



Clockwise from top centre. Left to right: Art Hindle (Ron Baxter) and Vincent Walsh (Callum). Tensions rise at a pop-up restaurant. Vincent Walsh (Callum), Joris Jarsky (Andrew) and Miranda Calderon (Jenny). The cooks preparing a dish. A nervous meeting with steak tartar. Left to right: Richard Zeppiera (Michael Bardor) and Vincent Walsh (Callum). Photos Michael DeCarlo, Andrew Kowalchuk and Purple Pictures

TWO HANDS TO MOUTH

**DIRECTED BY
MICHAEL DECARLO**

Veteran television director Michael DeCarlo had two words in mind when prepping his new film *Two Hands to Mouth*. Those words were “lurid” and “elegant.” Set entirely inside a posh restaurant that comes to double as a sort of bare existential space—a sort of Sartrean dinner party—*Two Hands to Mouth* does justice to these seemingly contradictory impulses. For all of its highly stylized dialogue (the film is wall-to-wall talking) it’s easily one of the most distinctive-looking

Canadian first features in recent memory. DeCarlo uses strong, dynamic compositions and boldly colour-coded lighting to bolster the underlying (and at times overwhelming) sense of claustrophobia and mania.

It’s a crowded movie, and that also extends to the circumstances of its production. DeCarlo shot the film in 15 days with one camera, which is even more amazing when you consider that there are more than a dozen characters in it, all of whom are vying for screen time. “On some days there were 14 actors in the room,” he says. “It is very unusual to see a film with that many principals and more unusual to see them in a film

of our scope. This is an intense and demanding film for the cast. We shot a lot of 15- and 20-minute takes and then we would do it again. And then again. This is the most shooting I have ever done in one day. [And he did it again and again.] This was truly an immersive experience for the performers and crew. Also a consuming one.”

DeCarlo says that he and ace DP Steve Cosens drew on the paintings of Francis Bacon for visual inspiration. He also name-checks Sidney Lumet, Luis Buñuel, Sam Peckinpah and Quentin Tarantino. (Now that would be a dinner party.) “I was aware of the cinematic tradition of violence,” he says. “The violence in the film,

both physical and emotional, is informed by character. I tried to create an emotional and physical world that explores intimate and tender moments as well as violence and cruelty.” *Two Hands to Mouth* is definitely violent, but it’s also about where violence comes from. Without spoiling the twist-filled screenplay it’s enough to say that DeCarlo is at least as interested in larger systems of economic brutality as close-quarters gunplay.

“Certainly the economic chaos of the last few years informed the script,” says DeCarlo. “At the same time, this is a narrative and dramatic film, not a political soap box. The multi-character cast allows for many voices and personalities

to co-exist and interact with each other. And like any good dinner guests, they discuss politics!” One of the strengths of *Two Hands to Mouth* is that its characters rarely sound like they’re speaking in the same voice, which is also a compliment to the actors, a vivid gallery of faces familiar from Canadian film and television. If there’s a star turn, though, it belongs to that old pro Art Hindle, who slips into the skin of a well-moneyed creep with serpentine finesse.

“Art is a wonderful guy and a passionate advocate of Canadian filmmaking and acting,” says DeCarlo. “We talked about the role. He had a previous life in the world of business, so he had some real



insight into the character. He's an excellent actor. He's handsome and charming and has the intensity to reveal the darkness that lurks within that character."

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