

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Cripps, Charlotte, "Night of the Riffing Dead," The Independent, November 17, 2003, p.18

## **ARTS: PREVIEWS - Night of the riffing dead**

The latest commission by Art-angel is Spook House, one of three films by the American artist and film-maker Cameron Jamie which will screen with a live soundtrack by the cult LA rock band, The Melvins. The band, dubbed the founding fathers of grunge, will perform to large-scale projections of Jamie's films in music venues across England, culminating in a show at the Forum in London on 28 November.

This tour marks the premiere in Britain of the work of an artist who is fascinated with social rites, rituals and horror. An expatriate American, Jamie is now based in Paris. "Being culturally and socially dead is strong in my work," he says. "I don't have to show how weird cultures are. I'm fascinated with what is considered 'normal.'"

Jamie's films are roughly edited together, emphasising their sinister undertones, and the oppressively slow and heavy music of The Melvins is a perfect fit. Best known for influencing Nirvana, The Melvins have recorded a string of bleak hardcore albums since 1986, including Gluey Porch Treatment and Stoner Witch.

"We are old friends," says Cameron Jamie. "I saw them when they first came to LA, playing in a small club in the late Eighties before the Nirvana boom. They blew me away with a set of drone noise that drove the whole audience out of the club, I was one of the few people to stay. It was a spiritual revelation to me. They took music to another dimension. Their music is so visual. It made sense to collaborate on soundtrack music."

The earlier film, BB, about LA kids and their backyard wrestling tournaments, has a soundtrack from The Melvins' most legendary album, Lycol. "This album set the standard for a whole genre of really slow composition, deconstructing heavy metal and rock music, even for Nirvana," says Jamie. "This 30-minute album is split into several tracks, and I used track one, which is 18 minutes of a slow guitar drone and thunderous sounding drums."

The Melvins scored the music for Kranky Klaus, a film about Austrian villagers who wait for Santa Claus and the Krampus, a huge horned beast who punishes the naughty ones. Jamie, who visited the Gastein region of Upper Austria for this film, says: "I witnessed people severely roughed up with a chain and whip by the Krampus, as Santa brings others gifts."

In Spook House, The Melvins play over a live sound-mix of monster groans and wind blowing, recorded live by Jamie in Detroit "spook houses", as people celebrated Hallowe'en. "It is a form of performance art," says Jamie. "The lowest forms of spook houses are called 'black-wall attractions' where people jump out at you. I've visited jails turned into spook houses and seen guys wearing skeleton masks and shooting up. Those sort of moralistic, preachy scenes are best. Instead of Freddie Kruger, you see domestic horror and the reality of issues such as abortion and drink-driving. The role-playing and fantasy is a way of escaping our pitiful existences."

CHARLOTTE CRIPPS

'Spook House', 'Kranky Klaus', 'BB': touring to 28 November (020- 7713 1402; [www.artangel.org.uk](http://www.artangel.org.uk))