

Elisabeth Moss Reigns Supreme in ‘Queen of Earth’

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Elisabeth Moss is the ‘Actor of Her Generation.’ She is a true chameleon, and can anchor a lead role while still expressing a twitch of consequence. The subject is depression in “Queen of Earth,” and writer/director Alex Ross Perry is able to honestly portray it through Moss.

The setting is a lake house, which gives the heavy subject a simplicity, and allows the actors to use the environment as a stage – they continue to confront each other in that space, despite the inherent distance that grows between them. There is an immediate empathy towards Moss, as the audience is privy to a her her boyfriend leaving her in a stunning scene that opens the film. As she escapes to her best friend’s lake cabin, she cannot deal with the simplest elements of maintaining life, and although any getaway vacation can be defined as therapeutic, nobody in the vicinity of the cabin has a clue on how to reach out to a depressed person, who doesn’t want to be reached. Elisabeth Moss magnificently portrays that downturned subtlety, and the story never allows her to come to terms with it.

Catherine (Elisabeth Moss) has experienced the double whammy of her father dying – he was a known artist who suffered from severe depression – and her boyfriend James (Kentucker Audley) leaving her. She seeks solace with her best friend Virginia (Katherine Waterston) by escaping to the lake house Virginia’s parents own. As the long week ticks by, it becomes apparent that Catherine is suffering the same fate as her father.



Catherine (Elisabeth Moss) is Challenged in 'Queen of Earth'

Photo credit: IFC Films

Flashbacks tell the story incompletely, but reveal that exactly one year before the circumstance was a bit cleaner – Catherine was still with the boyfriend who had yet to dump her, and Virginia was getting over a lost love of her own. The present situation is also complicated by a neighbor, Rich (Patrick Fugit), who Virginia is using as a friend with benefits, and who insists on pricking the expanding balloon of Catherine's lost soul.

There is a lot of truth in this film, both in its portrayal of a depressed individual and the dialogue that expounds on that depression. Every actor is on their game, as they shift through the minefield of Catherine's circumstance. The age group is probably late 20's/early 30's – which is old enough to have depression have a profound effect, and young enough to have those around Catherine not understand the ramifications of their confrontations with her.

Elisabeth Moss portrays the descent of Catherine like the drip from a IV bottle. There are obvious signs of disconnection, but not enough to sound an alarm (excessive sleep, lack of appetite, "there but not there"), and the persons surrounding her are not equipped to recognize the symptoms, even belittling her situation. There are also signs of more pressure. When the lake house has a party, an attendee confronts Catherine about some allegations that her father had cheated some people, and it was revealed after his death.

Part of the atmosphere that writer/director Alex Ross Perry creates is through the supporting performances around Catherine. Katherine Waterston ("Inherent Vice") has the most difficult job as the best friend Virginia, but Ross Perry reveals enough of their past to explain why Waterston is reacting the way she does. Patrick Fugit as Rich the neighbor is the antagonist – he wants the easy conquest of Virginia, and her freaky friend is in the way. Craig Butta has a short but effective scene with Moss in regards to the lake house community. It becomes an effective precursor to the breakdown that occurs at the party.



Virginia (Katherine Waterston) Exists with Catherine in 'Queen of Earth'

Photo credit: IFC Films

This is Ross Perry's fourth feature film, on the heels of last year's "Listen Up Phillip," which had a totally different style and feel, but also had a significant atmosphere and communicative reach (Moss also was in that film). Tackling the subject of depression is a slippery slope, but Ross Perry understands the delicate nature of the disease enough to allow it to honestly flourish, if that's the right word. Catherine is also an artist, which is a perfect example again on how the thing that makes you great, also has the power to destroy you.

The power of performance is brilliantly maneuvered by Elisabeth Moss in this film, which proves if an actor can just break through – as Moss did on "Mad Men" – a true wonder of possibilities can exist within the souls of her uniquely created characters. Elisabeth Moss is a true wonder.

"Queen of Earth" is in select theaters, including Chicago, and is available for digital download. See local listings for theaters, show times and download providers. Featuring Elisabeth Moss, Katherine Waterston, Patrick Fugit, Kentucker Audley and Craig Butta. Written and directed by Alex Ross Perry. Not Rated.



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