

£5.50 \$10.99



9 770262 357105



IT'S SHOW TIME!
**STARRING
ANDREJ PEJIC +
DREE HEMINGWAY**

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MATT JONES

i want to believe

British artist and filmmaker SHEZAD DAWOOD achieved notoriety for his 55-minute zombie western *Feature*, filmed in the English countryside and premiered in 2008; its most memorable scenes include a stylish Shezad dressed up as a cowboy, painted blue, and locked in an operatic embrace with a Wagnerian Valkyrie, as well as a grisly feast in which a trio of blonde zombies eat the sheriff's intestines in a saloon bar.

TEXT FELIX NASH

Born in London in 1974, he's an artist with a rich cultural heritage - an Indian father, a Pakistani mother and an Irish stepmother - that's mirrored in works such as *New Dream Machine Project*, a recent performance at the Cinémathèque de Tanger that involved traditional North African musicians playing on stage alongside a three-metre tall dream machine. Shezad's latest project is his most ambitious yet; an epic feature film called *Piercing Brightness* that takes UFOs to Lancashire and comes with an experimental 15-minute trailer, currently screening in a special viewing space at Modern Art Oxford. i-D caught up with him in a riad in Marrakesh, broke out the mint tea and backgammon, and asked him what it's all about.

What kind of film is *Piercing Brightness*?

Piercing Brightness is quite a hybrid film, it takes a documentary approach and then it's equally very firmly within a history of science fiction. It's also a film about belief. It's definitely quite bonkers. Basically it's all set in Preston in Lancashire, and it suggests that for millennia there have been visitors from somewhere, not specified, who have been coming to Preston because, obviously, it's the nexus of all intergalactic activity on earth.

Why Preston?

Generally, the places I end up or the way I do things is quite freewheeling, there's a certain kind of sense of synchronicity and accident in ending up in particular places. I was loosely thinking science fiction and I got this invitation from a public art commissioning body called In Certain Places, who are based in Preston. They're really interested in very ephemeral interventionist public art projects, and they'd been interested in my work, apparently mainly through *Feature*; where again I was thinking western and I got invited somewhere and it seemed to be an odd fit.

Feature was a zombie western right?

A zombie western in the Cambridgeshire countryside. But it turned out that Wysing Arts Centre, who commissioned that, were doing this whole rebuild and the architect's plans looked a bit like frontier town at Disneyland. We

found western re-enactors who did the whole circuit in Cambridgeshire, as well as a whole gay fetish cowboy scene, and role playing gamers who, it turned out, staged a game called Flying Lead, Walking Dead. So that kind of mad synchronicity is something I've almost come to expect. A similar thing happened with *Piercing Brightness* and Preston; it turned out that Lancashire County has one of the highest UFO sighting rates in the UK, and it's also the birthplace of Mormonism, with the first Mormon baptisms performed in the River Ribble. So, I like that thing where something becomes a mirror very much to a place, and actually the fantastical allows it to be more effective in doing so. Rather than taking away from the real, it actually reveals the real.

Your aliens take on human form, in the shape of a Chinese boy and girl. What was your thinking behind that?

I was very interested to play with ideas of national geographies, cultural boundaries, and how absolute or how arbitrary they are. So you've got the sort-of Chinese aliens who speak Mandarin, but then you've got their point of contact in Preston who is a shopkeeper who is also an alien. There's a hint of weirdness around the whole of the city through the film. For me it was very much this idea that everyone was potentially an alien, that idea of migration as perpetual. We have such big arguments and discussions about particular cultures and their impact on each other, but I think there's less attention given to seeing us all as one culture in which various shifts and balances occur. There's something interesting in that we don't think of ourselves as a species; we think of ourselves, still, more according to nationality. It's almost like a 19th-century paradigm that we're still stuck within, it's like the world and technologies have moved on but we haven't and we're still struggling. It's interesting that at the moment there's all this talk about globalisation, but national borders have never been so strictly enforced!

shezaddawood.com



Feature, 2008