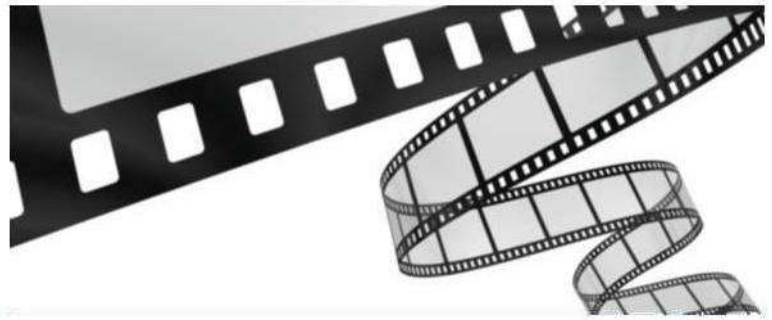


# CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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## **The Square**      2017

**Sweden**      **151 Minutes**

**Director:**      **Ruben Östlund**

**Writer:**      **Ruben Östlund**

### **Cast:**

Claes Bang: *Christian*; Elisabeth Moss: *Anne*; Dominic West: *Julian*; Terry Notary: *Oleg*; Christopher Læssø: *Michael*; Annica Liljeblad: *Sonja*

### **Ruben Östlund's Oscar-nominated assault on polite Swedish Society**

One of the oldest pleasures of cinema is the opportunity it gives us to look at beautiful people in beautiful places, possibly having beautiful sex. Often audiences get exactly what they came for but sometimes it isn't exactly straightforward. Take *The Square*, the Oscar-nominated film from Swedish director **Ruben Östlund** that won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2017. Its cast includes Danish heart-throb **Claes Bang** (tipped as a potential James Bond), handsome **Dominic West** (of *Wire* fame) and lovely **Elizabth Moss** (freed from her *Handmaid's Tale* wimple). The setting is Stockholm's fashionable art world so there's a visual feast of ultra-cool art gallery interiors, gilded halls, luxury apartments, modernist offices and a Tesla slicing through streets familiar from all those Scandi noir series.

This isn't a thriller, although it is certainly filled with jeopardy, and it isn't a romance, although it has one of the most startling sex scenes I've seen since Toni Erdmann. Instead *The Square* is a post-modern farce – a string of terrible mishaps befalls museum director Christian (Claes Bang) as he tries to hype a new exhibit and we watch his life spiral from cool to chaos. It's also a satire, gleefully poking fun at the pretensions of the art world and liberal Swedes' earnest efforts to promote a dialogue on immigration and racism.

But most of all, *The Square* is brilliantly acted and very stylish, if at times just a little bit too pleased with how clever it is. To describe the plot in any detail would be to spoil the film's unfolding pleasures; suffice to say there is a theft, inept revenge, social and professional humiliation, and an actor impersonating an ape who should make Andy Serkis a tad jealous.

Östlund is following up his disquieting hit *Force Majeure* and his budget has increased exponentially. For the first time he's working with actors famous outside Scandinavia. But his directing style hasn't changed – gruelling improvisations and multiple takes until the performance is just as he wants. Director of photography Frederik Wenzel's elegant shots are held at almost uncomfortable length; the audience is given plenty of time to observe closely each character as their thoughts and feelings flicker in front of our eyes.

There's much clever framing too, marginal figures edging into our vision. The spaces Christian navigates are both claustrophobic and hallucinatory. Confusing, faintly disturbing peripheral sounds come from off-screen with no explanatory cutaways to their source. Dialogue is kept naturalistic and doesn't get in the way of the actors – Aaron Sorkin does not haunt this script.

The noodling *a cappella* score is a touch irritating in its over-signalling of wit and the child actors lack credibility, but *The Square* finds Östlund at the top of his game. It should provide the most fun to be had in an art movie this month if not an art gallery. And Claes Bang's English accent, a homage to David Bowie, is startlingly good. This Danish actor would have no problem squaring up to Bond.

*Saskia Baron* (review in *theartsdesk.com*, Friday March 16, 2018)

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## Our previous presentation:

Apologies, once again to those disappointed that we could not show our intended film, **Loving Vincent**. Of those that chose to remain and watch our last-minute replacement (**J.A. Bayona's The Orphanage**), you rated the film 3.89 stars out of 5. Please visit the Archive pages at <http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk> to read all the feedback comments.

You can still provide feedback on this, or any other film, by visiting the Discussions page (<http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk/discussion/>).

## Our next presentation:

**L'Amant Double** will be shown on 29th January, starting at 8:00pm. In the meantime, we would like to wish everyone a Joyous Christmas and Happy New Year.