

Film Notes

by James Roethenbaugh

Norway | 2020 | 102m | 15 | subtitles

Director: Benjamin Ree

Starring: Barbora Kysilkova, Karl Bertil-Nordland

The Painter and the Thief

Five years ago, Czech painter Barbora Kysilkova's paintings were stolen in broad daylight from the Galleri Nobel in Oslo, Norway. The culprits, Karl Bertil-Nordland and his accomplice, were eventually caught and brought to trial. During the hearing, Kysilkova asks Bertil-Nordland why he stole the paintings, to which he simply replies, 'because they were beautiful'. Perhaps in an act of remorse — although more likely an artist discovering their latest muse — Kysilkova then asks the thief if he would agree to have his portrait painted.

What transpires is the tale of *The Painter and the Thief*, which on the surface is an art heist documentary, but on a deeper level provides an intense psychological exploration into the paradoxical friendship that forms between the two subjects. Filmed over the course of three years, documentary filmmaker Benjamin Ree managed to capture an emotional journey that *The Guardian* described as 'the year's most moving documentary'. Notably, the film also received the World Cinema Documentary Special Jury Award for Creative Storytelling at the Sundance Film Festival, as well as the Audience Award for Best

Documentary Feature at the London Film Festival.

Ree rose to prominence in 2016 when he produced his debut feature-length film, *Magnus*, which explored the tale of Norwegian chess prodigy and grandmaster Magnus Carlsen. Premiering at the Tribeca Film Festival and selling across 64 countries, this first feature established the director's talent as a documentary filmmaker. *Empire* noted that it was a 'study of a beautiful but mysterious mind, which also reveals the stressful nature of world-class chess tournaments and raises the deep question of where intelligence actually comes from'. Prior to this, Ree entered the industry working for the Norwegian television production company and broadcaster VGTV, directing the documentary shorts *Dreaming of the Golden Eagle / Drømmen om kongeørnen* (2012) and *When Ailin Kissed Lars* (2014). VGTV would later co-produce both *Magnus* and *The Painter and the Thief*.

Throughout his work, Ree tends to favour focusing on individuals, and often comments on the role of





Excellent

Fair

Poor

What did you think of the film? Please mark or tear the number.

Please add any further comments here:

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human nature when it comes to fame and stardom. During an interview with the Sundance Institute, he noted that *The Painter and the Thief* is primarily concerned with 'what we humans do in order to be seen and appreciated. That's what the film is exploring.' In both *Magnus* and *The Painter and the Thief*, he combines vérité-esque fly-on-the-wall cinematography with sections of home-video footage, thus ensuring his documentaries have an unmistakable realism. The result is a distinctively humanistic perspective on both fame and infamy alike.

On the topic of fame, since the release of the film, Bertil-Nordland and Kysilkova have both

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We love hearing what you think. Were you particularly passionate about a film? Perhaps you have an idea to improve the festival? Let us know! We'll be emailing all ticket holders a link to our audience survey — we'd really appreciate it if you could take just a few minutes to fill it out. You can also write to hello@filmbath.org.uk, tweet @FilmBathUK, or find us on Facebook.

benefitted from having their stories told cinematically. Prior to the robbery, Kysilkova was a relatively unknown artist, but she has since experienced commercial success on the art circuit. Undoubtedly, this critically acclaimed documentary added an attractive and intriguing quality to her and her work, leading to a welcome increase in sales. Bertil-Nordland, on the other hand, has simply appreciated the story being told from his perspective, suggesting to *Hollywood First Look Features* that 'maybe people can see the film and judge a bit less, and see that it's possible to change.'

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We hope you'll join us next year for (a hopefully more normal) FilmBath Festival 2021!



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