



Martha (Debbie Doebereiner) assembles a doll in *Bubble*.

BURST

Bubble

review by M. Faust

Bubble, which plays next Wednesday and Thursday (Feb. 15-16) at the Emerging Cinema screen at the Market Arcade, received a substantial amount of pre-release publicity for reasons that have nothing to do with the movie's content. It is the first of a planned series of six low-budget independent features that director Steven Soderbergh and HD-Net Films plan to release simultaneously to theaters, cable and home video.

The announcement sparked something of an uproar among theater owners, who have already been complaining that video windows (the time it takes a movie to get from the big screen to DVD) have become so short that they are hurting attendance. They argue that certain segments of the market won't bother going to a theater to see a new film when they expect to be able to rent it in a few months. For this reason, many theaters announced that they would boycott Soderbergh's film.

Of course, decreased business at movie theaters has to do with a lot of things besides DVD availability. And there's not much chance that the theaters that "boycotted" *Bubble* would ever have played it anyway. Despite Soderbergh's name, there's little to this intriguing but enervating little film, shot on digital video with non-professional actors, that would appeal to any kind of a mass audience.

Set in a small economically depressed town on the border between Ohio and West Virginia, *Bubble* is a murder mystery involving three people who work at a small doll factory. Overweight, 30ish Martha (Debbie Doebereiner) lives with her invalid father. She gives rides

to Kyle (Dustin James Ashley), a young man who lives in a trailer with his mother. They've forged a sort of friendship that consists of the bare bones of companionship—exchanging meaningless chit-chat while driving or taking their lunch breaks.

If we could look into Kyle's mind, we'd probably learn that he fears the very real possibility of ending up like Martha, who appears to have grown accustomed to her lot in life. Maybe that's why she takes a cautious dislike to new employee Rose (Misty Dawn Wilkins), who makes no secret of the fact that she considers work at the doll factory to be little more than a step above her previous job as a nurse's assistant.

A single mother with no prospects for a better life, Rose is determined to grab what she can get, whether it's worth taking or not. You can't blame her, but you're also not surprised to learn that an attitude like that in a place like this can only breed unhappiness.

Soderbergh presumably used non-actors largely as a way of both keeping his budget down while getting an authentic flavor of the people who inhabit this drab, lifeless expanse of middle America. But his performers' lack of the usual skills also keeps them from doing what professional actors would inevitably do: interpret these people. We're never sure what the reasons are for the things that happen here, which may bother some viewers. Still, for those who get on its wavelength, *Bubble* (the title is open to interpretation) can have a transfixedly voyeuristic fascination. av

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