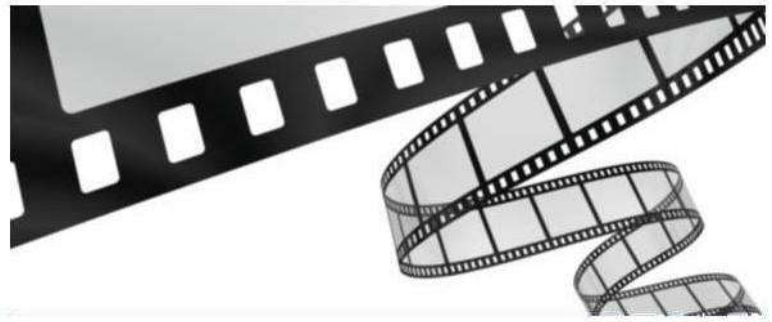


CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

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Exhibition

(UK 2013)

Running time: 104 minutes and 39 seconds

Written and directed by Joanna Hogg

Cast: Viv Albertine (D); Liam Gillick (H); Sirine Saba (woman in car); Tom Hiddleston (estate agent); Harry Kershaw (estate agent); Mary Roscoe (neighbour); Christopher McWatters (neighbour); Julienne Dolphin-Wilding (Skype friend); Mark McCabe (builder); Chris Wilson (paramedic); Daryl Francis (paramedic); Jared Wakefield (photographer)

Joanna Hogg is an artist and film-maker who entrances and enrages. After the first wave of praise from fans (such as me), her movies tend to get a backlash of incredulity and scorn from those who would prefer the envelope unpushed and unmolested. In the runup to its release, this latest film has already provoked some giggles and putdowns online. Some of the tweets I've been getting have felt like seat-bangs from some derisive digital walkout. It only makes me love her more.

Exhibition is a superbly glacial and composed experiment in fictional cine-portraiture; a refrigerated study in domesticity and sophistication, mysterious and preposterous – a movie that might claim its lineage from Rachel Whiteread's cast sculpture *House*, or David Hockney's painting *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*. Hogg uses her characteristic long takes from fixed camera positions; she uses available light, and a kind of middle-distance sound design; it's a film-making technique that makes you expect people on screen to start speaking not English but Austrian-accented German. This is a movie quite uninterested in the structural conventions of narrative, though there is a story – of a sort. It is also uninterested in the conventional tonal imperative of irony, though there is comedy, and tragedy – of a sort.

The leads are non-professionals. The former lead singer of The Slits, Viv Albertine, and the Turner-nominated artist Liam Gillick play a childless couple, identified as D and H, both contemporary artists and evidently of considerable private means, able to follow their vocations without worrying about money. They live in a handsome modernist house in London, with huge rectilinear spaces and its own eccentric lift. It was once home to its real-life architect, the late James Melvin, to whom the film is dedicated. There is some tension between them: H is considerably more successful than D, whose performance art has not yet found acclaim. They have tense conversations about her work; their sex life is stalled

and, in fact, the whole house seems to exist in a miasma of thwarted, introverted eroticism. When on her own, D does a great deal of masturbatory squirming and fantasising; she dictates her dreams into a machine on waking and often falls asleep hunched against walls or on window sills, like a cat. Her behaviour becomes progressively more disturbed and we are gradually introduced to her inner life; the scenes Hogg conjures have a mesmeric, hallucinatory quality.

The strange fact is that D and H want to move out of this extraordinary house, in which they have spent most of their adult lives, and on which they have lavished such care. They have presumably already found somewhere new; where they are moving is never mentioned, and neither is the asking price of the current place. Tom Hiddleston has a cameo as a sleek, courtier-like estate agent. Why are they moving? Because, as artists, they feel in some sense that they have outgrown the house and need to develop further, in a new context? Or is it because something terrible has happened to them there, something they can never mention? This could be at the root of their dysfunction, somehow fused with the eerily calm house itself; something that can only be expressed or reclaimed by being tacitly transformed – into art.

It is an enigma manipulated and maintained with mastery. Hogg's approach is something that might be called asatirical: the anxieties of the bohemian classes are held up for stringent inspection, but not ridicule. D and H are a world away from, say, Alan Bennett's *Stringalongs*, and they are also subtly different from Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche as the troubled couple in Michael Haneke's 2005 drama *Hidden*, who like D and H live high-status lives almost barricaded inside a gorgeous modern home in the middle of a capital city.

D and H's comfortable existence is not there to be tortured and lacerated, although at one point there is a very Hanekerian confrontation with a man who has had the bad taste to park in H's private slot. This clash is not the point. These are tremors and after-shocks to something that has already happened.

There is something disturbing in the way these feelings and alienated emotions have been displaced outwards. The house could be their prison, or their refuge, or their private exhibition space for emotional pain. As for D's mental state, is she losing it – or gaining it? It could be that, in her impossibly rarefied way, this contorted figure is absorbing the unspoken distress and is evolving into a butterfly of creativity. Exhibition is challenging, sensual, brilliant film-making.

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 24th April 2014

Our next film: *The Great Beauty*, Wednesday 17th June, 8pm.