accessible level."

-Time Out New York

"Far too outlandish to be believable – except it's all true"

-Wired

"Scores of interviews with art-scene players give dimension to the strange story of Cindy and Paul.."

-The Village Voice

"I found it sweet, disturbing, awkward, and romantic all at once--and one of the most revealing portraits I've ever seen of the mistress of camouflage."

-Elle Magazine

"Funny, swift, compelling, with sweet highs & lows.."

-Art Lovers New York

"[A] remarkably watchable record of the New York art scene at the turn of the last century."

-The Listener

The New York Times

MOVIE REVIEW

Guest of Cindy Sherman (2008)



Treia Media

"Guest of Cindy Sherman," directed by Tom Donahue and Paul Hasegawa-Overacker.

For the Love of Art

By NATHAN LEE
Published: March 27, 2009

Now here's a trend you don't often see: apparently, it's Cindy Sherman ex-lover month at the movies. "The Feature," an experimental memoir by Ms. Sherman's ex-husband Michel Auder, recently played at Anthology Film Archives. And now "Guest of Cindy Sherman," by Paul Hasegawa-Overacker (a.k.a. Paul H-O), offers an even more intimate look at the personal life of Ms. Sherman, the photographer.

Co-directed by Tom Donahue, the documentary revisits the heyday of "Gallery Beat," a breezy, irreverent public-access cable show hosted by Paul H-O. Begun in 1993, as the art world suffered a hangover after the 1980s, "Gallery Beat" functioned as a scrappy social diary for the scene.

Delightful archival footage captures the spark of Paul H-O's first encounter with Ms. Sherman, and the mutually flirtatious heat that ensued. With touching intimacy and charm, "Guest" chronicles the relationship that developed between them, first as interlocutor and subject, then as lovers and finally as a couple undone by the pressures, and prejudices, of superstardom.

At once a fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpse, bittersweet autobiography and witty trip down art-world memory lane, "Guest of Cindy Sherman" isn't out to settle scores or exploit access, public or otherwise. The only person who comes off looking bad is the eternally peevish Julian Schnabel, one of dozens of luminaries captured (or cornered) by Paul H-O's mirthful camera.



Guest Of Cindy Sherman

2008, Movie, NR, 88 mins

Main Review Cast & Details News Photos TV Listings

Guest Of Cindy Sherman: Review

Be the first to leave a comment



★★★

Paul Hasegawa-Overacker, better known as Paul H-O, has an interesting story to tell about the New York art scene of the 1990s. As one of the hosts of "GalleryBeat," a public access program, he was on the fringes of the scene, but that gave him a surprising level of access (he got people to talk more freely because they knew the audience was small) and the uniquely skewed perspective of the outsider. These elements coalesce into an engaging document in *Guest of Cindy Sherman*, which offers an overview of the TV show, with particular emphasis on his relationship with the esteemed and

famously reclusive photographer. H-O shares directing credit with accomplished indie producer/editor Tom Donahue, but thankfully, the filmmakers are unabashed about showing the less successful moments of his TV career, including a hilarious on-camera verbal beatdown by Julian Schnabel. The story of the rise and fall of H-O's romance with Sherman holds a certain fascination. H-O doesn't exactly handle living in her shadow gracefully, but at least he demonstrates some degree of self-awareness, and allows others to point out that his difficulty in accepting their respective roles is connected to a distinctly male sense of entitlement and ego. The film is more valuable as an entertainingly fast-paced look at Sherman's significance as a female artist whose primary subject was identity, and at the art boom of the late '90s and its discontents. H-O has made an engaging, funny, and illuminating film; one hopes he would appreciate the irony of the fact that he's the least interesting thing in it. ▶ [leave a comment](#) --Josh Ralske

Film

Time Out New York / Issue 704 : Mar 26–Apr 1, 2009

★★★★★ ★ | ★[RATE THIS]★
Critic's Rating

Film of the week

Guest of Cindy Sherman

Dirs. Paul H-O and Tom Donahue. 2008. N/R. 88mins. Documentary.



VIDEO KILLED THE ART STAR Sherman broadcasts, flirts, with codirector H-O.

There's the piece of art itself: central, maybe in a nice frame or something. Then there's the doodle on the side. And sometimes, that doodle has more to say than the artist. In the case of *Guest of Cindy Sherman*, the doodle is Paul Hasegawa-Overacker, better known as "Paul H-O," the gadfly host of public television's *Gallery Beat*, a '90s-era snarkcast. After a while, Paul became that show's former host and the current boyfriend of an internationally celebrated art star. Then he became her former boyfriend and the host of nothing.

Guest of Cindy Sherman, as this giddy, deceptively deep self-portrait implies, has less to do with the chameleonic photographer herself than it does the warping auras of competing fame bubbles. Still, there's more raw, revealing stuff about Sherman (not to mention other artists and their disgusting publicists) than in most examinations. H-O, working with editor Tom Donahue, includes his original interviews with Sherman: charming footage of the artist in her studio, laughing, being coy. It's the beginning of their courtship. We also go to the Hamptons, cruise on a private plane, and see the transition from his shitty Brooklyn apartment to a multimillion-dollar lifestyle and back.

Ultimately, the doc arrives at a Kaufmanesque notion of identity theft, and while the filmmaker-subject flatters himself as an equal to Sherman, there's an irony (explored in a public bit of radio therapy) about Paul's ego being undermined by a professional ghost. With unusual access, *Guest of Cindy Sherman* talks to other shadow people, like Elton John's companion, David Furnish, resulting in some painful admissions. Are these just insecure men learning about what women have long dealt with? Perhaps. Not a bad idea to put in a movie.

—Joshua Rothkopf

Time Out
New York

The Ride Of His Life 03/27/09

by stephanie cash

A new documentary film, *Guest of Cindy Sherman*, which premiered in theaters at the end of March, provides a behind-the-scenes look at the artist and the 1990s art world, as seen through the eyes of its star and co-producer, former artist and dedicated surfer Paul Hasegawa-Overacker. Centered around his romantic relationship with Sherman, the story begins in 1993 when Paul H-O, as he is familiarly known, got a video camera and launched his public-access TV show "Gallery Beat." An irreverent and well-informed program, Gallery Beat featured H-O, along with A.i.A. staffers Cathy Lebowitz and Walter Robinson (who is now at Artnet) as they went to openings, chatted with artists, visited studios and humorously tracked all manner of goings-on in the New York art world. Throughout the documentary, such notables as David Ross, Roberta Smith, Jerry Saltz, Judd Tully, Charlie Finch, John Waters and Eric Bogosian, along with assorted friends and family, provide commentary about H-O and his TV show, his relationship with Sherman, and her work.



Filmmaker Paul Hasegawa-Overacker interviewing Cindy Sherman for his show *GalleryBeat*.

As H-O says in the film, Gallery Beat launched in the recession of the early '90s, when "the art world was really friendly because everybody was pretty much broke" and half the galleries were going out of business. Viewers get to revisit the scrappy start, in 1994, of the Gramercy International Art Fair (at the then-downtrodden, now swanky Gramercy Park Hotel), for example, before it morphed into the Armory Show, and watch Tracey Emin and Jay Jopling, relatively unknown at the time, hang around their hotel room. As the film progresses, and the art world begins to overheat with money and celebrity, dealers and artists become less cooperative with the Gallery Beat crew and less tolerant of H-O's in-your-face antics.

Along the way, H-O meets Cindy Sherman. After many months, because she is intrigued by H-O, she accepts his request for an interview. Following a series of flirtatious, squirm-inducing on-camera encounters with the paradoxically camera-shy artist, they begin to date, and H-O eventually moves in with her in 2000. He lives the high life for a while, attending A-list parties and jetting out to L.A. with the art-world elite on Eli Broad's private jet. Soon enough, however, as his first TV show flounders in 2002 and a new one fails, the film becomes more about H-O's bruised ego. After five years, as H-O and the relationship begin to crack under the strain of his feelings of inadequacy, he engages in avoidance through surfing. A pivotal moment for H-O was attending a gallery dinner at which, seated several tables away from his girlfriend, his place card read "Guest of Cindy Sherman."

H-O then does a little soul-searching. He interviews other people on the topic of being a +1, including Eric Fischl and April Gornik, and Elton John's husband David Furnish. Yet even after he is "downsized" in 2006—we see him inflating an airbed in his humble new digs—his admiration for Sherman never wanes.

Sherman, who had final approval on the film, issued a statement disavowing her role in its making when it screened at the Tribeca Film Festival last summer. She said, in part, "I apologize to all those who participated, thinking they were doing me a favor in giving interviews and otherwise assisting in the fabrication of this film. Against my better judgment, it was clearly unwise to cooperate with the project at its inception." She needn't worry. She remains an endearingly enigmatic figure whom H-O never topples from her pedestal. And H-O manages to weave in an intriguing overview of her career, particularly its early days. The film was completed before the current economic crisis, and H-O seems prescient when, lamenting what the art world has become, he says in a voiceover, "something's gonna happen." And then he surfs off into the sunset.

[*Guest of Cindy Sherman*, is now screening at Cinema Village in New York City.]

A GUIDE TO THE CITY'S BEST
RESTAURANTS & ENTERTAINMENT

NEW YORK.

Tribeca Watch: Four Not to Miss

The film festival's greatest strength? NYC documentaries.

By Sara Cardace Published Apr 21, 2008

Add a Comment

GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN

Directors: Paul Hasegawa-Overacker ("Paul H-O") and Tom Donahue.

The Lowdown: H-O's camera captures awkward early flirtations between him and Sherman (he's her jilted ex) and more than a scene's share of self-aggrandizing.

Look Out For: The moment when Julian Schnabel lets loose on H-O for a perceived slight, calling his public-access show "idiotic" and "masturbatory."



(Photo: Courtesy of Filmlike)

Own This City

Time Out
New York

Own This City

Staff review: Guest of Cindy Sherman

Posted in [Tribeca Film Festival 2008](#) by [Lindsey Unterberger](#) on May 4th, 2008 at 8:02 pm

TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL WRAP-UP

***** (Five stars)

Director Paul H-O began his career as the Wayne (as in *Wayne's World*) of New York City's art scene. Really. In the early '90s he started his own public-access TV show called *Gallery Beat*. In his documentary *Guest of Cindy Sherman*, Paul brings the art world of the '80s and '90s down to an accessible level for those relatively unfamiliar with it. And while the story is based around art, it is also a love story. Paul befriends—and ultimately winds up dating—the iconic and notoriously reclusive artist Cindy Sherman. It is his relationship with Cindy that takes him from the outskirts of the elite art community to the status of a true insider. However, he is ultimately unable to deal with playing trophy boyfriend to his famous girlfriend. While Paul's in-your-face interview style and seemingly self-indulgent tantrums prove irksome at times, his humor and courage to film himself in such an unself-conscious way (not to mention his myriad candid interviews with major art players) more than compensate for any quirks of his outsize personality.

Posted: Fri., May 2, 2008, 2:09pm PT

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Tribeca

Guest of Cindy Sherman **(Documentary)**

By JOHN ANDERSON

A Filmlike presentation in association with Sundance Channel. Produced by Paul H-O, Tom Donahue, Anura Idupuganti. Co-producer, Christopher Trela. Directed by Paul H-O, Tom Donahue.

With: Paul H-O, Cindy Sherman.

[Read other reviews about this film](#)

POWERED BY 

If a doc manages to inform *and* entertain, it's ahead of the competition. If it features engaging personalities (or penguins), so much the better. And if it manages not to lose its assets while dipping its toe into murkier issues -- becoming, say, a brow-knitting thumb-sucker -- then it's really a work of art; such is "Guest of Cindy Sherman." Co-producing Sundance Channel should immediately allow the film to run free in the theatrical playground, where art lovers/voyeurs will adopt it as their own.

"Guest of Cindy Sherman" was how co-helmer Paul H-O found himself described on a seating card one night at some glitzy art-world dinner, thus inspiring this good-natured, engaging and uncensored autopsy of male ego and strip-searched celebrity. H-O's "girlfriend" was Sherman, the reclusive artist-photographer whose "Untitled Film Stills" are considered to be among the more important works of '80s American art. How the two became girlfriend/boyfriend (or whatever they call it in the lofty regions of lower Manhattan) is included in the movie. But so is the issue of bruised selfhood, when the man is less famous than the woman, and traditional roles get flipped on their heads.

H-O (which stands for Hasegawa-Overacker; need we say more?) was the creator and host of a cable access show titled "Gallery Beat" during the Koons-Schnabel-Sherman-fired New York art boom of the '80s. Irreverent and always an outsider, H-O was an ointment-occupying fly on Manhattan's gallery scene. That he and Sherman would hook up was unlikely.

But thanks to H-O's relentless taping, we see that they did, the evidence being a real-time budding, and blooming, of romance. Sherman, who usually never consented to do anything close to "Gallery Beat," was clearly smitten with H-O and he with her. Watching their playful interaction, with the remote art goddess acting like a flirty schoolgirl, is alternately wonderful, and appalling: Should we be watching this? One of the film's more ironic aspects is how H-O, who eventually found his second-banana status untenable, has now found his own vehicle, albeit one with "Cindy Sherman" in the title.

But he's a likable tour guide through his own checkered romantic/professional history, never taking himself -- or the art world, for that matter -- too seriously. Which is likely what attracted Sherman in the first place. She is unseen save for the archival footage, but the fact that she OK'd its use is testament to a generous spirit, and perhaps a few tender memories the viewer gets to share.

ELLE

ELLE NEWS *blog*

Daily style and culture from the fashion front

I found it sweet, disturbing, awkward, and romantic all at once--and one of the most revealing portraits I've ever seen of the mistress of camouflage.

May 02, 2008

CINDY SHERMAN AT THE TRIBECA FILM FEST

My experience with the Tribeca Film Festival over the past week and a half has been more about Mariah Carey, tuna tartare, and Tenjune than it has been about interesting work that would otherwise have flown under my radar. One cool exception: *Guest of Cindy Sherman*, a documentary about the unlikely relationship between Paul Hasegawa-Overacker and one of my favorite art stars of the century. Hasegawa-Overacker is a cable access reporter who got an assignment to interview Sherman--and ended up falling in love with her, then making this documentary about their five year relationship (which has since ended). Official word is that Sherman wants nothing to do with it and is even apologizing to friends who were filmed for it, but I found it sweet, disturbing, awkward, and romantic all at once--and one of the most revealing portraits I've ever seen of the mistress of camouflage.



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Tribeca Picks: Math Thriller, Kung Fu Fighter, More

By Jason Silverman May 07, 2008 | 2:00:00 PM Categories: [Movies](#)

NEW YORK -- The thumb prints of this year's Tribeca Film Festival were visible throughout Manhattan on billboards, subway ads, TV screens and tote bags. The fest, which wrapped its seventh year Sunday, is on pace to set speed records for becoming a New York City cultural institution. Still, if you asked insiders, the event was something of a programmatic mess in past years.

So this year Tribeca went lean, cutting 40 feature films from its platter. It's still a something-for-everyone smorgasbord -- a festival with room for a doc about Lyme Disease, a number of international genre films and for the premiere of *Speed Racer* -- but you could at least read through the catalog in a single sitting. Here's a scan of some of the films we saw.

Far too outlandish to be believable -- except it's all true

Guest of Cindy Sherman

Art-world star Cindy Sherman, best known for her haunting, sometimes creepy self-portraits, is a famed recluse, turning down all interviews.

Then, she decides to talk to the host of a public access show. Soon, the two seem to be falling in love.

Far too outlandish to be believable -- except it's all true, and captured on grainy tape! -- this smart, funny film also provides a lively scan of the NYC art scene, with all of its hypocrisy and posing.

The film provided the festival with some controversy, after [Sherman disassociated herself from the project](#).



Odd Couples at Tribeca

By S. JAMES SNYDER | April 22, 2008

Worlds collide at this year's Tribeca Film Festival, which begins tomorrow — or, at least, that's the central theme that keeps popping up as one rifles through a few dozen of this year's 120 selections.

GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN

First Screening: Sunday, 9 p.m.

emerges as a surprisingly powerful psychological drama

Whereas "Baby Mama" is about living with an unfamiliar guest, "Guest of Cindy Sherman" is about a beloved guest who finds himself overcome by a sense of alienation.

Tom Donahue and Paul Hasegawa-Overacker's documentary about a sarcastic art commentator who unexpectedly fell in love with one of the artists he was criticizing opens in the mid-1990s, as Mr. Hasegawa-Overacker is assembling his public access television show "GalleryBeat." From the outset, it's clear: He's an outcast peering into the art world, ruffling the feathers of the establishment as he comes to question all that others hold sacred. Yet from her very first meeting with Mr. Hasegawa-Overacker (known to most as Paul H-O), the famed photographer Cindy Sherman took a liking to him, and agreed to sit for an array of in-depth interviews.

The movie, though, is less about one art lover finding love and acceptance than about the stress and anxiety that overcome the couple as they try to build a bridge to connect their separate worlds. We watch as Mr. H-O is regularly invited to elite gatherings and allowed behind the velvet rope, even offered a seat at the head table. But in one of the film's darkest moments — recorded by Mr. H-O, who took his camera everywhere he and Ms. Sherman went — he recounts the humiliation he felt when he realized that his name card at one gala event read simply: "Guest of Cindy Sherman."

"Guest of Cindy Sherman" evolves from a story about the New York art scene at the close of the 20th century to an intimate profile of both an outcast and an insider, and emerges as a surprisingly powerful psychological drama about a man lost in the glare of the spotlight and immersed in a frantic bid to rediscover himself.

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FILM REVIEWS



Guest of Cindy Sherman
Dir. Paul Hasegawa-Overacker and Tom Donahue

[Filmlike; 2008]

88 minutes

●●●●○

Genre: documentary
Others: *Thanksgiving, The Wake*
Links: [Guest of Cindy Sherman - Filmlike](#)

Many great works of art have been conceived in crisis. Edward Munch's *The Scream* captured the artist in bouts of extreme anxiety; *The Starry Night* was composed shortly after Vincent van Gogh cut off his own ear; and Frida Kahlo painted her first self-portrait while recovering from a debilitating bus accident. *Guest of Cindy Sherman* emerged from a different kind of crisis. In the film, its co-director and protagonist Paul H-O (Hasegawa-Overacker) recounts conceiving of the project while escorting his art-star girlfriend Cindy Sherman to a gala dinner in her honor. As per the standard for such events, he is relegated to a table somewhere in the back by the kitchen. While looking for his name on a place card, H-O instead finds a title that describes his current situation, "Guest of Cindy Sherman," and sets out to create a film to match it.

When we meet Paul H-O in 1993, he's an artist who has just traded canvas for videotape, hosting *Gallery Beat*, a public access art show à la *Wayne's World*. From the beginning, the charismatic personality of H-O drives the film. As a host, his art-for-the-masses ideology pokes fun at the art world's serious posturing — at one point, Julian Schnabel berates the *Gallery Beat* team for making light of his work in an earlier episode — while celebrating the messy, informal splendor of the mid-'90s Soho gallery scene. H-O somehow finagles his way into landing an interview with already-established artist, notorious media recluse, and patented babe Cindy Sherman. The romantic relationship that develops frames the remainder of the film.

Guest of Cindy Sherman documents the evolution of the contemporary art market from the post-'80s price bust into the extremely lucrative, billion dollar business it is today. For H-O and Sherman, the shift brings an increasing number of obligations and commitments, putting a strain on their relationship. H-O fails to sell his irreverent art-host shtick as a cable TV show, and the exploration of that failure and subsequent anxiety it creates becomes the film's focus.

Like a character in a modern fable, H-O exhaustively solicits advice for an ultimately unsolvable problem: in this case, mediocrity.

He interviews significant others of celebrities and even appears on a radio morning show trying to find the cure for "famous girlfriend syndrome." But H-O is unable to cope. His delegated role, the film candidly admits, is one traditionally filled by women, which raises questions about gender roles and the dynamics of the modern relationship. Viewers are forced to question their own ideas about personal success and ambition, as well as who, if anyone, in a relationship should settle for the "woman's role."

The idea of auteurism is always a problematic one — what would *Annie Hall* or *The Godfather Trilogy* be without cinematographer Gordon Willis, for example — and it is especially so in this case. Although he never appears on camera, co-director and editor Tom Donahue's personality is heavily imbued in the film. Further, as a condition of allowing her work in the film, Sherman was granted the power to review and revise its final cut. What exactly she excised is unclear, but the filmmakers indicate the edits she dictated were substantial. That such a request would be made over what is essentially a benign portrait speaks of the level of control Sherman exercises over her persona. She rarely conducts interviews, shuns press coverage, and maintains a silence so absolute she neglects to name even her art.

Whereas Paul H-O is clearly vulnerable in the picture, it seems that Sherman was unable to submit to the same level of open access and candor. Though, admittedly, the stakes are higher for her: Sherman's work, most famously her enigmatic makeup-and-costume self-portraits, thrives on the ambiguity and ambivalence of its creator. The controversy surrounding the film's release (Sherman put out a press release disowning it) only makes one further question the motives and intentions — monetary and otherwise — of the parties involved. It's indicative of how much power and control today's art dealers, gallery owners, and taste-makers hold over the market when even a reaction, a messy, quirky film like *Guest of Cindy Sherman*, is indelibly shaped by that control. But with 'Cindy Sherman' in the title, I'm positive the film will find a market of its own.

by The Friz

MONDAY, MARCH 09, 2009

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Guest of Cindy Sherman

Directed by Paul H-O and Tom Donohue. 88 min. Screens Wed Mar 11 (6:30pm & 9:15pm) at Bloor Cinema (506 Bloor W).

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BY DAVID BALZER March 04, 2009 21:03

EDITORIAL RATING: ★★★★☆

The title of Paul H-O and Tom Donohue's new art-world documentary *Guest of Cindy* Sherman is somewhat misleading, for it suggests Sherman — best-known for her Untitled Film Stills, a landmark photographic series from the late '70s — will be presented as a snooty arriviste, as most art stars usually are. It turns out the title, the film and the couple at its centre are more thoughtful than that. H-O (an acronym for Hasegawa-Overacker), teams with Donohue to present what is unquestionably his life's most significant event: how his initial encounters with Sherman through his gonzo cable-access show *Gallery Beat* bloomed into a relationship that lasted almost a decade.

By the time H-O takes on the film's title as his mopey epithet, he and Donohue have made us well-aware of his tendencies towards self-indulgence. Subjects such as Molly Ringwald and Jeanne Tripplehorn underline this, the latter chiding him for being a macho fathead. They are right; H-O knows it. And though he does successfully get across what it's like to, as two mocking radio DJs who interview him at one point put it, have "famous girlfriend syndrome," what really sticks are the insights he provides into Sherman's character. Those enamoured of her artwork will not be disappointed with how she comes off in H-O's fascinating candid footage: as spirited yet modest, intelligent, sexy, humourous, stylish and determinedly American.

the village VOICE

Movies

Guest of Cindy Sherman

Directed by Tom Donahue and Paul Hasegawa-Overacker
April 27, 29; May 1, 2, 3

Guest of Cindy Sherman, the title of Tom Donahue and Paul Hasegawa-Overacker's shambolic, weirdly compelling documentary, refers to an incident—a placecard, specifically—that was the undoing of the latter co-director's romance with the notoriously elusive artist. Tracking the beginnings of Paul H-O's dishy cable-access show, *Gallery Beat*, the film depicts the high-flying New York art world of the late '80s and '90s, including the year—1990—that Cindy Sherman broke big. Her wry self-portraits attract celebrities, major bucks, and the brash Paul H-O, whose persistence scores him a rare invitation to Sherman's studio. Footage from the interviews he conducted there reveal a fluttery, adorable figure whose nerves betray a woman smitten. Scores of interviews with art-scene players give dimension to the strange story of Cindy and Paul; she disappears from the film, and he disappears, quite loudly, into her haute-fabulous shadow. His lament for their relationship encompasses a greater loss—that of an art community where even the riffraff were welcomed, and occasionally loved. **Michelle Orange**



Guest of Cindy Sherman: The interview that started all the trouble

Scores of interviews with art-scene players give dimension to the strange story of Cindy and Paul;



I dated Cindy Sherman ...

And all I got was this documentary. Paul H-O on his film about the iconic photographer and the perils of being an art world sidekick.

salon.com

By Joy Press

May 2, 2008 | It sounds like a highbrow fairy tale: an unsuccessful artist turned cable TV host snags an interview with one of the world's most reclusive and glamorous art stars, Cindy Sherman -- and the two fall in love. This is what actually happened to Paul Hasegawa-Overacker, aka Paul H-O, who uses it as the premise for the documentary he co-directed, "Guest of Cindy Sherman." But to cling too tightly to that romantic story line is to seriously misrepresent this movie, which is screening this week at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York and is slated to run eventually on the Sundance Channel.

In fact, "Guest of Cindy Sherman," which was co-directed by Tom Donahue, feels more like three or four docs fused into one entertaining (and sometimes squirm-inducing) concoction. We get a side-long view of the art world and its symbiotic relationship with commerce and celebrity, as well as an exploration of the awkward life of a famous person's "plus one." (H-O's own complaints are bulked up by an amusing interview with Elton John's companion, David Furnish.) At the center of it all is Sherman, in a fragmented portrait of a woman H-O calls "the most famous mystery girl of art," a photographer who has used her own image as the basis for a hugely influential body of work.

All this is strung together with H-O's confessional voice-overs, which present him as a goofy dude who has stumbled into the force field of a radiant, powerful woman and found himself devastated by his own lack of stature and lost sense of self. "I'd sort of been swallowed up," he complains. For five years he tags along as Sherman attends galas, hobnobs with celebs and collectors and jet-sets around the globe, spending his days as "the person hardly anyone wants to talk to." The final blow, at least as he represents it, may just be when H-O brings Sherman to see his therapist in an attempt to save their five-year relationship, and the therapist chooses to take her on as a client, jettisoning him. "Even my shrink would rather be with Cindy!" They eventually break up, though he carefully avoids showing any of the actual drama on-screen.

"Guest of Cindy Sherman" arrived at Tribeca wreathed in controversy: Sherman has officially disassociated herself from the doc, even going so far as to apologize to friends who are interviewed in the film for involving them. However, Sherman herself comes off surprisingly well -- whether working in her studio (where we watch her experiment with an endless permutation of outfits and makeup until she finds the perfect amalgam) or chatting with her sister. H-O says that Sherman got something close to final cut (at least as far as her own appearances are concerned). But for an artist whose work revolves around manipulating her own image, and yet who has very deliberately shielded herself from the publicity machine, it must feel like very unwelcome exposure -- by an ex-boyfriend, no less.



I dated Cindy Sherman ...

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By Joy Press

You started your Manhattan cable access show, "Gallery Beat," in 1993. You and Walter Robinson (then Art in America editor) really were the "Beavis and Butt-head" of the art world. You had a lot of fun with the show.

I had been an artist for 25 years, and I'll tell you, I took a real beating from that experience. The art world is extremely psychologically brutal on the psyche of the artist. It's like "Survivor." You come out of art school and, immediately, half of the people just drop off the list of "I want to be an artist" because they just take a look at it and go, "Ah! Not prepared." Almost everybody else is gone within five years.

By 1993, you had been through the insane '80s art world boom and then there was this big bust -- egos weren't running as high.

No, and "Gallery Beat" was just rocking. I shed my artist mask. I could just say, I am done with "the art." Because you know, as an artist, I was just so tired of having to deal with the competition and having to kiss the asses of dealers, collectors, curators. And in a lot of ways, these people are just really boring. Artists are a lot more exciting, interesting, beautiful and sexy.

So "Gallery Beat" really put the focus on the artists, and at a certain point you met Cindy Sherman. What did she represent to you?

I'd been doing the show for quite a few years. And public access [cable TV] is a labor of love. We did have sponsors, but we only made about \$10,000 a year. I was a carpenter! So, yeah, Cindy Sherman represented the top of the heap. And mysterious. She was the most famous mystery girl of art. Not only was she the heavyweight, the 800-pound gorilla, but she was also inaccessible. She and her dealers had brilliantly developed this image, which was so smart. And that basically was, "Don't talk to the press."

That was something that she had decided to do?

Well, it was easier for her to do, because she's a shy person. And actually her dealers are pretty low-key people, too, so it was a pretty brilliant plan by pretty brilliant people. You know, "Cindy, don't talk to anybody. Don't even title your work!" Do you know her work's not titled? All of the titles that have been given to the work, "Film Stills" and "Centerfolds," have been given by other people. It's all just untitled with a number.

It wouldn't be so weird, except that her work is so focused on her own image. You start to desperately want to know who Cindy Sherman is.

Well, especially someone who becomes such a celebrity figure within the art world and beyond.



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You ended up doing a series of interviews with her [for "Gallery Beat"]. Did you ever discuss with her later why she let you into her studio when she wasn't talking to anybody else?

She liked "Gallery Beat," thought it was a funny show. She thought I was cute, and when I saw her, I thought she was cute, too. I think it was a little bit of love at first sight. At least it was for me.

In the film, you and Walter Robinson discuss her like she's such a babe, which felt kind of weird to me. Even though she is obviously a beautiful woman, we don't usually think of her as a babe, since so much of her work is about camouflage and armor.

Yeah, but some of those pictures are really hot! [Laughter] Come on, the garter belt -- I definitely had fantasies about her years before I'd been exposed to her. And Walter and I enjoyed being guys. We enjoyed being non-p.c.

It's pretty obvious that we weren't taking this stuff seriously, and both of us -- as artists and as media people too -- we were pretty angry. We kind of felt like the system kept us out. We felt a little burned, so there are definitely hints of that skepticism over what goes on in the art world.

The film traces your journey from artist to cable show host to living with Cindy and becoming this kind of art world sidekick. How much did it change your life?

In the movie, I say, "You know my life wasn't like that, and all of a sudden I'm staying in Beverly Hills at the W Hotel." We're in this incredible penthouse suite, and I'm like, Whoa! This is insane. My partner and co-director Tom likes to say that I lost my identity; that's a spin we put out. But it's not that I "lost" my identity. It's just that my identity went into hibernation or was subsumed by this much greater force. That's why I called it "Cindy World." In the old days there were these things called Rolodexes with little cards. Mine had like 10 cards, and hers had 1,000. And, you know, Salman Rushdie would be in hers. Her world was a lot bigger and more powerful than mine.

Your perspective is so personal, and yet there you were with Cindy, who is on a completely different and much more controlled level.

I think "control" is the key term to use. There is so much control that is exercised, not only in her world but in the art world in general. That's why we don't know things about the art world. We don't know that art dealers are paid a 50 percent commission. Nobody in the art world questions that level of a take. They just accept it. And artists are the type of people who don't organize very well. They are all pretty much a bunch of loners just sort of stuck together. The business is strong, and they're afraid of not getting their work seen, of not being able to sell their work.



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This film has caused a lot of problems for me and for people in the art world who may have something to do with the film and are worried about what the effect is going to be. I've been excommunicated, basically, from that whole level of the art world.

And Cindy has dissociated herself from the film.

Absolutely. I mean, she produced an edict, a disclaimer that she had nothing to do with the film. And I find it very curious.

She knew it was filming the whole time?

She's involved in it! She was there at the inception. She was very much part of the production. I mean, we can't use her art without permission. She liked the idea. And she went on record in the Financial Times in 2006 -- she talks about the film. She does discuss her ambivalence, but she also says, You know, if there's anybody who can make the film it's going to be Paul. I trust him to make a good film, and I think it's going to be good.

What did she think the film was at that point? Did it change?

No, it didn't change. The thing about the Cindy Sherman thing is, I'm a guest of Cindy Sherman. And what I discovered about that life with her is that I just became a component in that life. I categorically became "the boyfriend." My influence as a partner didn't really extend beyond that. And I'm not satisfied in that position. I don't like to be pigeonholed, and I never sold myself as something else. I'm being seen as sort of an identity pirate right now. But you know what? I never changed what I was doing. I was that guy, the "Gallery Beat" guy who would say things and ask questions that other people were reticent to ask. I would ask someone like Alex Katz, "What does this mean?" And you know, the guy would look at me cross-eyed, like, "I'd like to bop you one, dude." But regular people should be entitled to understand this contemporary art. That was our whole point. We can show people what's funny, what we think, what's good. I rarely was critical of the art. I was critical of the business.

You finished the initial documentary on Cindy that you did for "Gallery Beat" many years ago, and you continued to film. Her art is all about producing images and alter egos of herself. That must have been incredibly difficult for her -- to cede control over her image to somebody else -- although she comes off very well in the film, really.

I'd say so. Talk about control -- I mean, she literally had a lot of the scenes and clips removed.



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So she had final cut?

In effect. I mean we could have defied that, if we'd wanted to. But the point is not defiance. The point is that this is a story, and it took place, and we are who we are. I mean, I think her anger at the film right now is an indicator of her frustration at not having control over this thing. I know there are people who work for her -- the dealers -- who are very much against [the documentary]. They always were. Somehow they've taken it upon themselves to be the guard dogs, the protectors, the spinners.

You interviewed a huge range of art world people and celebrities. Did you end up having to pull people out of the film?

No. We always presented the film accurately in the 10-minute trailer that we had produced and that everyone was aware of. And we actually used the trailer as the infrastructure of the film. We basically just took this 10-minute trailer and we made it bigger. I did a monologue, which essentially laid out the story line, and I tried it on an audience of people I had put together. People loved the story. Essentially it's the same one we have in the movie. We just didn't know what the ending would be.

Toward the end of the film, you talk to a number of other "plus ones" who talk about being partners of celebrities. And then somebody in the film asks you, "What's so terrible about it?"

Yeah, I had said, "I know what it feels like to be a wife that no one pays attention to." Afterwards, I was going, "Why did I say that?? Jesus Christ!"

For centuries women have gotten used to being the second fiddle.

I know. I know what it's like to be second fiddle, and I acknowledge my inferiority to the greater body. But then, I got tired of it. I'm sick of fabulous people. It's just a bunch of gas being blown up everyone's skirt. If Sean Penn doesn't know who you are, he's not going to blow smoke in your face, but I don't have anything to say to him, either.

So you're going to all these events and no one's talking to you, because you're not an art star or a celebrity.

I think the deal here is: Good manners never go out of style. If you have a partner, take care of your partner, you know? That's the story with Elton John and David Furnish. It was just by happenstance that I ended up sitting next to David at one of these big benefit dinners, and we were trading stories about getting shafted, you know? And I said, I'm making this movie, and he was like, I'm there.

So watch out for the place card. Be careful of who you invite. And be conscientious, because it can really bite you in the ass.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Paul (H-O) Hasegawa-Overacker

H-O was an exhibiting artist and independent/producer curator from 1975 until 1995. His painting and sculpture has been shown nationally and internationally. He created three large scale multi-disciplinary art events, I.Mannequin, (1980) National Offense,(1982) and San Francisco Science Fiction. The N.O. Show and SFSF were both nationally exhibited in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. He also produced two major performances by Mark Pauline and Survival Research Laboratories (1982-83).

In New York, H-O created and directed GalleryBeat Television from 1993 until 2002. He served on the Artist Committee for Visual Aids from 1992-94. H-O has also written feature articles and art criticism for Artnet Magazine, Art in America, The Surfer's Journal, and London Very. Notable subjects have included Andres Serrano, Brice Marden, Cindy Sherman, Tracy Emin, Matthew Collings, Roberta Smith, Peter Halley, Beth B., Fred Tomaselli, Sean Landers, Cecily Brown, *Sensation!* and The Whitney Biennial's, 1993-2004.

In September of 2003, H-O began work on the film that would become *Guest of Cindy Sherman*. In its unfinished stages, the film has been the subject of articles in Artnet Magazine, The Guardian of London, and Page Six in The New York Post. By 2004, *Guest of Cindy Sherman* had acquired international representation by Film Sales Company (international sales of *Fahrenheit 911*), and in 2007 inked a national broadcast deal with the Sundance Channel. *Guest of Cindy Sherman* will premiere at the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival.

Tom Donahue

Tom Donahue has produced and edited numerous features and documentaries that have screened at festivals including Sundance, Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, SXSW, Venice, San Sebastian and Tribeca (and have, combined, won over twenty-five awards).

He made his directorial debut in 2005 with the narrative short, *Thanksgiving* (starring Yolonda Ross, James Urbaniak and Seymour Cassel).

Currently he is working on two projects – the feature documentary, *Casting By*, a socio-historical look at the impact of the Hollywood Casting Director over the last half-century (with Clint Eastwood and Glenn Close); and he is prepping his narrative feature debut, the psychological thriller, *Beard's Creek*.

As a producer, Donahue's credits include Ramin Bahrani's feature, *Man Push Cart* (Official Selection, Sundance 2006, Venice 2006, New Directors New Films 2006) and the feature documentary *Highway Courtesans* (International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam, IFP's American Sidebar at the Berlinale, and 2006 SXSW Festival).

In 2003, Donahue produced and edited Alfredo de Villa's acclaimed debut feature, *Washington Heights*, winner of five Best Picture awards at festivals worldwide, the Audience Award at the Los Angeles Film Festival, and runner-up for the Jury Award at the Tribeca Film Festival.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

I was experimenting on a new kind of television show about art when a mutual artist friend introduced me to Tom Donahue. I knew about Tom's talent as a filmmaker and editor extraordinaire. I think we got matchmade. After he saw my footage of contemporary artists in their natural habitats, vis a vis my cable show, *GalleryBeat*, he was hooked. This footage included, as far as I knew, the only video of my girlfriend - the famously enigmatic/secrective Cindy Sherman, in a full day-long studio session. Not even her closest assistants had seen her at work so it beat me why she let me tape it. Around that time, I had a wonderfully awful experience at a posh art dinner that galvanized the movie for us. Tom and I agreed to co-direct it and tapped Anura Idupuganti as our production partner, our female counterbalance and referee.

The caveat: Would Cindy agree to it? She did and was a huge help in the early stages. Our plan was to finish it within the year. Four years later, we'd interviewed over 75 people, traveled around the country, and after lots of strange roads and dead ends, made a movie nothing like the one we originally intended. In a perverse twist, my life had to fall apart before this thing could finally come together. It turned out to be a hell of lot more than we ever imagined.

-Paul H-O

At first, I was wary about co-directing a documentary with someone who was also its primary subject. It was not ever something I would recommend to anybody setting out to make a film. Could the subject ever be self-aware enough to see himself objectively? Would he make choices in service to the story even if they reflected badly on him? Would he be willing to be seen as not entirely likable? Right away, Paul struck me as someone who spoke frankly, who shot from the hip (sometimes to his own detriment). And it was only this kind of honesty that would make this film what it needed to be. So every choice the two of us made over the last four years had to pass the bull*#@! test. Having the subject as a co-conspirator made those stakes much higher for us. It was a fascinating process.

-Tom Donahue

GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN

A Feature Documentary

Directed by Paul H-O & Tom Donahue

INTERVIEWS INCLUDE

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Alex Auder & Gaby Hoffman | (<i>Cindy's Stepdaughters</i>) |
| Eli Broad | (Art Collector) |
| Cecily Brown | (Artist; Friend of Paul) |
| Amy Capellazzo | (Head of Contemporary Art, Christie's) |
| Sarah Charlesworth | (Artist; Friend of Cindy) |
| Charlie Clough | (Artist; Friend of Cindy) |
| Danny DeVito | (Actor, Art Collector) |
| Eric Fischl | (Artist) |
| David Furnish | (Life partner of Elton John) |
| Peter Galassi | (Chief Curator, Photography, Museum of Modern Art) |
| Susan Jennings | (Cindy's former assistant) |
| Brad Johns | (Colorist) |
| Carol Kane | (Actress, Star of Cindy's film, <i>Office Killer</i>) |
| Sean Landers | (Artist; Friend of Paul) |
| Cathy Lebowitz | (Reviews Editor, <i>Art in America</i> ; Correspondent, <i>GalleryBeat</i>) |
| Robert Longo | (Artist; Cindy's former boyfriend) |
| Marty Margulies | (Art Collector) |
| Carlo McCormick | (Senior Editor, <i>Paper Magazine</i>) |
| Hank & Barbara Overacker | (Paul's Aunt & Uncle) |
| Amos Poe | (Filmmaker; Friend of Cindy) |
| Molly Ringwald | (Actress; Co-Star of <i>Office Killer</i>) |
| Panio Gianopoulos | (Molly Ringwald's boyfriend) |
| Walter Robinson | (Former Editor, <i>Art in America</i> ; Co-Host, <i>GalleryBeat</i>) |
| Ron Rocheleau | (Creator of <i>Concrete TV</i> ; Friend of Paul) |
| David Ross | (Former Director of the Whitney Museum) |
| Jerry Saltz | (Art Critic) |
| Bob & Sandy Sherman | (Cindy's brother and his wife) |
| John Sherman | (Cindy's brother) |
| Laurie Simmons | (Artist; Friend of Cindy) |
| Ingrid Sischy | (Editor-in-Chief, <i>Interview Magazine</i>) |
| Roberta Smith | (Art Critic, <i>The New York Times</i>) |
| Calvin Tomkins & Dodie Kazanjian | (Writers, <i>New Yorker Magazine</i>) |
| Jeanne Tripplehorn | (Actress; Co-star, <i>Office Killer</i>) |
| Spencer Tunick | (Artist; Friend of Paul's) |
| Christine Vachon | (Producer, <i>Office Killer</i>) |
| Helene Weiner & Janelle Reiring | (Cindy's Art Dealers) |
| Fred Wilson | (Artist) |
| Michael Zwack | (Artist; Friend of Cindy) |