



LaBruce, Bruce (b. 1964)

by Michael G. Cornelius

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Bruce LaBruce has become one of the most controversial and influential members of the "queercore" or "homocore" movement of extreme or guerrilla-type homosexual artistic expression. A writer, editor, actor, and photographer, LaBruce is most widely known as a director whose films consistently challenge and invert the way queer culture is depicted and celebrated.

Born Justin Stewart in Southampton, Ontario, Canada in 1964, LaBruce experienced an "idyllic" and "isolated" childhood. His career in "queercore" first began in his early twenties, when he became editor and producer of the homo punk fanzine *J.D.* (1985-1991).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he also surfaced as the producer/director/writer/star of several super eight films, including *Boy/Girl*, *I Know What It's Like to Be Dead*, *Bruce and Pepper Wayne Gacy's Home Movies*, and *Slam!*

In 1991, LaBruce released his first feature length film, *No Skin Off My Ass*. This film explores the relationship between an effete hairdresser (played by LaBruce) and a mute skinhead. The film quickly became a favorite of the independent film circuit and a cult hit.

LaBruce's next film was *Super 8½* (1994), an admonitory bio-pic about the rise to cult stardom of a rapidly aging porn actor/director and the underground filmmaker who exploits him. *Super 8½* played at film festivals worldwide, and was followed by *Hustler White* (1996), which LaBruce co-directed with Rick Castro.

Hustler White tells the story of a Santa Monica Boulevard street hustler (Tony Ward) who is being pursued by a love-struck writer (LaBruce). The film intersperses parodic treatments of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and Robert Aldrich's *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) with graphic depictions of hardcore, underground sex. The most notorious scene in the film depicts a man being anally penetrated by the stump of an amputee's leg.

In 1999 LaBruce made the small but significant transition from "queercore" independent film to pornographic movies, directing *Skin Flick*, released by Cazzo Films. LaBruce has also worked recently as a photographer and columnist for magazines such as *Honcho*, *Inches*, and *Index Magazine*.

In an interview, LaBruce explains why he entitled his 1997 memoir *The Reluctant Pornographer*. He remarks that "I think you'd be crazy not to be reluctant with regard to working in pornography. It is a very strange and harsh world which attracts a lot of interesting but sometimes insane and freaked out people. I choose to work in pornography because it is one of the few remaining places where homosexuals can express themselves freely and radically without fear of censure."

As a founder of the "queercore" movement, LaBruce has been instrumental in reaffirming and celebrating



A portrait of Bruce LaBruce by Christian Vagt.
Courtesy Bruce LaBruce.
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the outsider status of homosexuals. His films depict worlds inhabited by marginalized people such as street hustlers, porn stars, skinheads, drag queens, sadists, masochists, and others who exhibit an atypical sexuality. LaBruce believes these figures are in danger of disappearing in this new conformist century.

Regarding the movement he helped found, LaBruce said in an interview with *Oasis Magazine*: "I think gay culture is more bourgeois than ever because now that it has been identified as a demographic which can be economically exploited by corporations, it is to the advantage of those who can capitalize on its commodification to make it as innocuous and non-threatening as possible in order to market it. Queercore was and probably remains a form of rebellion against this process."

An iconoclast and provocateur, LaBruce, through his work, remains committed to pushing the boundaries of cinema, society, moral comfort, and yes, even taste, in his desire to demystify and explore worlds many might deem taboo.

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