

## Art School Confidential

### The Art of Murder

A surprisingly clever script laughs at world of art and murder.

Have you ever seen a real-life caricature walking down the street? Maybe it was the granola-munching, tree-hugging, Boulder-area, trust fund hippy. Or perhaps it was the peroxide-drenched, pants-sagging, Colorado/stoner/snowboarder type. Either way, you know what I'm talking about when I say that *Art School Confidential* uses clever dialogue, puns and jokes, and witty jabs to poke fun at the I'm-an-artist-please-don't-make-fun-of-me types that you see every so often. Everyone enjoys laughing at cartoons, but when you see a real-life cartoon character, it's even better!

*Art School Confidential* follows incoming freshman, Jerome Platz, as he makes his way through his first semester at the snooty Strathmore art school. Besides having to deal with the stresses of college, Jerome has to worry about the "Strathmore Strangler" as well. Someone is running around killing the poor students of Strathmore, but the cops can't quite figure out who the murderer is. Not only does Jerome have to worry about turning his paintings in on time, but he has to avoid death while he tries to win over his dream girl *and* be the "greatest artist of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" at the same time.

Director, artist, and comic book aficionado, Terry Zwigoff, (who also directed *Bad Santa*, *Ghost World*, and the very funny *Crumb*) uses an excellent soundtrack, a dynamic cast, and some very satisfying dark humor to lampoon the art world, but the real pleasure in watching this movie is seeing John Malkovich portray the ambiguously gay, pseudo-intellectual art professor as he tries to prod his students to excellence. In supporting roles, Anjelica Huston, Ethan Suplee (*My Name is Earl*), and Nick Swardson offer some of the best lines in the movie, but the chemistry between starring actors, Max Minghella and Joel Moore, as comrades-in-arms in the battle to create art is what really makes *Art School Confidential* great.

As a writer and as an avid movie-goer, I appreciate it when writers choose not to dumb down the script to the lowest common denominator. Daniel Clowes, who also wrote the screenplay for *Ghost World*, offers some very witty and insightful views on both college and art, but he does it in a very subtle way. If you're looking for visual gags and Larry, Curly, Moe humor, you're not going to find it here. Clowes makes you use your brain, not only to pick up on the underlying jokes, but to follow the complicated storyline as well.

*Art School Confidential* is surprising in that it doesn't really fit into any one genre. It's a murder, who-dunnit story, but it's also a comedy. It's a romantic story, but it's also a commentary on the absurdity of the art world as well. It offers a little something for everyone, but not everybody is going to like it because it does drag a little bit in the middle, but this is forgivable because it's so funny. Perhaps making fun of murder doesn't suit your tastes, but if you're like me and realize that this is a film noir comedy along the lines of *Death to Smoochy*, then you're going to love it because the humor is sharp and the story is intelligent.

Andy Warhol once said that, "In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes." I was really surprised by the performance offered by Max Minghella as Jerome Platz, and I hope he sticks around for a little longer than fifteen minutes. The emotions in his facial expressions, which range from funny to angry to sad, was a real joy to watch. I was surprised at the range that this young actor was able to deliver. He definitely shows talent and has a bright future. I was also pleased that the screen presence of some of the bigger stars such as John Malkovich and Anjelica Huston didn't overwhelm the younger talent. Terry Zwigoff did an excellent job of balancing new and old talent, and as a director, he succeeded at tying everything together.

*Art School Confidential* offers some extremely refreshing dialogue, humor, and acting that seems to be missing from Hollywood blockbusters these days. If you're like me, I would rather pay nine dollars to see a new actor like Joel Moore acting sincerely funny than I would to see Tom Cruise acting rather stupid. Why doesn't Hollywood understand that no matter how big the star of the movie is, nothing is going to save a bad storyline? *Art School Confidential* tells a great story that is accentuated with some great acting. Do yourself a favor—skip yet another *Mission Impossible* and see a smaller movie like this one instead. You'll feel better knowing that your intelligence isn't going to be insulted by Mr. Cruise.