



LOVING VINCENT was screened by Kino Ken at the Diamond Theatre in Ligonier, Pennsylvania on Sunday evening, November 5th of this year. Here's his review of that unique film.

18 of a possible 20 points

******1/2 of a possible *******

Poland/United Kingdom/Greece 2017 color 94 minutes

BreakThru Productions/Trademark Films/Silver Reel/Odra Film/

Centrum Technologii Audiowizualnych/Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej

**Producers: Sean Bobbitt, Cloene Clarke, Jonathan Feroze,
Richard Landesborough, Ivan Mactaggart, Hugh Welchman**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points:

2 Direction: Dorota Kobiela* and Hugh Welchman*

- 2 **Editing: Dorota Kobiela* and Justyna Wierszynska***
- 2 **Photography: Tristan Oliver* and Lukasz Zal***
- 2 **Lighting: Toby Farrar* and Maciej Bedyk***
- Special Optical Effects: Scott McIntyre, Eddy Popplewell,**
 Bartosz Armusiewicz,
 Szymon Gospodarek, Jorgo Gjikapulli,
 Krzysztof Laskowski,
 Lukasz Mackiewicz, others
- 2 **Written by: Dorota Kobiela*, Hugh Welchman*, and**
 Jacek Dehnel
- Script Supervision: Rebecca Sheridan**
- Music Recording: Geoff Foster* Music Mixer: Geoff Foster***
- 2 **Music: Clint Mansell* Orchestrator: Matt Dunkley***
- 2 **Production Design: Matthew Button*, Maria Duffek*, and**
 Andrzej Rafal Waltenberger*
- 0 **Sound Design: Michael Fojcik, Michal Jankowski**
- Sync Effects: Mateusz Irisik, Krzysztof Jastrzab,**
 Krzysztof Salawa, Jacek Pajak
- Dialogue Editing: Pawel Luczak**
- Sound Mixing: Hannes Wannerberger, Ronnie Mukwaya**
- Voices Casting: Jennifer Duffy*, Vanessa Baker***
- Motion Capture Casting: Sylwia Czaplewska,**
 Magda Sobolewska (extras)
- 2 **Voice Acting**
- 2 **Creativity**
- 18 total points**

Voices Cast: Douglas Booth* (Armand Roublin), Josh Burdett (Zouave),

**Holly Earl (La Mousmé), Robin Hodges (Lieutenant Milliet),
Chris O'Dowd* (Postmaster Joseph Roulin), John Sessions
(Père Tanguy, Paris art dealer), Helen McCrory* (Louise Chevalier,
Dr. Gachet's housekeeper), Eleanor Tomlinson* (Adeline Ravoux,
barmaid and teen daughter of Van Gogh's landlord), Aidan Turner*
(Boatman), Joe Stuckey (Simple-Minded Young Man with Cornflower),
Saiorse Ronan* (Marguerite Gachet, the doctor's daughter),
James Greene* (Old Peasant), Martin Herdman*
(Gendarme Rigamon), Bill Thomas (Dr. Mazery), Jerome Flynn*
(Dr. Gachet), Richard Banks (Ravoux Inn regular), Carole Le Clanche
(Madame Ravoux), Shaun Newnham (Landlord of Night Café),
Andrew Scott-Marshall (The Drinker)**

**An invigoratingly fresh approach to hand-painted animation,
LOVING VINCENT explores the final three months of painter Vincent
Van Gogh's troubled life. Designed as a post-mortem mystery being
investigated by an inquisitive postmaster's son with an undeliverable
letter for Theo, Vincent's art dealer brother, the film employs various
paintings of the older sibling as backgrounds.**

**Portrayed here as leading a disciplined life during this period,
Vincent displays a quite different character in the 1991 biopic directed
by Maurice Pialat, where he dissolutely pursues adventures with
inebriation and prostitutes, the latter being encouraged and
occasionally supplied by his younger brother. Both pictures suggest
Vincent actively engaged in a secretive love affair with
Marguerite Gachet while residing in Auvers-sur-Oise, a village about
twenty-seven miles northwest of downtown Paris.**

What is actually known is that “madman” Van Gogh arrived in that community to obtain treatment from Marguerite’s father for recurring episodes of mental aberration. He chose not to follow physician advice about elimination of unhealthy alcohol and tobacco consumption, writing that Dr. Gachet was as mentally abnormal as himself, hardly in a position to counsel others. Though continuing to produce masterpieces of oil painting while staying in the countryside outside Paris, Vincent’s parallel fixation on smoking and excessive bibulation indubitably weakened him. An uncommunicative former friend, fellow artist Paul Gauguin refused to either correspond with or rejoin him, which did nothing to improve his outlook on the world. It’s also possible Vincent and Gachet argued about art when that topic should not have been discussed by that pair. Because several times in the past Gachet’s patient had been dismissed by a teacher over just such rows.

Why the man chose to shoot himself remains unexplained. Theories advanced as LOVING VINCENT progresses include a forbidden love affair, fatal interference in a bullying situation involving one local youth of diminished mental capacity, a charge made by Dr. Gachet of Vincent’s being a financial burden to Theo, and despair over continuing inability to create any saleable art. LOVING VINCENT’S writers tantalize audiences with these various alternatives, generating plenty of suspense before a final denouement.

Told from the point of view of Armand Roublin, gadfly son of the Arles postmaster who had befriended Vincent at a previous temporary lodging, the film follows this traveler as he attempts to find someone who will gratefully receive a final letter from the

deceased Dutchman to Theo. He meets a succession of individuals who had known the agitated soul during his final weeks. Their stories and characterizations conflict, leaving Armand to sort out some kind of overall truth as best he can.

Art dealer Pere Tanguy in Paris believes Van Gogh was periodically depressed about lack of recognition from both relatives on native soil and art buyers. Adeline Ravoux, teen daughter of Van Gogh's landlord in Auvers-sur-Oise, asserts Dr. Gauchet's increasing hostility discouraged a convalescing companion. Louise Chevalier, puritanical housekeeper at the Gachets, opines raging insanity inspired by Satan did in the redheaded Northerner. Marguerite Gachet, to the contrary, expresses certitude a quarrel between her papa and his wayward fellow artist had a lot to do with curtailing the latter's life. Dr. Mazery, second treater of Van Gogh's bullet wound, thinks it probable someone else shot the victim. Perhaps one of two teenage wannabe cowboys with a handgun who frequently plagued or amused (or both) the man from Holland.

This last possibility has been raised in a recent biography of the most expressionist of Impressionists by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith titled *Van Gogh: A Life* (Random House, 2011). It is corroborated by findings reported by forensic pathologist Vincent Di Maio and author Ron Franscell in their book *Morgue: A Life in Death* (St. Martin's Press, 2016).

Yet Adeline Ravoux testified Vincent himself reported to her the fatal bullet was self-inflicted. Did he lie?

Viewers can draw their own conclusions about Vincent's motive and cause of death, though the filmmakers strongly support research in the writings noted above.

As a creative enterprise, *Loving Vincent* merits kudos for nearly flawless execution. Consisting of sixty-five thousand hand-painted individual cells, it is indisputably a superior work of art, mirroring the creations of its subject and using many of his best-known masterpieces to tell a coherent narrative.

Geoff Foster's music score is built upon repetitions of simple melodic motives much in the manner of Philip Glass's minimalism, with gradually rising or falling volumes and a heavy reliance on strings. Wordless chorus is also present, haunting, repressed, subdued, a soundscape well suited to the inner anguish of Vincent's life.

Especially convincing as almost documentary reenactment are motion capture modelings with painted personages vividly realized, their movements resembling still life studies suddenly gifted with kinetic vitality. Color schemes are those of Vincent himself in settings familiar from his portraits and landscapes. Timing is generally synchronized, though occasional lapses in animation of faces are minimally distracting. Character designs follow faithfully from Van Gogh's portraits, with the added accompaniment of speech bringing them into more rounded perspective as each interviewee encountered tells of his or her relationship with someone dead but assuredly not forgotten. The art department enjoyed a relatively easy assignment in fashioning wardrobes, since most details were readily apparent on pre-existing canvasses. All the same, Dorota Roqueplo was credited with costume designing.

A splendid matching of voice to image was achieved by Jennifer Duffy and Vanessa Baker in choosing actors to perform through sound alone. Among the most memorable are

Eleanor Tomlinson as tart-tongued Adeline Ravoux, Aidan Turner as a gossipy boatman passing along compromising tidbits about more affluent idlers, Jerome Flynn's defensive and prickly Dr. Gachet, and Saoirse Ronan's depiction of an enigmatic admirer of Vincent's artistic talent. Douglas Booth's impatient, belligerent Armand Roublin is also quite engaging, representing quite ably the audience's curiosity about an offscreen tragedy.

Indeed, the only significant shortcoming of *Loving Vincent* is its sound. Recording engineers paid insufficient attention to diction, settling for inferior enunciations which unfortunately sabotage at certain points a succinct, impressively literate screenplay by Dorota Kobiela, Hugh Welchman, and Jacek Dehnel.

Because of its violent and still controversial subject matter, *Loving Vincent* cannot be recommended for viewers under the age of sixteen. It's a gorgeous, frequently mesmerizing theatrical experience for their elders, who can appreciate the interplay of life and art. One highly recommended which they shouldn't bypass.