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L O S A N G E L E S ■ N E W Y O R K

Thin

(Docu)

An HBO Documentary Films presentation. Produced by R.J. Cutler, Lauren Greenfield, Amanda Micheli, Ted Skillman. Executive producer, Sheila Nevins.

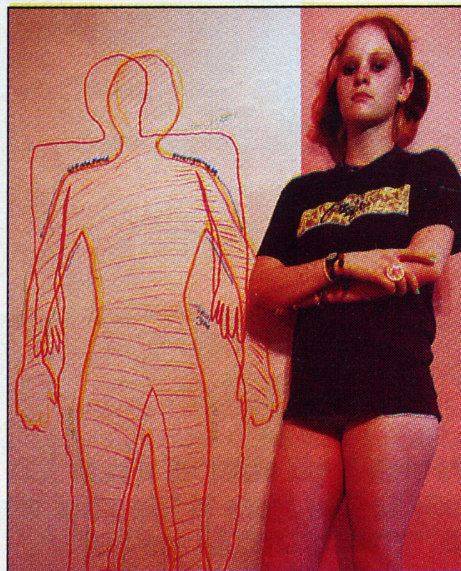
Directed by Lauren Greenfield. Camera (color, DV-to-35mm), Amanda Micheli; editor, Kate Amend; music, Miriam Cutler; sound, Judy Kard, Claudia Katayanagi; supervising producer, Lisa Heller. **Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (competing)**, Jan. 21, 2006. Running time: 105 MIN.

By JOHN ANDERSON

Lauren Greenfield's fly-on-the-wall study of four young clients of the Renfrew Center, a Florida facility for young women with eating disorders, is more than a PSA in docu clothing. Both an indictment of U.S. health care (several of the women are discharged prematurely because their insurance runs out) and a graphic condemnation of our culture's obsession with thinness, pic neither exploiting its subjects nor soft-pedals their plight. Made-by-HBO docu figures to have a high profile on the cabler's menu considering that, according to the pic, one out of every seven adolescent American females suffers from an eating disorder.

Greenfield concentrates on four principals, a cross-section of the types of personalities and problems that result in self-starvation.

Shelly is the bulimic child of divorce, and a twin who envies her



Lauren Greenfield's documentary "Thin" explores the world of the Renfrew Center, a clinic for women with eating disorders.

sister. She's been fed through an abdominal tube for the previous five years. Polly, 29, is cranky but charismatic and a leader among her peers. Alisa, a divorced mother of two who looks like she's 15, is far more self-possessed than her fellow subjects, but admits that she joined the Air Force during Operation Desert Storm "just so I could lose weight."

Brittany, a goth-ish waif whose mother, too, has an eating disorder, suffers a breakdown over her intractable struggle that results in what is probably the film's saddest, most mesmerizing moment. With Miriam Cutler's occasionally funereal but always appropriate score

rippling through the background, Brittany's crisis, and those of the other subjects, becomes visceral.

Pic also considers the staff and the seemingly dozens of patients at Renfrew in its emotional mix.

Helmer Greenfield's access is consistently astounding; that she and her accomplished d.p., Amanda Micheli, get inside as they do is oftentimes as fascinating as what they're documenting. The two are there in the morning, when the patients stumble zombie-like down the Renfrew corridors for their weigh-in and body check; they are there when the women have their various, if infrequent, moments of joy. The director obviously managed to earn the trust of the young women, and it's easy to see how she did it; she never intrudes, and, on several occasions, she's present when rules are being broken but never rats anyone out.

There are things that perhaps should have been told to the viewer that "Thin," in its verite way, doesn't say. Even though Renfrew is a women's clinic, one wonders why so few men are afflicted with eating disorders. Why is anorexia such a phenomenon of plenty? How much, exactly, does it cost to go through a program at Renfrew?

In the end, though, the fact that one is asking these questions is a testament to Greenfield, whose well-structured, fiercely candid movie is, most of all, a provocation.