

FILM REVIEWS / CRITIQUES DE FILMS

TRANSCENDING TIME IN *VINCENT AND ME*

Vincent and Me. Super Ecran/ La Soci  t   Radio-Canada, 1991. 91 minutes, colour. Written and directed by Michael Rubbo.

Summer art school in Montreal leads to adventure in Europe when a young art student (Jo) naively sketches the portrait of con-man, Bruno Winkler, in a style similar to one of Vincent van Gogh's portraits. Winkler spots the resemblance immediately and commissions another drawing from the girl. This he passes off as an early, newly-discovered van Gogh. In an effort to recover her drawing, Jo travels to Amsterdam where she uncovers Winkler's further involvement in art theft and forgery.

Although at one level *Vincent and Me* is a simple Walt Disney-style *whodunit*, with all that entails, including heart-warming morals such as, "be true to yourself" and stock characters such as the suavely evil spy and the zany, yet adorable grandmother, at a deeper level, it is an exploration of time. Transitions from Vincent in nineteenth-century Arles to intrigue in twentieth-century Montreal record the intersection of temporal and eternal, contrast the living man with his historical persona, and suggest that time is not neatly divided into before and after, but that past, present and future co-exist.

At the centre of this tale of greed and ambition is the image of the pure artist. Unnoticed and unrewarded, Vincent paints, filling canvasses which will change perception and fuel forgery rings a century later. Art transcends time.

On the narrative level, present and past meet in the life of Josephine. It is the strength of her mystical identification with van Gogh that launches and finally resolves the events of the plot. When it seems impossible that Jo will ever be able to prove the drawing is hers, a departure from the film's realism into fantasy enables her to travel backwards in time to meet her mentor face to face, solve her problem, and revise history's view of the artist. He is released from despair and madness and transformed into a breathing, laughing man. A human life is more than the sum of its parts and imagination bridges the centuries.

Fragments of Vincent also survive in the consciousness of the living. In the documentary footage which frames the film, one-hundred-year old Mme. Calment describes what she remembers of van Gogh from her encounters with him in her father's store. Documentary and fantasy collide with humorous results when Jo challenges Mme. Calment's view of the artist.

In *Vincent and Me* narrative structure, fantasy and documentary combine to suggest that time is circular and simultaneous rather than linear and sequential. Art, memory, and the transcendent powers of the imagination unite past, present, and future.

Pamela Seaton McLean is a freelance writer and teacher of English.