

French Animated Hit ‘The Painting’ Challenges Expectations

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 1, 2013 - 2:15pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Like the brilliant work of Sylvain Chomet (“The Illusionist”), Francois Laguionie’s “The Painting” is designed more for adults than children, unless your kid is a particular aficionado of art history. Opening tomorrow at the Siskel Film Center in Chicago, “The Painting” is a deeply allegorical work about coming to terms with a creator who may have left us behind but it’s also just a delightful, romantic adventure with a visual palette far more engaging than most animated blockbusters this year.

The painter has left behind his work and the creations within that work vary in terms of completion. Within an elaborate tableau, the most noble people are the Allduns (all done), the figures that have been fully painted, complete with elaborate facial features and detailed costumes. The Halfies are mostly complete and might only be missing a brushstroke here or there but they’re still shunned by the Allduns. They’re not as hunted or loathed as the Sketchies, the loosely-drawn figures without much shape and no color.



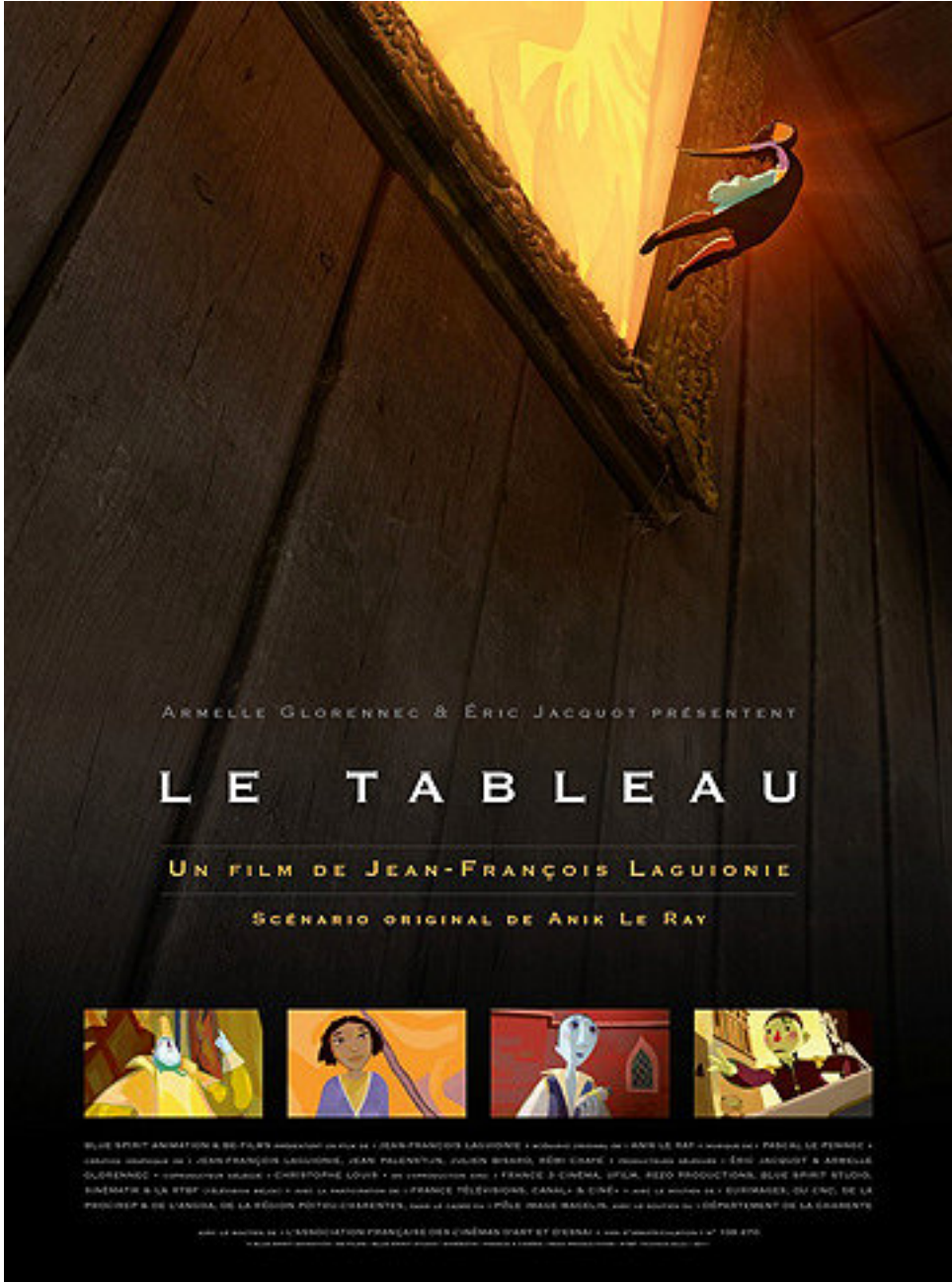
The Painting

Photo credit: Cinedigm

Of course, as in all great fantasies that feature class systems, we get a Romeo and Juliet in the world within this painting. Ramo, an Alldun with more of a heart than his pretentious peers, falls for Claire, a Halfie. Perhaps if Ramo can find the painter, the creator of them all, he can convince him to complete Claire, to color in her eyes and lips and give her the same social standing within this divided world.

Claire disappears and Ramo and Claire’s friend Lola set out to find her, crossing into a part of the painting deemed no man’s land. Plume, a Sketchie, trails along and the trio end up bouncing from painting to painting, finding a war landscape, a half-nude woman, a self-portrait, and a Venetian festival. Here is where “The Painting” comes to life. While the first act feels a bit too obvious in its allegory, the film truly takes off when it becomes less straightforward and more dreamlike when the trio adventure into uncharted territory to find God, I mean, the Painter. The middle act of “The Painting” is truly brilliant.

“The Painting” can be visually deceptive. What first seems like simple, hand-drawn animation morphs into much more with some CG sequences and even live action. Laguionie works his way not just through the symbolism of his God-as-painter parallel but neatly works in a bit of art history and even a commentary on artistic creation and free will. Do we need God to complete us or can we do it ourselves?



The Painting
Photo credit: Cinedigm

I do wish a few different decisions had been made creatively. The whole piece should have been hand-drawn with the exception of the final sequence. The cheaply rendered CG-animation falls deep into the uncanny valley when the characters would have looked better without such dead visages. And the dialogue should have been minimalized since so much of it is right on the nose. The end leaves so little for interpretation that it might as well have flashing subtitles to illuminate its themes. I wanted to do a little more interpretation and be told a little less (even if I'm a little thrown by an ending that suggests that the lower classes only want to be like the Allduns and are only happy when they are, which could be read as a slightly disturbing social commentary).

In the end, flaws withstanding, "The Painting" is a vastly more ambitious piece of animation than the junk littering the landscape of blockbuster animation. We should encourage more filmmakers stateside to take the risks often being seen only from our international animation studios. Where is the magic of Studio Ghibli or the creativity of this French piece of work in American animation? You should definitely see "The Painting" but let's hope all the creative personnel at Pixar, Disney, DreamWorks, Fox, and Sony see it as well.

"The Painting" was written by Jean-Francoise Laguionie & Anik Leray and directed by Laguionie. It opens at the Siskel Film Center in Chicago, tomorrow, August 2, 2013.



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