

# ‘Velvet Buzzsaw’ Money and cursed art paint a strange spectacle



CHENNAI: The art world is seedy. Money is a menace, and industry elites can be monsters. That is the overarching message to take from Dan Gilroy’s film “Velvet Buzzsaw,” which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on Jan. 27, and had hopped over to Netflix by Feb. 1.

Gilroy made a big impression with his 2014 thriller “Nightcrawler,” which featured strong performances from Jake Gyllenhaal and Rene Russo. Now, Gilroy has got the band back together, but the result is decidedly less captivating than their first collaboration. Where “Nightcrawler” was comically ghoulish, “Velvet Buzzsaw” lacks humor, is uptight and, at times, borders on the bizarre.

The opening draws us into the murkiness of the art world. Critic Morf Vendewalt (Gyllenhaal), makes or breaks careers in tandem with gallery owner Rhodora (Russo) and her assistant Josephina (Zawe Ashton), with whom he is in a relationship. Money, not art, is the name of the game, but things take a turn when the trio embark on the

sale of artworks which, it transpires, their dead creator had insisted be destroyed. The film then veers into a maelstrom of death and the supernatural, featuring flesh-eating sculptures and cursed paintings.

This is not a standard horror movie. Though equal parts grisly and fantastical, it is more a sadistic satire on an art industry which, beneath a veneer of culture and civilization, is toxic to its core. Artists, dealers, critics and collectors circle each other in a macabre dance of wealth, power, back-stabbing and opportunity. But such a hungry industry swallows even its own in the end, as the protagonists discover to their cost. Yet overall, this is far from a dream follow-up from Gilroy, though a strong, tense score from Marco Beltrami and Buck Sanders goes some way toward redeeming the film, giving it a well-paced tempo.

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