

PULSE

JUST in time for this year's orgy of movie industry self-love — the Oscars — comes Sarah Morris' unflinching look at the Hollywood machine, "Los Angeles." The short film, which opens today at the Friedrich Petzel Gallery (535 W. 22nd St.) chronicles the week before last year's Academy Awards.



Morris, a painter and filmmaker who lives in London and New York, gives an outsider's view of the city — and shows an intimate glimpse of the stars you won't see on network TV.

Watching "Los Angeles" is like having an all-access pass to Hollywood. "Nothing is scripted," said Morris, who let the stars choose which of their activities would be filmed.

Infamous producer and "The Kid Stays in the Picture" scribe Robert Evans decided to be shot getting his face shaved by his very young, very topless girlfriend.

"Rush Hour" director Brett Ratner picked getting dressed in the back of a Bentley by a personal valet, leading to images you won't be able to get out of your head. (Especially once you realize the semi-nude Ratner doesn't wear any underwear.)

Morris had more specific ideas for some participants. "With Dennis Hopper, I wanted to film him brushing his teeth or driving his car," says Morris. "He chose driving his car — which he really likes to do."

Sofia Coppola was filmed getting into her Porsche at the celebrity-studded Chateau Marmont, but Morris instead decided to show her seat-holder at the Oscars rehearsal because, she felt, "it was a more appropriate representation" of the "Lost in Translation" director.

Morris filmed Sandra Bullock, John Travolta, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett rehearsing for their award presentations. During the pre-show arrivals, Morris and her crew had a prime spot, and there are shots of everyone from Nicole Kidman to Owen Wilson and Steve Martin working the red carpet. But instead of the typical paparazzi shots, Morris' show how chaotic and crowded the scene is.

"It's such a complex city. It's all ego," says Morris. Besides celebrities, "Los Angeles" also captures other elements of the city's narcissistic personality: leggy blonde tennis players.

Xanax prescriptions being filled, Mulholland Drive, movie sets and women getting botox injections.

Ironically, even though the film makes L.A. look like a shallow (but beautiful) fantasy world, Morris' subjects have loved the end result. Ratner, who is shown in perhaps the most compromising position of anyone in the film, recently hosted an L.A. viewing where attendees "went nuts. We got a standing ovation," Morris says.

"They like that it's degrading," she says. "It resonated in their reflection of themselves."

With no professional obligation to be at the Oscars this year, Morris isn't sure if she'll watch the event on TV. "I didn't even watch last year," she laughs.

After being immersed in Los Angeles' most intense week, the filmmaker maintains that her favorite moment was getting out of there. "It felt surreal by the end of it. It was fantastic to get on the flight back to New York."

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

By MARISA MELTZER

Indie director's warts-and-all look at pre-Oscar H'wood

Sarah Morris' "Los Angeles"
Courtesy of Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York. Photo: Sean Deck.



Scenes from Sarah Morris' short film "Los Angeles," including producer Robert Evans (bottom, center) getting a shave from his topless girlfriend.