

John Waters (Writer/Director)

Born in Baltimore, MD in 1946, John Waters was drawn to movies at an early age, particularly exploitation movies with lurid ad campaigns. He subscribed to Variety at the age of twelve, absorbing the magazine's factual information and its lexicon of insider lingo. This early education would prove useful as the future director began his career giving puppet shows for children's birthday parties. As a teen-ager, Waters began making 8-mm underground movies influenced by the likes of Jean-Luc Godard, Walt Disney, Andy Warhol, Russ Meyer, Ingmar Bergman, and Herschell Gordon Lewis.

Using Baltimore, which he fondly dubbed the "Hairdo Capitol of the World," as the setting for all his films, Waters assembled a cast of ensemble players, mostly native Baltimoreans, and friends of long standing: Divine, David Lochary, Mary Vivian Pearce, Mink Stole and Edith Massey. Waters also established lasting relationships with key production people, such as production designer Vincent Peranio, costume designer Van Smith, and casting director Pat Moran, helping to give his films that trademark Waters "look."

Waters made his first film, an 8-mm short, *Hag in a Black Leather Jacket* in 1964, starring Mary Vivian Pearce. Waters followed with *Roman Candles* in 1967, the first of his films to star Divine and Mink Stole. In 1967, he made his first 16-mm film with *Eat Your Makeup*, the story of a deranged governess and her lover who kidnap fashion models and force them to model themselves to death. *Mondo Trasho*, Waters' first feature length film, was completed in 1969 despite the fact that the production ground to a halt when the director and two actors were arrested for "participating in a misdemeanor, to wit: indecent exposure."

In 1970, Waters completed what he described as his first "celluloid atrocity," *Multiple Maniacs*. The film told the story of Lady Divine and her lover, Mr. David, proprietors of a freak show who lure unsuspecting suburbanites into their tents to witness "The Cavalcade of Perversions."

In 1972 Waters created what would become the most "notorious" film in the American independent cinema of the 1970's, *Pink Flamingos*. Centered on the great battle to secure the title "Filthiest People Alive," *Pink Flamingos* pitted Divine's "Babs Johnson" against Mink Stole and David Lochary's truly evil "Connie and Raymond Marble," while turning Waters into a cult celebrity. *Pink Flamingos* went on to become a smash success at midnight screenings in the U.S. and all over the world. *Pink Flamingos*, called "a paragon of bad taste" by the Museum of Modern art, was added to the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress, one of only 25 films earmarked in 2021 year for preservation "as works of enduring importance to American culture."

Waters followed the success of *Pink Flamingos* with three more pictures, spanning the remainder of the decade. In 1974 he created *Female Trouble*, the story of Dawn Davenport (Divine), a criminal who wanted to be famous so badly she committed murder. 1977 marked the premier of *Desperate Living*, a monstrous fairytale comedy starring the notorious Mafia moll turned stripper Liz Renay. In 1981 Waters completed *Polyester*, a wide-screen comic melodrama starring Divine and Tab Hunter. Filmed in glorious "Odorama," ticket buyers were given scratch 'n' sniff cards that allowed the audience to smell along with the characters in their fragrant search for romantic happiness.

In *Hairspray* (1988), Waters created "an almost big-budget comedy extravaganza about star-struck teen-age celebrities in 1962, their stage mothers and their quest for mental health." The film was a box office and critical success and starred the then unknown Ricki Lake, Deborah Harry, the late Sonny Bono, Jerry Stiller, Pia Zadora, and Ric Ocasek. The U.S. Library of Congress added *Hairspray* to the National Film Registry in 2022, Librarian of Congress calling it "...an irresistible look at Baltimore's teen dance scene in 1962, as well as a moving plea for racial integration."

The success of *Hairspray* brought Waters major Hollywood backing for his next feature, *Cry-Baby* (1990), a juvenile delinquent musical comedy satire, starring Johnny Depp. In 1994, Waters released *Serial Mom*, the well-reviewed, socially un-redeeming comedy starring Kathleen Turner and Sam Waterston, which was the closing night attraction at that year's Cannes Film Festival.

Pecker, a feel-good movie about lesbian strippers, pubic-hair harassment, and amateur photography, was released in 1998. It starred Edward Furlong and Christina Ricci. The Japan Times called it "a Disney film for perverts."

Cecil B. DeMented, a comedy action-thriller about a young lunatic film director (Stephen Dorff) and his gang of film cultists who kidnap a real-life Hollywood movie goddess (Melanie Griffith) and force her to act in their own Super 8 underground movie, was released in 2000. Kevin Thomas of *The LA Times*, called *Cecil B. DeMented* "a fast, furious and funny fusillade of a movie."

A Dirty Shame concerns head-injury sufferers who, after their concussion, experience a carnal lust they cannot control. It stars Tracey Ullman, Johnny Knoxville, Selma Blair, and Chris Isaak. Rated NC-17 by the Motion Picture Association of America, Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* called the film "wicked, kinky fun."

Upcoming in September 2023, the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures will present John Waters: Pope of Trash, the first comprehensive exhibition dedicated to John Waters' contributions to cinema.

In addition to writing and directing feature films, Waters is the author of ten books: Shock Value, Crackpot, Pink Flamingos and Other Filth, Hairspray, Female Trouble and Multiple Maniacs, and Art: A Sex Book (co-written with art critic Bruce Hainley). His book, Role Models, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in May 2010 and earned spots on the best seller lists for the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and the San Francisco Chronicle. Carsick, John Waters' book chronicling his adventure hitchhiking from Baltimore to San Francisco in the Spring of 2012, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in June 2014 and debuted on the NY Times Bestseller list at #12 and on the Los Angeles Times Bestseller list in the #7 position. The Grammy nominated audiobook version of CARSICK, as read by John Waters, was a featured pick by AudioFile Magazine, Publisher's Weekly and the L.A. Times Summer Reading list, among others. The 2017 release of Make Trouble, published by Algonquin Books, features the text, with illustrations, of Waters' commencement speech delivered at the 2015 Rhode Island School of Design graduation ceremony. The book was also released as an audio album in 7" single format by Third Man Records. May 21 2019, Farrar, Straus and Giroux published Mr. Know-It-All, The Tarnished Wisdom of a Filth Elder in USA. The audiobook version, read by John Waters, was also nominated for a Grammy award. Waters authored and recorded a spoken-word EP, Prayer to Pasolini, in 2021 on the Sub Pop label. His first novel, Liarmouth: A Feel Bad Romance, was published in May 2022 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux and optioned the same year by Village Roadshow Pictures for John to write and direct the movie.

Concurrent to his careers as a filmmaker and author, John Waters is also a photographer whose work, first represented by American Fine Arts and presently, the Marianne Boesky Galley in New York and Sprüth Magers in Berlin and London, has been shown in galleries all over the world since 1992. Four art catalogs have been published on John Waters' photographs and sculpture beginning with Director's Cut in 1997 (Scalo Books). John Waters: Change of Life followed in 2004 (Harry N. Abrams) to accompany a Waters retrospective exhibition at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. The exhibition traveled to the Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland, the Orange County Museum of Art and The Andy Warhol Museum. In 2006, the catalog, Unwatchable was published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name that opened simultaneously at The Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York and de Pury & Luxembourg Gallery in Zurich. In January 2015, Waters' exhibition, "Beverly Hills John" opened at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York and Sprüth Magers Gallery in London. Waters was invited to guest curate an exhibition at The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2011-2012 as part of their Event Horizon ongoing project and his "Absentee Landlord" exhibition was held over by popular demand. A retrospective of Waters' art, Indecent Exposure, was exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Art from October 2018, to January 2019, and travelled to The Wexner Center for the Arts from February 2 to April 28, 2019. University of California press published a catalog, Indecent Exposure, in conjunction with this exhibition. From February to April 2021 his show "Hollywood's Greatest Hits" was on view at Sprüth Magers gallery in Los Angeles.

John Waters' one man spoken-word lectures entitled "The End of the World" "This Filthy World", "False Negative" or "Make Trouble" and his annual Christmas show, "A John Waters Christmas", are performed at colleges, museums, film-festivals and comedy clubs around the world. He has played to sold out audiences at the Coachella Valley Music and

Arts Festival, Bonnaroo, the Sydney Opera House, Volksbühne Berlin, and both Southbank Centre and Barbican Hall in London.

In 2004, the music compilation CD "A John Waters Christmas" was released by New Line Records and was followed up in 2007 by "A Date With John Waters". 2022 saw the vinyl release by Sub Pop of the 7" single "It's In The Book", Waters' cover of a 1952 hit comedy recording by Johnny Standley.

As an actor, Waters has appeared in many motion pictures including Jonathan Demme's *Something Wild*, Woody Allen's *Sweet and Lowdown*, Herschell Gordon Lewis' *Blood Feast 2: All You Can Eat*, and Don Mancini's *Seed of Chucky*, and the 20th Century Fox film *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip*. In February 2006, Waters hosted a 13-episode television series on the here! TV Network called *John Waters Presents Movies That Will Corrupt You*. He also appeared in an episode of NBC's hit show, *My Name Is Earl*, and played "The Groom Reaper" in the CourtTV series *Til Death Do Us Part*. John provided animation or narration voiceover for *The Simpsons*, Disney Channel's *Fish Hooks* and *Mickey Mouse Shorts*, Animal Planet and Turner Classic Movies. He also played William Castle in an episode of Ryan Murphy's HBO series *Feud* in 2017. His cameo in the season five finale of the NBC-TV series *The Blacklist* in 2018 was described as "every bit as fun and strange as you would hope." *Law & Order Special Victims Unit* now counts John among their recurring cast members as "Floyd Cougat". In 2021 *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* invited John to guest star in their fourth season. The series *Search Party* crafted the role of Sheffield for John in their fifth and final season in 2022.

Waters is a member of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Additionally, he is a past member of the boards of The Andy Warhol Foundation and Printed Matter, a former member of the Wexner Center International Arts Advisory Council and was selected as a juror for the 2011 Venice Biennale. He is also a member of the Board of Directors for the Maryland Film Festival, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and has been a key participant in the Provincetown International Film Festival since it began in 1999, the same year Waters was honored as the first recipient of PIFF's "Filmmaker on the Edge" award. In September 2014, Film Society of Lincoln Center honored John Waters' fifty years in filmmaking with a 10-day celebration entitled "Fifty Years of John Waters: How Much Can You Take?" featuring a complete retrospective of his film work. In May 2015, Waters was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). During the month of September 2015, Waters' body of work as a filmmaker was again celebrated at the British Film Institute with a program called "The Complete Films of John Waters...Every Goddam One of Them." The French Minister of Culture bestowed the rank of Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters to Mr. Waters in 2015. In May 2016, John Waters received another Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Arts (MICA). In February 2017, John Waters was presented the Writers Guild of America, East's Ian McLellan Hunter Award honoring his body of work as a writer in motion pictures. In 2019 Locarno Film Festival awarded him the Career Golden Leopard and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival recognized his contribution to the art of Cinema with the Golden Alexander. In May 2022 and June 2023, the School of Visual Arts in New York (SVA) awarded John his third and fourth Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts when he delivered a virtual commencement speech during lockdown of 2020 and later in person in 2022 at Radio City Music Hall. John Waters was the featured with Mink Stole in the 2022 Calvin Klein Pride campaign, he was a face of the Saint Laurent fall/winter 2020 menswear campaign, and the year before that he was featured along with Olympic gold medalist Megan Rapinoe in the Nike x Olivia Kim commercial.

Director Filmography

2004	A Dirty Shame
2000	Cecil B. Demented
1998	Pecker
1994	Serial Mom
1990	Cry-Baby
1988	Hairspray
1981	Polyester
1977	Desperate Living
1974	Female Trouble

1972	Pink Flamingos
1970	Multiple Maniacs
	The Diane Linkletter Story
1969	Mondo Trasho
1968	Eat Your Makeup
1967	Roman Candles
1964	Hag in a Black Leather Jacket