



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 2 EPISODE 10 (late-OCT 2020)

A NIGHT AT THE LOUVRE – LEONARDO DA VINCI

Vincent Delieuvin – Curator (Louvre)

Natalie Miller AO – Sharmill Films

Tim Stackpool:

And joining us on the podcast from the Louvre, curator Monsieur Vincent Delieuvin. Welcome to the podcast.

Vincent Delieuvin:

Thank you very much.

Tim Stackpool:

The first thing I wanted to ask you before we talk about the exhibition and the film was about working at the museum when there were no people, there was no crowds there. There's something like 30,000 people visiting the Louvre every day before COVID, and then when restrictions came into force, there was nobody. How was it to work there at that time?

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, for us, we are quite lucky because we are quite used to work in the museum when the galleries are closed, but even for me, it was something very special because it was not only when crowds were out of the museum, it was also during night, really at 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 AM. And so it was the first time for me also to be in the galleries at that moment. And it was a beautiful moment because you have time, it's very silent, and it's like a dream. So it was a great moment in my career.

Tim Stackpool:

And did you create a different feeling for yourself amongst the art with the quiet and the solitude?

Vincent Delieuvin:

Sure. And there is also a strong relationship with Leonardo da Vinci, because he used to paint several of his works in a dark background, and he has a strong relationship with shadow, with darkness. And so there was something very special to have a look at drawings and paintings by Leonardo da Vinci during nighttime. And it was really poetic, I should say.

Tim Stackpool:

It's a remarkable responsibility of having such great artworks and great history to present.

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, sure. Leonardo da Vinci is not an easy artist, because you have to work to study his works and his writings before, and you have to ask for very important loans from all around the world. And so it's always difficult to organise such an exhibition and you feel like well, it was also for us French people, an important anniversary because Leonardo da Vinci died in France, and thanks to his death in France, we have the biggest collection of his paintings. We have five original paintings by Leonardo da Vinci, which is about the third of his work. And so it was really quite a stressful to organise such an exhibition.

Tim Stackpool:

And it took some time, I understand, for you to put it together, along with Louis Frank, your colleague.

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, we were quite lucky to work together. It's always better to work with someone. And so we have been studying Leonardo da Vinci for more than 10 years, and I mean to write the catalogue, to study his works, his writings, to understand the artist, but after to organise the exhibition, we started in 2015 asking for loans from the most important collections in several museums and also private collections, and so it was a great, great and important job to be able to have so many masterpieces together in our galleries.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes. And I wonder if much negotiation took place there because the Mona Lisa, of course, cannot travel because it is so fragile. Did you have to negotiate with many other galleries to get some of their collection into the Louvre?

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, for loans, it becomes like that a lot. Several museums, they're organizing many exhibition and it's normal when we ask for something, to help our colleagues with their own project. So yes, sure, we have to negotiate, but it's always also a pleasure to find a good solution for both institutions. For example, we will send, in a few months, one of our masterpiece by another important Renaissance artist, Raphael. One of our masterpiece by Raphael will be sent to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg in Russia. They sent us their Leonardo, their wonderful Madonna by Leonardo, and we will help them with their project on Raphael. So we did that kind of negotiation with several other institution. And sometimes, you have also very nice institution which doesn't ask for anything. For example, the Royal Collection in the United Kingdom, they sent us several of their most beautiful drawings by Leonardo only to have the pleasure to see them with our paintings and asking for nothing from us.

Tim Stackpool:

I was reading about the analysis of his drawings and paintings, and you carried out extensive studies on Leonardo's sources in the 16th century. How did those come together?

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, to organise the exhibition we had to have a new look on all the archive documents and all the old sources on Leonardo. And thanks to that work, we were able to interpret in different manner some of his most important works. For example, one of his greater composition on a battle he had to do for Florence in Italy, we discovered that, thanks to the archive document, that it was probably a night scene and not a day atmosphere, and so this change a lot about several of his composition. But what was more important, probably, is the scientific investigation done on his works and drawings, because something very specific to Leonardo is that he preferred to paint only a few paintings, about 20 during his entire life. He preferred to paint just a few, but spending a lot of time to perfect his composition, changing his mind in several ways.

Vincent Delieuvin:

And thanks to scientific investigation, we were able to discover, in a quite precise way, all his different thoughts on his painting, the evolution of the composition, the change he made on the story he was painting. And this is quite fascinating because thanks to that, you discover the personality of the artist and you understand the evolution of his composition. So that was really great, and I'm sure also that Leonardo would have been very happy to see that kind of scientific investigation done on his works. He

was such a interest ... He was very interested by science, and so we imagined how he could have been interested by that kind of scientific investigation.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes, I think his early days were concerned with mathematics and geometry, if I recall from watching the early parts of the film. That leads me to the other question, and in a way you've already answered it, about new discoveries you think about the way he did his work that perhaps you uncovered that no-one had seen before.

Vincent Delieuvin:

Sure. Well, that was something very important because in recent years, some specialists says that painting was not something very important for Leonardo, he was more interested in science and in the exhibition, we really wanted to explain to the public that painting was really something crucial for Leonardo, the most important thing for Leonardo da Vinci, and he became a scientist to become the best painter in his life because he saw that painting was based on science. And we wanted also to explain that each painting had a long genesis and that its work was an important thing for Leonardo da Vinci. And thanks to the scientific investigation, the new kind of scientific investigation we were able to do on our paintings, we discovered how much time Leonardo spent on his works.

Vincent Delieuvin:

Also, we discovered that, thanks to some restoration conservation treatment we did on our works, we were able, in recent years, to restore three of his paintings from our collection. We were also lucky to have all the results of the scientific investigation, the restoration done in other museum at the National Gallery in London, in Florence, in the Uffizi, in the gallery of the Uffizi in Florence, in the National Gallery in Washington also, all the museum who have Leonardo da Vinci's works, in recent years have been studying their works. And so in this exhibition, we were able to propose a synthesis on that.

Tim Stackpool:

Your exhibition was an absolute blockbuster for the museum. For the film though, it took four nights of filming, and I understand about 30 crew and technicians worked on creating the movie. Are you happy with how the movie displays your exhibition?

Vincent Delieuvin:

Yes. Well, it's a movie, so I think what we wanted to say on Leonardo da Vinci is perfectly explained in the movie, because what we wanted to say on the artist is perfectly comprehensible in the movie, because you can see a detail of his drawings, his paintings, and you perfectly understand the art of the artist. So yes, we are very happy. And for us, when you've been building an exhibition for more than 10 years, you live with your exhibition during only four months, and after, it's the end, there is nothing else than the catalog, but a book, it's so different. And we are very lucky to have that movie, which will be a memory of the exhibition.

Tim Stackpool:

Absolutely. And the one thing I do love about the film as well is the level of detail that we are allowed to see in the paintings, detail that we would never be close enough in the museum, as the public, to be able to see in the paintings. We would never be allowed to get that close to the canvas. But in the film, as you say, you highlight the details, and all of a sudden you become so connected with this work. And

it's the privilege of sitting through the film and seeing such detail, which I think is one of the great advantages of actually having the movie.

Vincent Delieuvin:

I totally agree about that. And I have to say that several of my colleagues who saw the exhibition, and after they saw the movie, they said that they saw different things, some parts of the works, of the drawings, of the paintings. During the visit, they didn't see some details. And so this is quite precious because really it gives you a wonderful image of Leonardo da Vinci's works and it helps you to understand in a better way the aim of his art.

Tim Stackpool:

When I was watching the film, especially towards the end where there is this beautiful cinematic reveal of the Mona Lisa. More and more art being revealed as you come around the corner and then you see the Mona Lisa in the film. And I love how you are describing the various aspects of the Mona Lisa. You are looking very intensely as you speak at the Mona Lisa, and we witness you talking about the artwork that obviously you love so much and you know so well. Do you know as much as you need to know now about Leonardo da Vinci?

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, what is something so fascinating with Leonardo is that you never end studying him and his writing, and I continue to work on the artist. And maybe some day we will restore other works by Leonardo da Vinci we have in our collection, so it's always a work in progress, but I have to say that I'm a fortunate curator because I am allowed to be in contact with such a masterpiece as the Mona Lisa. Each year, I can open the showcase in which she is on display, and I'm able to see the painting in the way that it should be seen normally. But unfortunately, as the Mona Lisa is such a masterpiece and she has been attacked in the past by crazy people, and unfortunately we have to put her in that kind of showcase. It's like that, but each year I'm allowed to have her in my hands, because we make a condition report of the painting. And it's a wonderful moment in which we can understand in a better way ... see the painting and understand in a better way the composition and the incredible art of the artist, the refinement of his painting.

Tim Stackpool:

And there are incredible descriptions of all the pieces. The Mona Lisa is probably his best known amongst the general public. And you have a lovely description where you talk about how the painting is life-size, and how she would be sitting in the room and, as you walk in, it's as if she notices you in the room, and her head turns to look at you when she discovers that you've walked into the room. It's a magic moment in the film, and of course it is the climax of the film, as you would expect. It truly is beautiful to see, as I say, the detail in the picture, but also lovely to see obviously the love that you and Louis have as well for the work.

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, that's true. It's true, by the way, because we are really in love with that painting, which is when you are able to see her in the quite private way, like it is proposed the movie, it's really an incredible masterpiece. And it was important also to remember that to the public, because sometimes people say, "Oh well, we know her enough, or too much of the Mona Lisa. It's too much," but in the movie, it's a

moment in which you are able to have a new look on her, on the composition, on the painting, and understand it in a much better way.

Tim Stackpool:

Considering all of this, what would you like the viewer of the film to understand about Leonardo that perhaps we haven't understood in the past?

Vincent Delieuvin:

Well, one of the most important thing was to explain to the public that really the art of painting was the most important thing in Leonardo's life. Today, we have a confused image of Leonardo da Vinci, someone who studied many things, but at the end, didn't paint a lot, and probably was more a scientist than a painter. And what we really wanted to explain in the exhibition and in the movie, it was Leonardo da Vinci had a very specific livery original compared to the other artist of his time. He preferred really to paint only a few perfect paintings based on a scientific understanding of nature.

Vincent Delieuvin:

And before, as he was painting some of his work, he started to study nature in a very scientific way, and each part of nature, and we explained that in exhibition. We show how he studied mathematics, geometry, anatomy, and many other fields. And this was not something different from painting, this was really the basement of the art of painting, and he needed to understand perfectly nature to be able to paint nature in his works. And this is the most important thing we wanted to explain the exhibition, the very original way of thinking the art by Leonardo, how scientific was his art.

Tim Stackpool:

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak to us on the podcast. It is a privilege to speak with you. Thank you for putting the exhibition together over so many years, and for creating the film, and we really appreciate your time.

Vincent Delieuvin:

Thank you very much for inviting me.

Tim Stackpool:

That's Monsieur Vincent Delieuvin, co-curator of the Leonardo da Vinci exhibition, which ran last year from October through to February this year, and has now been turned into that film we're talking about called A Night at the Louvre: Leonardo da Vinci. Now, it will come as no surprise to many that the film is being distributed in Australia by Natalie Miller of Sharmill Films. Natalie is passionate about cinema and the business of film. She has been for many years. She's a pioneer of Australian art house cinema, and is perhaps best known for being the first female independent distributor in Australia, and as the successful co-founder of the iconic Cinema Nova in Melbourne. Natalie, thanks for joining us now on the podcast.

Natalie Miller:

Pleasure.

Tim Stackpool:

When did you first learn about this film and how did it come your way for distribution?

Natalie Miller:

Well, Sharmill Films has been really at the forefront of doing special events in the cinema. We started about 13 years ago with the Met Opera, when digital first came out, because the digital revolution enabled us to be able to run all these programs. So we went from doing the Met Opera to the national theater, and then we went into art and ballet. And for many years, we've done art films on the screen, originally exhibition on film, and at more recent times, we've been with Pathé in the UK doing their art on screen. So it was part of a ... the Louvre is part of a regular series that we are playing. We just recently did the impressionists, which was fantastic.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes. Now, this year has been incredibly challenging for everyone. Did you ever feel that you might not be able to get this da Vinci film screening this year?

Natalie Miller:

No, because fortunately the rest of Australia, apart from Victoria, where I am, of course, in Melbourne, is up and running. So our cinema, apart from two weeks, has been closed for six months in Melbourne, and all other cinemas, but we've had the rest of Australia to go out with. So we went out in the rest of Australia with the impressionists and we will be going out to the rest of Australia with the Louvre.

Tim Stackpool:

Well, that's good in a way, I guess. The film itself, impressive it is visually, its storytelling, its cinematography is just amazing, but how do you think it rates given your experience with so many other films of this kind?

Natalie Miller:

Well, it's up there with the best of them, and we've had some very good ones on the Vatican, on all sorts of things, on all sorts of artists over the years, but it is up with the best of them, and we're thrilled to be able to run it. I mean what an incredible story of Leonardo da Vinci. I mean I've known about him from my days back at Melbourne University, that's a long time ago, but this was such an insight into his work, and his mind, and how he worked between being an artist and a scientist. And you sit there waiting for the famous paintings that you know, obviously ending up with Mona Lisa, but I think that it rates as highly as any that we've ever run.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes, indeed. And I think one of the most unique things about da Vinci is the extent and breadth of his work, I should put it that way, as an artist, as a scientist in a way too, and an inventor, and a philosopher.

Natalie Miller:

Well, that's right. I mean it's quite incredible. And even parts where they talk about the technique of his painting, how he changed from what the technique used to be with the others in the Renaissance to what he was doing. It's all quite fascinating. The only thing I felt was maybe missing is his actual personal life.

Tim Stackpool:

Well, I guess that's so. The producers, I think, have to consider, when putting the film together, is this about the development of his art or do we incorporate the gossip as well?

Natalie Miller:

Who he married or his secret mistress. Was Mona Lisa his secret mistress? No, I think you're absolutely right. I think it focuses on the art and I think that's where it is just amazing. And what an exhibition. I mean when the camera moves slowly through the Louvre, from wall to wall, painting to painting, and then takes you right upstairs to Mona Lisa. I found that fascinating that they said ... Was it 30,000 people a day visit the Mona Lisa? So they had to put her in a separate section, otherwise it would have dominated the rest of the exhibition.

Tim Stackpool:

It is a great archive, not only of the work of da Vinci, but also of the exhibition as it was put together and curated. But I also wanted to ask you, Natalie, you are legendary in the distribution of films of this kind, and within the screening business, if you like, particularly in Melbourne for many years-

Natalie Miller:

Don't say how many.

Tim Stackpool:

No, I won't, but who is there to carry the torch forward in terms of what you've done, if and when you hit that retirement button?

Natalie Miller:

Are you talking particularly within my own company? But there are lots of distributors and I'm not the only one. I think the fact is that I focused, from the first film I ever bought, *The Exterminating Angel*, which was Luis Buñuel's film. And of course, if we're talking art, we had all these films, it's just a particular focus and a passion of mine to only try and bring the best of the art house world. And there's other distributors who, of course, do bring in those art house world (films).

Natalie Miller:

In regard to my own company, well I have three sons and one of them is an entertainment lawyer, and very interested in film, very interested in art, and any art that I own is selected by him. He's got a particular eye. I'm hopeful one day he might help me in the business. He was once in LA and saw this painting, and rings me and said, "This is fantastic. Can we buy it? Or you buy it," he says to me. And I just have such trust in his taste that I said yes. And I think he's the same with film, but look, I don't know, we'll see in the future. But look, there are other people who are ... There are other companies who do buy some of the very good art house films.

Natalie Miller:

In fact, these days it's so competitive, everyone's trying to race to the top and pay huge guarantees for films. I've missed out on quite a lot of top art films. I would have loved to have bought *Portrait of a Lady* and the bidding war just became too much. So there are other people out there. I am not the only one. I was brought up in a business family. My father owned a [Bourke 00:23:04] Street store. So I was brought up with business at the dinner table every night, so I've gotten very lucky to have a mixture of my

interests, and I can buy a film like *The Square*, which I'm sure you've seen, and *Force Majeure*, and all these films. Yeah, I'm very lucky that I'm able to do that, but I get sad when I miss out on a lot, but I'm quite resigned to the fact that this is it today, that others are in the business and we have to accept that.

Tim Stackpool:

Well, Natalie, your success over the years has meant a lot of joy for those who have enjoyed the films. *A Night at the Louvre: Leonardo da Vinci* premieres on around 40 screens around the country, and I really appreciate your time on the podcast.

Natalie Miller:

Okay. Thanks, Tim. Thank you. Thank you. Bye-bye.