

# Such MOVING Pictures

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## Outfest Review: Stuff

The percussive score that accompanies *Stuff's* opening moments reveal the tension that underlies the entire film. There's something primal about the relentless drumbeat; it isn't an obvious accompaniment to the domestic images and dramas that fill writer-director Suzanne Guacci's film. But the friction is thematically precise, giving voice to the base, emotional creatures we are under the laws, mores, and traditions that we let rule our lives and dictate our decorum.

We've all got lots of stuff: belongings that pile up in closets and on shelves and under our beds, emotions that contradict and confuse, baggage that makes us feel like a burden to those around us. *Stuff* plays on all these definitions of the throwaway word, building a low-key but effective drama. These characters are consumed with their own worlds, their own *stuff*: Deb (Yvonne Jung) is sliding ever further into the dreaded "bored housewife" archetype while her wife Trish (Karen Sillas) tries to sort out the mess that lingers five years after her father's death. Daughter Suzie (Maya Guacci) is consumed by the desire to play the narrator in an upcoming school play. And so on and so forth, numerous personal crises colliding and building on each other, familial and romantic ties fraying while others form.



Of course, there's another woman, too: cool, tattooed single mom Jamie (Traci Dinwiddie), whose abusive ex storms back into her life, complicating things with her mute son. We've seen a hundred movies like this; hell, just a couple years ago we had a similar lesbian domestic drama, *Concussion*. But familiarity doesn't count against a movie when it's well done, as *Stuff* is. Familiar plots, subject matter, and stylistic choices aren't weaknesses when employed within good films.

For as seemingly easy as it is to define and sort the characters, they're revealed to be more complex than expected. Sure, Deb is fed up with being stuck at home, never sure where Trish is, but she's also an excited, supportive mother, relishing those aspects of being the more nurturing parent. While Trish seems at first to be a typical career woman, the greater strain in life comes from an emotional place, fretting over her father's grave, which remains without a headstone.

Such nuances color the characters outside the lines we initially see and expect to be neatly filled in: this is a drama of parents and children, the way those roles change and the way they stay the same. Sometimes, it's hard to exist as both at once, as is the case with Trish, feeling the pressure of being an attentive daughter to an ornery mother (*The Big C*'s wonderful Phyllis Sommerville) more than the drive to be present in her children's lives. *Stuff* doesn't merely observe how difficult it can be to be an active participant in a marriage, but looks beyond that at how hard it is to be a person in this world, required to wear many hats. No man or woman is an island, especially when family is involved.

With her strong cast, tried-and-true subject matter, and clear voice, Susan Guacci isn't seeking to redefine the domestic drama, but rather to create a strong, queer entry in the subgenre. She succeeds admirably, showing that all the stuff we've got to deal with is easier with people we love by our sides.

Clayton W. at 8:45 PM

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