

Review Indie drama 'Can Hitler Happen Here?' is a real curio



Mark McCullough Thomas and Laura Esterman in the film "Can Hitler Happen Here?" (Pilgrims 7 Corp.)

By **Gary Goldstein**

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The dauntingly titled “Can Hitler Happen Here?” is one of the more curious feature forays in recent memory; a brief, at times surreal look at madness, aging and personal freedom. It’s a gutsy, often off-putting piece whose eccentric little New York story and experimental vibe might have been better served by a short film.

Miriam Kohen (an intrepid Laura Esterman) is a wealthy, 74-year-old artist living in reclusive squalor in her Upper East Side townhouse, to the consternation of her affluent

neighbors (Tracy Shayne, John Pirkis), L.A.-based son (Mark McCullough Thomas), a persistent social worker (Alexander Quiroga) and others.

Their mounting intrusions send Miriam into a rabbit hole of paranoia, alcoholism and resistance, and make her wonder if the “nanny state” she believes prevails could turn into a “fascist state.”

First-time feature director Saskia Rifkin, with a bold assist from cinematographer Frederic Fasano (shooting in black-and-white and in the boxier 4:3 ratio), works hard to immerse us into Miriam’s roiling mind-set, employing an eclectic, sometimes garish visual style that alternately rivets and confounds.

Catherine May Levin’s script, singular as it may be, provides little context or history about Miriam, leaving more questions than answers. The retro-ish gay content is also a bit head-scratching. Still, if the film’s messages are debatable, its final image resonates.

‘Can Hitler Happen Here?’

Not rated

Running time: 1 hour, 13 minutes

Playing: Laemmle Playhouse 7, Pasadena

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