

Movie imitates life in a world that's already been blown to 'Smithereens'

By Steve Abariotes

Set against a backdrop of graffiti, punk rock clubs and burned out basements, "Smithereens" takes us all the way to the top (of the bottom) with Wren (Susan Berman), a down-and-out, teenage, punk rock, bag lady. She makes her nightly circuit of the Manhattan punk bars, while voraciously watching television during the day. Her reading primarily consists of biographies about dead rock stars and the flip sides of record jackets. She wants to be Mrs. Ziggy Stardust but no one will let her, or rather, nobody is paying attention to her.

"Smithereens" placed eighth at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival ahead of such Hollywood-produced entries as "Shoot The Moon" and "Missing." The troubles of Wren were similar to those of director Susan Seidelman — a complete lack of money. From the look of the film it is apparent, but in no way is this unsatisfactory. The hand-held camera and grainy film is complimentary of the action that takes place. Maybe if director Penelope Spheeris had decided to appear in front of the cameras in her film, "The Decline of Western Civilization," "Smithereens" is what would have happened.

"Smithereens" documentary flavor emanates not only from style, but in the "slice of life" fashion Wren's life is depicted. She never changes. There is no dramatic climax and no lessons are learned.

In Wren's world there is no justice. This is reflected in Wren's friendship with Eric (Richard Hell), an anarchic punk rocker. Wren is torn between Eric and Paul (Brad Rinn) and bounces between them like a ping-pong ball, seeking shelter after her landlady locks her out of her apartment.

Paul is a Montana farmboy, who paints portraits for \$10 each. He is the friendliest character in the film and he is a relatively "normal" person in a place where to be normal is to be abnormal. Some of the funniest and most human moments happen between Wren and Paul. But her attraction to Eric and the life of a rock star remain. "I just want to live in a swimming pool, eat tacos and sign autographs," she pleads.

Both Eric and Paul would like to be friends with Wren, but neither of them really wants to be. Her arrogant self-interest is too much. Even the bouncer at the bar gets fed up with her. Wren garners no ones respect. Even Seidelman's camera neglects her in a



Photo courtesy Sheldon Film Theatre

Susan Berman in a scene from "Smithereens," playing at the Sheldon Film Theatre through Saturday night.

way by frequently photographing her from the neck down. Yet, at the same time, Wren plasters pictures of her self in the subways. Like her name suggests, she is small but resilient.

The dramatic events are arranged logically, but life in Wren's world is scattered and frustrating. As she tells Paul: "Once I dreamed that the world already blew up 10 years ago — right to smithereens — and people were just floatin' around on pieces of it, not even realizing what had happened."

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