

VAN GOGH & JAPAN

PRODUCED BY PHIL GRABSKY | DIRECTED BY DAVID BICKERSTAFF

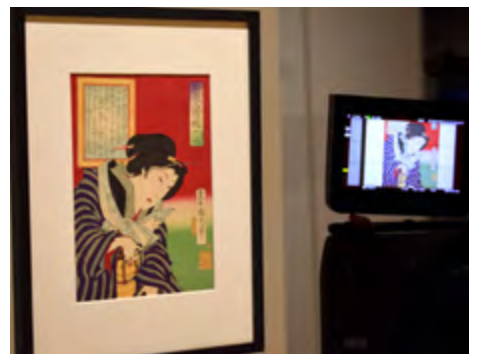
Those of you who have been following Exhibition On Screen over the years know we are motivated by a desire to bring art and artists to as wide an audience as possible. Thus part of me is delighted when I hear of another Van Gogh or Caravaggio film. After all, how often is *Hamlet* or *The Marriage of Figaro* performed? Great art withstands numerous viewings and explorations. On the other hand, I admit to some frustration when the same old myths are perpetuated, the same legends laid out as if they offer the only 'truth' about an artist and their life. Van Gogh is a great example of this: the crazed Dutchman walking with furrowed brows and hunched shoulders through fields of sunflowers on his way to another night of drinking in brothels... It's lazy and unfair. For one thing, there was no such thing in his lifetime as a field of sunflowers! To over-stress his mental illness or the occasional night-time bawdiness overlooks the passion and sheer effort he put into becoming a great artist.

That's what I want to know more about: how and why did he paint the way he did? Who did he learn from? What was he trying to say? Hence, when we heard about the major exhibition '*Van Gogh and Japan*' touring Japan and coming to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, we leapt at the chance to use that as a springboard to explore some of those questions.

Frankly, one cannot over-estimate the impact that Japanese art had on artists like Van Gogh – and others such as Monet, Degas and Cézanne – when they first encountered it in Paris in the mid 19th Century. It was revolutionary. The paintings we know and love – the paintings that some argue make him the world's favourite artist – cannot be fully appreciated without grasping how deeply Japanese art affected him.

Cinema is about story-telling and this is a cracking story. I hope you enjoy it – and I hope you relish the chance to look afresh at the work of a hard-working, deep-thinking and hugely enthusiastic artist. Watch it once, and then try to come back with a friend who perhaps is one of those poor souls who says the awful words 'I'm not into art'. What makes Van Gogh so great, so timeless, is that he communicates about us to us – and those who think art is not for them should think again. Firstly, because art is for everyone and, secondly, because Van Gogh – aided by the impact of Japanese art – was and is a master communicator to all of us.

Phil Grabsky



Subscribe to our free newsletter
for updates and
behind-the-scenes access at
seventh-art.com

