

## The Artist's Obsession in 'Gauguin: Voyage to Tahiti'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 24, 2018 - 5:54pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The art masters, and the masterpieces they have created, become a background culture in our lives... even if we don't necessarily know the artist. Paul Gauguin is one of those painters-as-cultural-influencer, and a vital point in his artistic life is told in the film "Gauguin: Voyage to Tahiti."

Vincent Cassel – best known to American audiences in "Ocean's Twelve" (and "Thirteen") – dives into the role of Paul Gauguin like a man possessed, and in many ways this was Gauguin's most obsessive period. He left everything behind as a French painter to find his "artistic" self in Tahiti, and as many great masters do, paid the price. The story is fascinating and frustrating, much like the artist himself, but doesn't project an understanding to the artist's inner life or the Tahitian natives around him. This works as a lesson in being an artist over everything else, and in that circumstance something always have got to give... or in Gauguin's case, give out.

Paul Gauguin (Vincent Cassel) has come to the end of his useful life as an artist in Paris, circa 1890. Despite the efforts of many around him, including his soon-to-be-ex wife Mette (Pernille Bergendorff) and friend/patron Schuffenecker (Samuel Jouy), he is bound and determined to find his artistic soul in Tahiti (a colony island of French Polynesia). In 1891, he leaves for that destination.





Vincent Cassel as the Artist in 'Gauguin: Voyage to Tahiti'

Photo credit: Cohen Media Group

He is restless at first, until he travels to the collective of Matalea, taking with him a bride named Tehura (Tuheï Adams). This is when his most productive times begin, but he is also beset by bad health, poverty and an assistant named Jotépha (Pua-Taï Hikutini) who has an eye for Tehura. These factors fight against his artistic productivity, despite the support of Dr. Vallin (Malik Zidi). Gauguin's paradise and vision begins to unravel.

Vincent Cassel carries the narrative on his back as Gauguin, communicating the artist's obsessions in a dogged performance. His determination to both feed his painter's soul and prove to those he left behind that he could be a master is communicated effectively under Cassel's watch. The inner drive, much harder and more subtle to communicate, got buried underneath the story, as it was rendered by director Edouard Deluc.

The actors portraying the Tahitian natives – Tuheï Adams as Tehura and Pua-Taï Hikutini as Jotépha – are a connection to the backdrop of Gauguin's situation, but don't deliver much beyond their roles as his support. Adams had the ethereal beauty necessary to realize the inspiration for some of PG's most famous works, yet her adultery and evolving disconnection from the artist is not fully developed.



The Artist and His Muse Tehura (Tuheï Adams) in 'Gauguin: Voyage to Tahiti'

Photo credit: Cohen Media Group

There is however, a defining sensibility to the film in the understanding of the organic nature of “the master” and his “masterpieces.” The painters of that era did not live in our world... of branding, the right art dealer and a kind of lemming-like devotion from potential wealthy possessors... they lived in a world of ‘how do I find the artistic energy to sell my vision?’ The competition was fierce, and the possessor dollar was more scarce, so Gauguin did what he needed to do to – much like his contemporary Vincent Van Gogh – to find the master within, and bring it to life organically. The film paints this picture directly and effectively, as both art history and a lesson.

What is the dollar value of Paul Gauguin in the modern age of unlimited funds among the wealthiest? It currently stands at \$300 million for “When Will You Marry” (Nafea Faa Ipoipo). The painting was done in 1892, as Gauguin sat in a bamboo shack on the remote island of Tahiti. The eventual extreme valuation begins with that sacrifice.

*“Gauguin: Voyage to Tahiti” runs through July 26th at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 North State Street, Chicago. For details, [click here](#). [19] Featuring Vincent Cassel, Tuheï Adams, Pua-Taï Hikutini, Malik Zidi, Samuel Jouy and Pernille Bergendorff. Screenplay by Edouard Deluc, Etienne Comar, Thomas Lilti and Sarah Kaminsky. Directed by Bo Edouard Deluc. Not Rated.*



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