

John Waters (Writer/Director)

Born in Baltimore, MD in 1946, John Waters was drawn to movies at an early age, particularly exploitation movies with lurid ad campaigns. He subscribed to *Variety* at the age of twelve, absorbing the magazine's factual information and its lexicon of insider lingo. This early education would prove useful as the future director began his career giving puppet shows for children's birthday parties. As a teen-ager, Waters began making 8-mm underground movies influenced by the likes of Jean-Luc Godard, Walt Disney, Andy Warhol, Russ Meyer, Ingmar Bergman, and Herschell Gordon Lewis.

Using Baltimore, which he fondly dubbed the "Hairdo Capitol of the World," as the setting for all his films, Waters assembled a cast of ensemble players, mostly native Baltimoreans and friends of long standing: Divine, David Lochary, Mary Vivian Pearce, Mink Stole and Edith Massey. Waters also established lasting relationships with key production people, such as production designer Vincent Peranio, costume designer Van Smith, and casting director Pat Moran, helping to give his films that trademark Waters "look."

Waters made his first film, an 8-mm short, *Hag in a Black Leather Jacket* in 1964, starring Mary Vivian Pearce. Waters followed with *Roman Candles* in 1966, the first of his films to star Divine and Mink Stole. In 1967, he made his first 16-mm film with *Eat Your Makeup*, the story of a deranged governess and her lover who kidnap fashion models and force them to model themselves to death. *Mondo Trasho*, Waters' first feature length film, was completed in 1969 despite the fact that the production ground to a halt when the director and two actors were arrested for "participating in a misdemeanor, to wit: indecent exposure."

In 1970, Waters completed what he described as his first "celluloid atrocity," *Multiple Maniacs*. The film told the story of Lady Divine and her lover, Mr. David, proprietors of a freak show who lure unsuspecting suburbanites into their tents to witness "The Cavalcade of Perversions." In 1972 Waters created what would become the most "notorious" film in the American independent cinema of the 1970's, *Pink Flamingos*. Centered on the great battle to secure the title "Filthiest People Alive," *Pink Flamingos* pitted Divine's "Babs Johnson" against Mink Stole and David Lochary's truly evil "Connie and Raymond Marble," while turning Waters into a cult celebrity. *Pink Flamingos* went on to become a smash success at midnight screenings in the U.S. and all over the world.

Waters followed the success of *Pink Flamingos* with three more pictures, spanning the remainder of the decade. In 1974 he created *Female Trouble*, the story of Dawn Davenport (Divine), a criminal who wanted to be famous so badly she committed murder. 1977 marked the premier of *Desperate Living*, a monstrous fairytale comedy starring the notorious Mafia moll turned stripper Liz Renay. In 1981 Waters completed *Polyester*, a wide-screen comic melodrama starring Divine and Tab Hunter. Filmed in glorious "Odorama," ticket buyers were given scratch 'n' sniff cards that allowed the

audience to smell along with the characters in their fragrant search for romantic happiness.

In *Hairspray* (1988), Waters created "an almost big-budget comedy extravaganza about star-struck teen-age celebrities in 1962, their stage mothers and their quest for mental health." The film was a box office and critical success and starred the then unknown Ricki Lake, Deborah Harry, the late Sonny Bono, Jerry Stiller, Pia Zadora and Ric Ocasek.

The success of *Hairspray* brought Waters major Hollywood backing for his next feature, *Cry-Baby* (1990), a juvenile delinquent musical comedy satire, starring Johnny Depp. In 1994, Waters released *Serial Mom*, the well reviewed, socially un-redeeming comedy starring Kathleen Turner and Sam Waterston, which was the closing night attraction at that year's Cannes Film Festival.

Pink Flamingos, the ultimate trash masterpiece, was again in theatres for a 25th Anniversary re-release in 1997, complete with newfound footage. Commenting on the long-lasting popularity of the film, director Waters proudly boasts, "it's hard to offend three generations, but it looks like I've succeeded."

Pecker, a feel-good movie about lesbian strippers, pubic-hair harassment and amateur photography, was released in 1998. It starred Edward Furlong and Christina Ricci. The Japan Times called it "a Disney film for perverts."

Cecil B. DeMented, a comedy action-thriller about a young lunatic film director (Stephen Dorff) and his gang of film cultists who kidnap a real-life Hollywood movie goddess (Melanie Griffith) and force her to act in their own Super 8 underground movie, was released in 2000. Kevin Thomas of *The LA Times*, called *Cecil B. DeMented* "a fast, furious and funny fusillade of a movie."

A Dirty Shame concerns head injury sufferers who, after their concussion, experience a carnal lust they cannot control. It stars Tracey Ullman, Johnny Knoxville, Selma Blair, and Chris Isaak. Rated NC-17 by the Motion Picture Association of America, Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* called the film "wicked, kinky fun."

In addition to writing and directing feature films, Waters is the author of five books: Shock Value, Crackpot, Pink Flamingos and Other Trash, Hairspray, Female Trouble and Multiple Maniacs, and Art: A Sex Book (co-written with art critic Bruce Hainley).

Concurrent to his careers as a filmmaker and author, John Waters is also a photographer whose work, first represented by American Fine Arts and presently, the Marianne Boesky Galley in New York, has been shown in galleries all over the world since 1992. Three art catalogs have been published on John Waters' photographs and sculpture beginning with Director's Cut in 1997 (Scalo Books). John Waters: Change of Life followed in 2004 (Harry N. Abrams) to accompany a Waters retrospective exhibition at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. The exhibition traveled to the Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland, the Orange County Museum of Art and The Andy Warhol

Museum. And finally, in 2006, the catalog, Unwatchable was published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name that opened simultaneously at The Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York and de Pury & Luxembourg Gallery in Zurich.

John Waters' one man spoken-word lecture entitled "This Filthy World" is performed at colleges, museums, film-festivals and comedy clubs across the United States. Netflix produced a film version of the live act that was released in 2006. The film was also screened at the Toronto, Berlin and Edinburgh Film Festivals. In 2004, the music compilation CD "A John Waters Christmas" was released by New Line Records and was followed up in 2007 by "A Date With John Waters".

As an actor, Waters has appeared in many motion pictures including Jonathan Demme's "Something Wild", Woody Allen's "Sweet and Lowdown", Herschell Gordon Lewis' "Blood Feast 2: All You Can Eat" and Don Mancini's "Seed of Chucky." In February, 2006, Waters hosted a 13-episode television series on the here! TV Network called "John Waters Presents Movies That Will Corrupt You." He also appeared in an episode of NBC's hit show, "My Name Is Earl," and plays "The Groom Reaper" in the CourtTV series "Til Death Do Us Part."

Waters is a member of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and is on the Wexner Center International Arts Advisory Council. Additionally, he is a member of the boards of The Andy Warhol Foundation and Printed Matter.

Director Filmography

2004	A Dirty Shame
2000	Cecil B. Demented
1998	Pecker
1994	Serial Mom
1990	Cry-Baby
1988	Hairspray
1981	Polyester
1977	Desperate Living
1974	Female Trouble
1972	Pink Flamingos
1970	Multiple Maniacs
	The Diane Linkletter Story
1969	Mondo Trasho
1967	Eat Your Makeup
1966	Roman Candles
1964	Hag in a Black Leather Jacket