



Nightwatching

Like Nicolas Roeg and Ken Russell, Peter Greenaway is a cinematic adventurer who for several decades wowed the British arthouse with a succession of challenging and deeply idiosyncratic films, only to slip out of favour and in effect disappear from public awareness. Given that none of his film projects – not even the epic *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy (2003-04) – has been released either in UK theatres or for the UK home market in the decade since his *8½ Women* (1999), *Nightwatching* represents something of a comeback, though it seems a further sign of his fall from grace that even this film has taken over two years to reach our screens following its 2007 completion.

How appropriate, then, that *Nightwatching* should focus on an artist who, like Greenaway himself, found his coded, carnivalesque works first winning him approval and then driving him to the margins. In 1642, at the peak of his career, Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn (an earthy Martin Freeman) reluctantly agrees to create a group portrait of the Militia Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq (later known as *The Night Watch*) but imports into his picture cryptic clues to the peccadilloes, hypocrisies and even murderous plots of his subjects, so engendering his own ruin – and incidentally inventing a new kind of art which, in its strikingly dramatic postures and chiaroscuro effects, is a forerunner of cinema itself.

Here, conversely, Greenaway's cinema has been styled to resemble no less than a work by the Dutch master. Every scene is staged with overt artifice, lit to accentuate the long shadows and framed like a *tableau vivant* (often in imitation of specific paintings), while Rembrandt alone, much like the figure of himself he concealed in the background of *The Night Watch*, occasionally looks directly at the viewer (and speaks to camera), uniquely aware that he is an object of both spectacle and narrative. This is a portrait of an artist at work, in love and in lust – but it also offers a radical reinterpretation of the painting as an allegorical cipher for crimes and conspiracies carried out by the Militia itself, which comprised Amsterdam's cultural, spiritual and economic élites. It is a theory that Greenaway would resume and expand in his next feature, the film essay *Rembrandt's J'accuse* (2008), which should be viewed with *Nightwatching* as a diptych.

This is a work that bears the unmistakable signature of its creator. There are all the usual Greenaway obsessions with witty wordplay, sexual/political power games and the effects of light on a roomful of objects. The idea of art framing murder can be traced all the way back to Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982), while the character of Marieke (Natalie Press) – the abused orphan befriended on the roof by a 'nightwatching' Rembrandt – clearly resembles, in her appearance, manner of speaking and interest in the night sky, the 'skipping girl' (Natalie Morse) from *Drowning by Numbers* (1988). Perhaps the real question is not so much whether *Nightwatching* represents a return to form for Greenaway, but rather whether such form has any place in today's cinemas. Nostalgic fans of the director are likely to get exactly what they want from *Nightwatching* – but for all its experimentation, intellectualism and intricacy, it has little to offer that's new. Perhaps, though, this is an unfair criticism of a film that in fact invites us to look again, with unblinkered eyes, at the old.

Anton Bitel, *Sight and Sound*, April 2010

NIGHTWATCHING

Directed by: Peter Greenaway
©: Nightwatching BV
Production Company: Nightwatching Productions Inc.
Produced with the participation of: Wales Creative IP Fund, Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, Gremi Film Production
Made with the financial support of: Netherlands Film Fund, Rotterdam Film Fund, Media Plus
Made with the participation of: Government of Canada, Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit Program, British Columbia Film
Produced with the participation of: Film Finances Ltd
Made with the support of: UK Film Council New Cinema Fund
Presented by: ContentFilm International, Wales Creative IP Fund, UK Film Council, Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, Netherlands Film Fund, Rotterdam Film Fund, Media Plus
In association with: No Equal Entertainment, Odeon Films, Yeti Films
Presented by: Gremi Film Production
Executive Producers: Grzegorz Hajdarowicz, Linda James, Paul Trijbits, Jamie Carmichael, Larry Sugar
Produced by: Kees Kasander
In co-production with: Piotr Mularuk, Magdalena Napieracz
Co-produced by: Christine Haebler, Carlo Dusi
Line Producer: Benedicte Hermesse
Line Producer (Wales): Eliane Huss
Associate Producer: Kim Arnott
Production Manager (Poland): Andrzej Besztak
Production Co-ordinator (Poland): Agnieszka Kik
Production Co-ordinator (Wales): Phil Claydon
Lead Production Accountant: Melissa Ruffle
Production Accountant (Netherlands): Cinecent, Erik Bakker, Mandy Posthuma
Production Accountant (Wales): Jenine Baker
Production Accountants (Poland): Jolanta Surgiewicz, Malgorzata Dedek
Location/Set Manager: Anna Palka
Location Manager: Owen Gower
Location Manager/Scout: Graham Mathews
Post-production Supervisor (Canada): Sally Dixon
Post-production Supervisor (EU): Jochem van Rijs
1st Assistant Director: Stacy Fish
2nd Assistant Director (Poland): Weronika Migon
2nd Assistant Director (Wales): Nick Murray
Script Supervisor: Claudia Morgado
CASTING DIRECTORS: Tania Polentarutti, Weronika Migon, Corinne Clark, Peter Wooldrige
Written by: Peter Greenaway
Director of Photography: Reinier van Brummelen
Camera Operator: Ruzbeh Babol
Gaffer: Peter Smith
Key Grip (Poland): Marek Czapak
Key Grip (Wales): Cees Aloserij
Visual Effects by: Rainmaker
Special Effects: Doug McCarthey, Mike Wilde, Leszek Olbinski, Marek Pinkowski
Editor: Karen Porter
Additional Editing: Elmer Leupen
Production Designer: Maarten Piersma
Art Director: James Willcock
Set Decorator: Dory van Noort
Sketcher on Set/Rembrandt Sketches: Solko Schalm
Construction Manager: Lidewij Kapteijn
Construction Manager (Poland): Andrzej Rychtarczyk

Costume Designers: Jagna Janicka, Marrit van der Burgt, Jagna Janicka
Hair/Make-up: Sara Meerman
Make-up Artist: Janusz Kaleja
Make-up Artist (Poland): Marcin Rodak
Make-up Artist (Wales): Kate Petersen
Music Composer: Wlodek Pawlik
Sound Designer: Tony Gort
Sound Supervisor: Tony Gort
Production Sound Mixer: Maurice Hillier
Additional Sound Mixer: Brent Calkin
Re-recording Mixers: Greg Stewart, Tom Perry
Sound Editing: Tony Gort
Stunt Co-ordinator (Wales): Zbigniew Modej

Cast

Martin Freeman (*Rembrandt van Rijn*)
Emily Holmes (*Hendrickje Stoeffels*)
Jodhi May (*Geertje*)
Eva Birthistle (*Saskia Uylenburgh*)
Toby Jones (*Gerard Dou*)
Natalie Press (*Marieke*)
Chris Britton (*Rombout Kemp*)
Richard McCabe (*Bloemfeldt*)
Agata Buzek (*Titia Uylenburgh*)
Kevin McNulty (*Hendrick Uylenburgh*)
Harry Ferrier (*Carl Hasselburg*)
Rafal Mohr (*Floris*)
Adam Kotz (*Willem van Ruytenburgh*)
Fiona O'Shaughnessy (*Marita*)
Adrian Lukis (*Frans Banning Cocq*)
Krzysztof Pieczynski (*Jacob de Roy*)
Matthew Walker (*Matthias van der Meulen*)
Michael Teigen (*Carel Fabritius*)
Jonathon Young (*Visscher*)
Jonathan Holmes (*Ferdinand Bol*)
Gerard Plunkett (*Engelen*)
Andrzej Seweryn (*Piers Hasselburg*)
Maciej Marczewski (*Clement*)
Maciej Zakoscielny (*Egremont*)
Reimer van Beek (*Titus, newborn*)
Robert Zalecki (*Titus, 4 months*)
Kacper Kasięcki (*Titus, toddler*)
Anna Antonowicz (*Catharina*)
Hugh Thomas (*Jacob Jorisz*)
Michael Culkin (*Herman Wormskerck*)
Jochum ten Haaf (*Jongkind*)
Grazyna Barszczewska (*Banning Cocq's mother-in-law*)
Weronika Migon (*Frau Hasselburg*)
Robert J. Page (*actor on stage*)
Magdalena Gnatowska (*orphanage governess Martha*)
Alicja Borkowska (*orphanage governess Lotte*)
Dewi Rhys Williams (*Martin Geyle*)
Magdalena Smalara (*Ineke*)
Aleksandra Lemba (*Ispidie*)
Peter Greenaway *

Netherlands-Canada-UK-Poland 2007©
141 mins

* Uncredited

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Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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