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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

'Butterfly' Review: Renate Reinsve Anchors Guttormsen

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A nearly twenty-year gestation pays off in a film that trades plot momentum for something rarer: patience. Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen spent close to two decades carrying "Butterfly" before it became a film anyone could see, and the weight of that duration is felt in every frame.

Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen's long-gestating feature opens as something close to a satirical mystery, all narrative tension and forward pull, before folding inward into a slower, more observational register that asks the viewer to sit with healing rather than watch it resolved. The director has described this as a "two wings" structure, and the metaphor holds. What's less expected is how little the film telegraphs the hinge. You feel the shift in your body before you can name it.

Renate Reinsve plays Lily, a woman whose deterioration, pale skin, damaged hair, a self-destructive relationship to her own body is rendered with a commitment that never tips into spectacle. Reinsve, fresh off the kind of visibility that could easily swallow a smaller film, instead lets her fame dissolve into the role. Opposite her, Helene Børneby, as Diana, occupies the harder, less showy part: admiration curdling into resentment, longing that never quite resolves into either love or rivalry.

Guttormsen has spoken about worrying that Reinsve's recognizability might overshadow the character, and there are moments, particularly early on, where the audience's awareness of the actress threatens to compete with the fiction. But the film earns its trust. By the second wing, Lily and Diana are simply sisters, and that's the whole point.

Gran Canaria functions as more than backdrop here. Guttormsen spent years living among the people who eventually became part of the story, and that duration shows up on screen as texture rather than tourism. The film doesn't gawk at its locations or its non-professional faces; it treats them with the same unhurried attention it gives its leads.

This is the upside of what the director calls her "Lilith Method," a production philosophy built around intuition and flexibility rather than industrial efficiency. The downside, by her own admission, is visible too: a film this size occasionally strains against a process designed for smaller frameworks, and there are stretches in the back half where the slowness tips from meditative into merely slow.

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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What makes Butterfly particularly fascinating is the way it gradually changes its relationship to the world it depicts. Early on, Guttormsen approaches the island's spiritual seekers with a skeptical, almost comic distance. Wellness rituals, communal gatherings, and promises of personal transformation are observed with a lightly satirical eye, as though the film itself remains uncertain whether to take any of it seriously. The humor is often sharp, and some of the film's most entertaining moments emerge from this tension between sincerity and absurdity.

Then, quietly, that distance begins to disappear.

The film's second half asks viewers to make the same leap its characters do. The irony recedes. The jokes become less frequent. What initially appears to be a critique of self-help culture gradually transforms into something closer to an exploration of faith, not necessarily faith in any organized belief system, but faith in the possibility that people can change. It's a bold gamble because it requires Guttormsen to risk accusations of naivety. Films are generally more comfortable mocking spiritual yearning than embracing it. Butterfly eventually chooses the latter.

Whether that choice lands will likely determine how one responds to the film as a whole. There are moments when Guttormsen's openness feels deeply moving, particularly as Lily's healing begins to emerge not through revelation but through accumulation. A conversation here, a gesture there, a slight shift in posture or perspective. The film understands that transformation rarely announces itself dramatically. More often, it arrives quietly enough that we only recognize it in retrospect.

At the same time, Butterfly occasionally struggles to translate that philosophy into compelling dramatic momentum. The final act, in particular, can feel diffuse. Scenes drift into one another with a looseness that sometimes enriches the film's observational qualities and sometimes weakens them. Guttormsen's refusal to force conclusions is admirable, but there are points where ambiguity threatens to become indecision. Not every narrative thread requires resolution, but a few seem to disappear rather than evolve.

Still, Butterfly resists the tidy emotional architecture that contemporary festival cinema often rewards. Guttormsen isn't interested in epiphanies packaged for audience consumption. Healing, as she frames it, doesn't arrive with catharsis. It arrives in fragments, unevenly, sometimes without anyone noticing until it's already happened. That's a difficult thing to dramatize, and Butterfly doesn't always succeed at it. But the ambition is rare, and Reinsve's performance alone justifies the patience the film asks for.

What lingers isn't the mystery the first half promises, but the quieter, harder question the second half actually asks: what does it look like to keep living without insisting that living make sense?

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A project nearly two decades in the making could easily have collapsed beneath the weight of its own aspirations. Instead, *Butterfly* emerges as something stranger and more valuable: a film willing to risk awkwardness, drift, and uncertainty in pursuit of emotional truths that cleaner narratives often flatten. It is uneven, occasionally frustrating, and at times almost defiantly elusive. Yet its flaws feel inseparable from its convictions.

Like the healing it depicts, *Butterfly* unfolds in fits and starts. It never fully resolves itself, nor does it seem interested in trying. By the end, that feels less like a limitation than a statement of purpose.

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
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