

DALLAS Observer

That's How You Pronounce Clitoris? Five Observations from Dead White Zombies' *Flesh World*

By [Brentney Hamilton](#) Mon., Jun. 11 2012 at 1:00 PM



Dead White Zombies

Boning on our minds at *Flesh World*.

You're not a lone pervert: I initially read [Fleshlight](#), too, when I saw that the progressive collective, [Dead White Zombies](#), was up to another one of their "experimental theatre performance installation[s]" called *Flesh World*. As it turns out, that misinterpretation wasn't so far off, as there was in fact a fair bit of simulated sex. [In case you hadn't heard](#), Dead White Zombies is a group of

roughly 22 thespians and performance artists, headed by writer/director and self-proclaimed "Poo Pah Doo" Thomas Riccio, and it is not an understatement to suggest that their *sui generis* work is unlike anything else currently going on in Dallas. Something with zombies is going down in Oak Cliff - Is it a play? Is it performance art? Well, yes.

Saturday night, I headed out West for the final production of *Flesh World*, entirely unsure what to expect. "Zombies" suggested haunted house type chills or at least ironic cult throwbacks, and the location itself - a 36,000 ft² welding warehouse - is already a little unnerving, at least to those with an overactive imagination. *Flesh World* was, however, less "bump in the night" than psychological thriller - think *Mad Max* with more girrrl power, or *Community's* dystopian paintball episode, but less self-conscious of the occasional cliché (gorgeous, scantily-clad weapon-toting women with unusual dye jobs; a good-looking, butnefarious "boss" character with a claw). But, all teasing aside, the costumes and Mise-en-scène were spot-on, and the summer heat added an uncomfortable but effective element, unquestionably appropriate for the bizarre world Riccio and company have so thoroughly developed.



The Ninja Turtles can't save you now.

Varying from the traditional three-wall performance venue, *Flesh World* utilized space and movement in unconventional ways that kept its 90 minute running time fresh and engaging; viewers literally and physically followed the story from one section of the warehouse to another, tracing the characters through a nonlinear journey. Growing up in rural Texas, I am familiar with the mode as it is utilized in most evangelical Hell Houses. Like those paragons of artistic expression, *Flesh World* contained oodles of screaming, writhing, gnashing of teeth and sweating. So, you can imagine my confusion when no one tried to peer pressure me into chatting with Jesus at the end.

But, instead, *Flesh World* keeps it real, real meta. The obscure story drops viewers into a disorienting world and demands they work to uncover their own conclusions and to form interpretations based on few narrative clues. I've yet to figure out portions - the delineations between the spiritual realm and the protagonist's own psyche - and the fact that it's still on my mind speaks to the impression it imparts. Still working it out, here are my top five observations.



Shine some light, girl. He might never find it in the dark.

5. Oh, that's how you pronounce clitoris?

Tomato/Tomahto. Shit, your guess is as good as mine. Word to the wise, Riccio pushes boundaries and takes no prisoners when it comes to explicit language and adult subject matter. You probably don't want to bring a grade schooler to a DWZ production.

4. Move over Katy Perry, Hilly Holsonback is rocking a blue wig like woah.

Okay, so I gently teased the production for its use of wildly coiffed characters, but if I looked half as sexy as Stephanie Cleghorn and Hilly Holsenback with cobalt tresses, I'd dye that shit today. A real standout, Holsonback portrayed the protagonist's soul and didn't speak throughout *Flesh World*, but just one of her wry glances or devilish smirks was worth a thousand words.

3. Shit's scarier when you don't see it.

Hardly a new concept, Hitchcock of course perfected it decades before the MPAA would even think to allow joints like *The Human Centipede* or *Saw* in mainstream theaters. And, while *Flesh World* would not be rightly considered "horror" or really even all that "creepy," when characters aggressively blaze by, brandishing guns and disappearing behind the audience into the darkness of the warehouse during the first act, a viewer is both unnerved and enticed, left wondering if what lies in store is, indeed, a bump or two in the darkness.



Most effective way to get out of homework? Freak the *fuck* out of your teachers.

2. Creepy little kid = instant skin crawling.

One of *Flesh World's* most intriguing elements comes in the form of third grader, Catherine Culver, who portrayed the protagonist's innocence and who was decked out in a white dress, tights and Mary Janes, with similarly ghostly make up and a platinum wig. With a disaffected countenance, she first appeared slowly circling the audience, visible only when the aptly-used backdrop encircling the second scene was blown open, and her macabre expression was enough to keep a few viewers from sitting beside her in a later scene. Seriously, I had to scoot down closer to this sweet little girl because some adults found her a little too "*Children of the Corn*" for their tastes.

1. *Flesh World* is worth the \$15.

While the show may not have been perfect in every way - the acting occasionally wavered toward distractingly over-the-top and some of the "edgier" lines tried a bit too hard for shock-value - I was more than happy to spend the money on something so unique and that was clearly produced with a small, but very wisely used, budget. In fact, I can't wait to see where *Dead White Zombies* goes next.

But, next time I will definitely bring cash. While there was a wide variety of beverages, including Shiner, for purchase (or "donation"), they were unable to accept plastic, and the warehouse got *warm*, even during the 9:30 p.m. show. Fuck Shiner, by 11:00 I was wishing I had a Camelbak.