

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

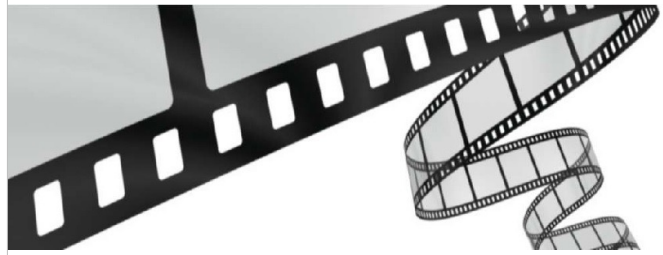
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LOVING VINCENT

Dirs: Dorota Kobiela & Hugh Welchman

95 min

Did Vincent van Gogh, as first suggested in the biography of 2011 by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White, not actually shoot himself, but rather was shot as a result of a bizarre prank by a local bully, one Rene Secretan, a 16-years old who was tormenting poor Vincent and loved to swagger round the fields in a cowboy costume carrying a pistol? Did Vincent claim, on his death bed, that he had killed himself, perhaps out of weary despair, or a desire not to make posthumous trouble for the neighbourhood, or perhaps simply to avoid the ignominy of an absurd end, and claim the awful glamour of suicide? This theme is explored in what has been described as an intriguing, possibly weirdly exasperating, oddity of a film, with its scintillatingly impressive technique of, apparently, hand-painting every frame which can be seen as a pastiche of a van Gogh canvas.

Landscapes pulse and throb: brushstrokes bristle on skies, or people's faces, like autumn leaves. Sometimes specific images are coyly referenced - although the film stops short at sunflowers themselves! The directors have created live-action footage with actors playing scripted roles and then digital software appears to have been used to facilitate the over-painting. The style has been likened to the rotoscope technique on Richard Linklater's eerie, dreamlike film *Waking Life* from 2001, or Ari Folman's *Waltz With Bashir* in 2008. Here, though, real, oozing paint has been painstakingly used. Peter Bradshaw in 'The Guardian' makes an intriguing analogy, asking "Are Welchman and Kobiela like old-school London cab drivers finding their way around with the 'knowledge' while everyone else has satnav?"

Douglas Booth plays Armand Roulin, son of the local postmaster, played by **Chris O'Dowd**, in Auvers-sur-Oise, where van Gogh ended his life in illness and poverty: van Gogh did portraits, of course, of both of them. On the narrative pretext of delivering a letter from van Gogh to his brother Theo, Armand makes it his business to discover what actually happened and he talks to many famous portrait subjects. **Robert Gulaczyk** plays van Gogh. The flashbacks are in the form of monochrome pencil drawings.

Bradshaw, again, makes the point: "[the film] is accomplished and ... impressive. And as van Gogh did paint so much, so indefatigably, it is almost as if a whole pictorial world could perhaps be put together, just as this film has been..., from his canvases alone." Bradshaw, with other critics, also suggests that the whole movie is really about 'style', rather than telling us very much about van Gogh's work or his life.

Having watched this film, you may like to go on-line and read the review by the art critic **Jonathan Jones**, also originally published in The Guardian. He has some trenchant views on the 'art industry' which surrounds 'great' artists like Van Gogh and reiterates the point that this is not a film to help us learn more about the artist's life - far from it! - but that viewers may find some real enjoyment from the efforts of the artists who contributed to 'creating an entire film from pastiches of Van Gogh's art.'

Our next screening: *The Square* on 3 December. This will be our last film of 2018 before we begin 2019 with *L'Amant Double* on 29 January. Do please consider donating your unwanted books, CDs and DVD/Blu-rays to the Club. A Happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year to all!

