

Loving Vincent [12] 2017 | UK/Poland/USA | 92 min

UK release date **13th October 2017**

Director **Dorota Kobiela, Hugh Welchman**

Screenplay **Dorota Kobiela, Hugh Welchman, Jack Dehnell**

Cinematographer **Tristan Oliver, Lukasz Zal**

Cast **Robert Gulaczyk** (Vincent Van Gogh); **Aidan Turner** (The Boatman); **Helen McCrory** (Louise Chevalier); **Eleanor Tomlinson** (Adeline Ravoux); **Jerome Flynn** (Dr Gachet); **Chris O'Dowd** (Postman Joseph Roulin); **Douglas Booth** (Armand Roulin); **Saoirse Ronan** (Marguerite Gachet)

Loving Vincent is surely the most idiosyncratic and original animated feature of the year – a film about the death of Vincent van Gogh that is structured like an investigative crime drama. It uses oil painting in the style of its subject's own work combined with live action material and computer-generated imagery.

Armand Roulin (Douglas Booth), the son of postmaster Roulin, one of Van Gogh's closest friends, is the amateur detective. He has an unopened letter Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo shortly before his death. His father wants him to deliver it in person. Armand is a cocky youngster with no particular interest in Van Gogh but the more he immerses himself in the artist's world, the more obsessed he becomes about discovering how and why Van Gogh died.

At its crudest, Loving Vincent stands as a keynotes-style primer on the artist and his work. There are references to his unhappy childhood and an account of why his mother was so aloof with him. (She remained grief-stricken over the stillbirth of Vincent's older brother.) We learn how he failed in several other careers before beginning painting in earnest in his late twenties. We see him being taunted by Toulouse-Lautrec in his time in Paris. We are introduced to Père Tanguy, (a bluff and cheery John Sessions), who provided him with his paints. The filmmakers don't balk at showing him cutting off his ear (which he presents as a gift to a prostitute).

Loving Vincent is very effective in conveying Armand's awe and bafflement about this "rough, awkward man who had only been painting a couple of years" and yet so quickly began to display his genius. The way the oil paintings are animated is also startling. Van Gogh's swirling brush strokes come to life and the colours move as if they have their own violent pulse.

The character who seems best placed to unlock the mystery surrounding his death is the rough-spoken Dr Gachet (Jerome Flynn), subject of one of his most famous paintings. Gachet was an artist himself and seemingly jealous that Van Gogh's ability so transcended his own. His daughter Marguerite (Saoirse Ronan) was briefly very close to Van Gogh and possibly even loved him but was warned by her father not to distract from his art.

The real measure of Loving Vincent is that it should appeal to anyone with a passing interest in its subject but is authoritative enough to intrigue the experts too. Reportedly over 65,000 individual paintings were created by more than 100 artists in the process of shooting the feature. You can't help but admire the sheer scope of the filmmakers' vision and the painstaking way they went about crafting their tribute to Van Gogh.

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