



Filmmaker John Waters  
Photo: Greg Garry

## JOHN WATERS TALKS HOLLYWOOD INFLUENCES AHEAD OF THE ACADEMY MUSEUM EXHIBIT, WALK OF FAME STAR

BY GREG GARRY  
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"Los Angeles is everything a great American city should be," John Waters once wrote. "Rich, hilarious, of questionable taste and throbbing with fake glamour."

Starting September 17, one of L.A.'s grand new institutions, the [Academy Museum of Motion Pictures](#), will repay the compliment, launching John Waters: Pope of Trash, an expansive yearlong exhibit that looks back at the 77-year-old auteur's six decades of shock-and-awe filmmaking. Pulling from Waters' archives at Wesleyan University, as well as his private collection of memorabilia — like the electric chair that zapped Divine in *Female Trouble*, which usually sits in his living room in Baltimore — it too promises to be hilarious, filled with fake glamour and, especially, of questionable taste. Says Dara Jaffe, who curated the show along with Museum of Modern Art alum Jenny He. "We wanted to show our reverence for John's irreverence."

While in town to open the exhibit, Waters will receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. It is, he tells *Los Angeles*, the realization of a lifelong dream. "I always wanted to sell out to Hollywood," he says. "Problem is, no one wanted to buy me."

**Greg Gary (GG):** This show is, basically, your lifetime achievement award. Do you have any favorite pieces in it?

**John Waters (JW):** I haven't even seen it all. I'll be discovering stuff I haven't seen from my archives since the '80s. But the electric chair that kills Divine in *Female Trouble* — that's been in my living room for years. We would decorate it every year like a Christmas tree. But you can't sit in it and take a selfie — I'm against the death penalty.

**GG:** There are a lot of shoe and foot items: Divine's baby shoes, Edie's heels from *Pink Flamingos*, the foot-stomper paintings from *Polyester* and Patty Hearst's white shoes from *Serial Mom*...

**JW:** Shoes are such a ridiculous waste of a budget — you never see them in movies. That's why I always have foot fetishists in my movies, to get my money's worth. I don't like to waste budget! Shoes are definitely important in my movies.

**GG:** There's a fair amount of crazy fan art in the exhibit, too, like a pipe-cleaner Queen Carlotta and a little doll of you holding an Oscar.

**JW:** I love the really bad naive ones the best, the unflattering ones, because they're the most touching in a way. I have a studio full of them. It's very flattering that fans do that for me, except when I'm on tour and someone hands me a 30-foot framed canvas. How the hell am I going to get this home?

**GG:** You have this museum show, and the next day you're getting a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Where exactly is your star?

**JW:** I don't know, and you don't get to pick. I said I hope it's either in front of the old Frederick's of Hollywood or in front of the Larry Edmunds Bookshop, which, on my first trip to L.A., I got a jaywalking ticket crossing the street to go to! I hope I'm near Alvin and the Chipmunks, and that there's room for Divine to get one near me, too. I don't mind if it's in the most obscure place, as long as it's not next to Trump's because they are always destroying it.

**GG:** People do crazy things on their favorite star's star, like snort lines. What do you hope they do on yours?

**JW:** What could people leave me on my star? No turds, please. Been there, done that.

**GG:** What do you feel your biggest influence has been?

**JW:** My biggest influence in the beginning was Walt Disney because of his colorful villains like Captain Hook. Then I found Ingmar Bergman, whom I loved because he had vomit and suicide and despair in his movies. They were shown in Baltimore as sex movies because they had bare breasts in them. *Summer With Monika* was edited, all the dialogue removed and [the title changed to] *The Sins of Monika*. And certainly Warhol and the underground scene in New York. And Fellini was a huge influence.

**GG:** You are sort of the American Fellini...

**JW:** I would never say that. The meanest review I ever got was, "Waters may think he was Russ Meyer, but he's really [*Mommie Dearest* director] Frank Perry." I don't dislike Perry; he made some great movies. If they had called me David Lean, I would have been very insulted.

**GG:** Are you an Academy member?

**JW:** Of course! I vote for everything, even the Razzies.



The cast of John Waters' 1972 gross-out masterpiece 'Pink Flamingos.'  
Photo: Laurence Irvine / Courtesy of Warner Bros.

**GG:** Which of your films do you think are Academy Award-worthy? Any of them?

**JW:** I think Kathleen Turner in *Serial Mom* deserved an Oscar. I badgered the studio to launch a campaign for her, but they refused. If you lose, all that money from the Oscar campaign comes out of your profits. But it's worth it. It's very exciting.

**GG:** You were a pioneer of independent filmmaking. What do you make of the current state of indie film?

**JW:** Well, it's weird because young people don't want to see art movies anymore — they want to go to the mall and see a comic book movie and then have a riot afterward. They don't like feel-bad French movies with full-frontal nudity — that's my favorite genre.

**GG:** The museum draws tourists and school-trip kiddies. What do you want the uninitiated, who may only know *Hairspray*, to come away with?

**JW:** I hope kids realize they aren't weird and that dreams really do come true. That's what movies can do, take you into another world. That's why I called my original studio Dreamland — it was a bedroom in my parents' house where I made my first movie. In a way, I do find show business holy: It's a miracle, and it's all about believing.

**GG:** You aren't done yet believing, with plans underway to film your debut novel, *Liarmouth*. When you finally get your Oscar, who would you thank first?

**JW:** My parents! When I get the Walk of Fame star, I'm bringing a photo of my parents because they allowed and encouraged me even though they were horrified by the movies I made. That's a really loving parent. I've had a lot of fans come up to me and tell me their parents showed them my movies, which is the opposite of what used to happen. Parents used to call the police on me. Times have changed.