

FILM REVIEWS | C13



SQUEEGEE BANDIT

(R16 – contains violence, offensive language and drug use) directed by Sandor Lau. 75 mins. Playing now.

★★★★

AFTER WATCHING Sandor Lau's *Squeegee Bandit*, a documentary on Auckland's roadside window-washers, I'm still not sure I like the idea of them. But the film at least does a creditable job of explaining why someone might want to clean windows at intersections for a dollar or two a car.

Following South Auckland squeegee-twirler Kevin Whana, aka Starfish, for nine months, Lau's documentary sees such means-to-an-end employment as a trickle-down effect of European colonisation, one of many forms that still widely afflict Maori today.

There hasn't been such a volatile, in-your-face, brutally authentic character in local cinema since maybe Jake Heke in *Once Were Warriors*. A constantly changing rollercoaster of moods, Whana is at once amusing, vicious, charismatic and street-smart— we're always flinching from his outbursts of angry, expletive-filled tirades, but we rarely tune out from what he has to say.

Wittily employing old educational and archival footage to underscore its themes, the

doco tracks Whana's daily moves with candid fearlessness. It reveals the hardships of Starfish's abusive upbringing, his nomadic lifestyle, brushes with the law, dealing with the abandonment of his family and the surprisingly lucrative venture of squeegeeing car windows (on a good day, Whana earns up to \$80 an hour).

The hip-hop-tinged, MTV-ish presentation of Whana's job teeters on glorification, but *Squeegee Bandit* is no woe-is-me apologia for window-washing. Instead, it's a concise, cogently argued reading of a facet of New Zealand society that's often neglected. For all Whana's ongoing struggles with personal demons, the final, unexpectedly spiritual moments allow him a sense of forward-thinking determination. "We're gonna work something out," he says, finding solace in God. We're optimistic he will too.

— AARON YAP

THE PITCH: Behaviours of a Window Washer.
WATCH OUT FOR: Starfish at intersections. Don't make him mad, whatever you do.