

David Lynch The Art Life

USA/Denmark 2016

Directors: Jon Nguyen, Rick Barnes, Olivia Neergaard-Holm
Certificate 15 88m 23s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Artist documentaries are plenty thick on the ground these days – they're cheap to make, and bring an inscribed audience – while those that double as actually great films are only slightly less rare than hen's teeth. Sorting through the vast middle range beyond that, one usually does best to follow one's own pre-existing inclinations – for fans only, as they say.

So it is with Jon Nguyen, Rick Barnes and Olivia Neergaard-Holm's *David Lynch: The Art Life*, a perfectly well-wrought home-video-grade featurette that combines original footage of a contemporary Lynch painting in his studio in the Hollywood Hills – the compound familiar from his *Last Highway* (1997) – and a voiceover track in which the high-coiffed grand old man reflects on his formative years and the creative path that has led him to this point.

This is as good a time as any to mention that I am a lifelong, dyed-in-the-wool, carry-me-out-in-a-box fan of Lynch; the appellation 'fan' sits rather uncomfortably next to the profession of critic, which is one reason I've almost entirely passed on opportunities to write about his work through the years – not so difficult, given the infrequency of his output. But now Lynch's name is back in the conversation – hence the release of this film – by virtue of the fact that *Twin Peaks: The Return* marks the arrival of something like 18 hours of new audiovisual work from the director. It's a sequel that has thus far disdained fan service, perversely throwing out the playbook of one of the most beloved cult items of all time in order to devote an enormous amount of screen time to Kyle MacLachlan wearing an oversized lime-green blazer and muttering to himself. And fan that I am, I take it all in and applaud like a trained seal.

Like many of my generation, my awakening to a conception of what film art could be was tied up with seeing what Lynch made it. As such, the biographical information covered in *The Art Life* is largely familiar from readings and rereadings of the Chris Rodley-edited interview book *Lynch on Lynch*, though of course there is an additional pleasure that comes from hearing the director amble down memory lane, with his inimitable blunt, nasal delivery, while working away at one of his paintings. Some of



Sitting pretty: David Lynch

the film's best moments add new colour to old stories: Lynch becoming freshly outraged while recollecting storming out of a Bob Dylan concert, apparently alarmed and appalled by the singer-songwriter's diminutive stature, or his audible recoil when speaking of former neighbours in the then depressed city of Philadelphia, where he attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. ("One woman, who was my neighbour, reeked of urine, and she was a complete racist.")

No hardballs are lobbed – in fact, if the visuals are to be trusted, Lynch seems to have been left to record his own recollections – and no voices are heard aside from that of the artist himself, spinning the old yarn of his creative coming of age. So, you know, for fans only – though this one didn't at all mind sitting at the subject's feet. 🍷

The Death of Louis XIV

France/Portugal/Spain 2016

Director: Albert Serra

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Reviewed by Erika Balsom

In the words of Jean Cocteau, the cinema is death at work – but finitude weighs more heavily on some images than on others. In 1959, the concluding

freeze-frame of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* arrested the young face of Jean-Pierre Léaud, its stillness like a premonition of a death to come. Almost 60 years later in *The Death of Louis XIV*, this moment of expiration arrives, at least in fiction. Albert Serra delivers us once more to a sustained concentration on one of cinema's most fascinating faces, now jowled, sagging and puffy. In the titular role of the Sun King, Léaud lies supine in wigs and powder, his necrotic leg rotting away, as those around him – whether out of politeness, deference or optimism – refuse to acknowledge that his body is shutting down. Closing the circle from childhood to old age, Louis is anything but majestic, dribbling and drooling his way to the end with a vulnerable, infantile innocence.

The Death of Louis XIV began life as a proposed museum installation, commissioned by the Centre Pompidou as a performance that would feature Léaud over a 15-day period. Something of this origin is preserved in the resulting film, particularly in its single-room setting and unwavering insistence on bodily presence. Yet this is emphatically not filmed theatre. Working with a three-camera set-up, Serra shot continuously and assembled scenes in the editing room. He consistently exploits the uniquely cinematic magnification of the close-up, with a quick movement of Léaud's eyebrow or the pathetic tubercle of his upper lip supplying all the drama that has been purposefully sapped from the film's narrative.

With its Warholian literalism, Serra's title gives away the film's conclusion from its beginning. As in his previous films *Honour of the Knights* (2006) and *Birdsong* (2008) – which reimagined the stories of Don Quixote and the Three Wise Men respectively – Serra chooses a narrative for adaptation precisely because we already know what will happen. This complete cancellation of suspense imbues the film with the pathos of the inexorable, and sounds a note of dark comedy each time one of the king's retinue insists that recovery is just around the corner.

Just as Serra's *Story of My Death* (2013) staged a confrontation between enlightenment and romanticism, *The Death of Louis XIV* is structured around an overarching epochal tension, this time a turning-point in the history of medicine between old superstition and new science. Serra sides with neither, suggesting instead – and against his characters – that any hope of a cure is futile. Inevitably, all shall pass and without great fanfare. As Louis XIV's flesh putrefies, the sounds of ticking clocks and buzzing flies fill the soundtrack like aural emblems of the vanitas paintings produced in Flanders and the Netherlands during his reign. Serra adopts a palette evoking these images, with burgundy and shadowy browns dominating his static frame. What better than the demise of an absolutist monarch to underline the transitoriness of all things? The banality of death, devoid of narrative or symbolic significance,

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jon Nguyen
Jason S.
Sabrina S. Sutherland

Cinematographer

Jason S.

Edited by

Olivia Neergaard-

Holm

Music Composed by

Jonatan Bengta
Sound Design
Philip Nicolai Flindt

@Duck Diver Films &
Kong Gulerod Film

Production

Companies
Duck Diver Films
presents in
association with
Kong Gulerod Film,
Xanf Studio and
Hideout Films

A film by Jon Nguyen,
Rick Barnes, Olivia
Neergaard-Holm
Executive Producers
Adam F. Goldberg,
Lawrence Makow,
Christophe Vandaele,
Kurt S. Kittleson

Alexandre Garna
Vince Di Meglio
Aga Wasiak
Josefine Bothe

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Soda Pictures

A documentary about the director and artist David Lynch, who is seen pottering in his painting studio in the Hollywood Hills, going about his creative rounds. In voiceover we hear him reflect on his early life, his artistic development and the start of his filmmaking career. He begins in Missoula, Montana, where he was born, and describes a peripatetic childhood, its many relocations prompted by his father's job with the US department of agriculture. The family finally settles in Alexandria, Virginia, where David, an aimless teenage delinquent, decides to become an artist following a chance encounter with the painter

Bushnell Keeler and with Robert Henri's book 'The Art Spirit'. After a period at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and an abortive European trip with friend and future production designer Jack Fisk, Lynch attends the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, which proves fertile ground for his developing sensibility. Here, after being struck by a desire to see one of his paintings move, he takes his first steps towards filmmaking and begins to produce short works. He is accepted into the American Film Institute and moves west, where he will begin work on 'Eraserhead', the film that will make his name.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid The Long Haul

USA 2017, Director: David Bowers, Certificate U 91m 13s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Embodying the 'kids will watch anything' ethos that's all too common in children's entertainment, the fourth entry in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series offers little more than of-the-moment pop-culture references and slightly too gross toilet humour. These two awful tendencies collide early on, when Greg Heffley, the eponymous kid, gets a soiled nappy stuck to his hand and a video of him trying to shake it off goes viral. In the hope of redeeming himself, Greg tries to divert the family's road trip away from visiting his Meemaw on her 90th birthday and instead towards a gaming convention where his PewDiePie-like YouTube idol will be in attendance.

Along with a piglet that defecates in the car and Greg's harridan mother (Alicia Silverstone), who insists on no cellphones during the trip, the film's main antagonists are the 'Beardos', a family only slightly more irrational and cruel than the Heffleys. These plot strands fail to coalesce, and mostly feel like bad riffs on the Griswolds' misadventures in *National Lampoon's Vacation* (1983), minus the comic timing or heart.

Even though they do nothing to earn the audience's sympathy, everything works out for Greg and his bland, mean-spirited family in the end. The overlong experience of witnessing them triumph is about as much fun as being locked in a hot car. **S**



Royal pain: Jean-Pierre Léaud

meets and conquers even the most elite in a rare moment of true democracy.

Serra is well known for his work with non-professional actors, but here the intertext of Léaud's star persona proves pivotal, despite the director's too-insistent claim that it was not a factor in his casting. Truffaut once said that Léaud was the "anti-documentary actor" because he possessed a screen presence that immediately opened on to fiction. The intervening years have complicated this assessment. *The Death of Louis XIV's* images of Léaud are marked by a doubleness: we see at once a fiction of a dying king and a documentary of an ageing actor. Each aspect of the image wrestles with and undoes the other, in what is nothing less than an object lesson in what makes a certain kind of cinema so compelling: real bodies in real spaces, revealed through the

inhuman gaze of the camera. It is tempting to understand *The Death of Louis XIV* as an elegy, if not for cinema itself, then for this particular idea of cinema, imperilled in the age of CGI.

The casting of Léaud is central in this regard, as we stare long and hard at his ruined body while the indelible images of the actor in his most famous roles of the 1950s and 1960s are burned on our retinas, never far out of mind. His is a face cruelly frozen in the past; that Léaud has aged always comes as a bitter surprise, though of course it shouldn't. Tsai Ming-Liang and Olivier Assayas have turned to the actor for similar reasons in recent films, but none has succeeded as fully as Serra in capturing a superlative performance while underlining the devastating reality of cinema as time embalmed. This uncompromising film is one of the year's best. **S**



I am curious, orange: Jason Drucker

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Thierry Lounas
Joaquim Sapinho
Albert Serra
Claire Bonnefoy
Screenplay
Thierry Lounas
Albert Serra
Director of Photography
Jonathan Riquembourg
Editors
Ariadna Ribas
Artur Tort
Albert Serra
Art Director
Sebastián Vogler
Original Music

Marc Verdaguer

Key Sound Recordists
Jordi Ribas
Anne Dupouy
Key Costumer
Nina Avramovic

©Capricci Films, Rosa Films, Andergraun Films, Bobi Lux
Production Companies
Capricci presents in co-production with Rosa Films, Andergraun Films, Bobi Lux
With the support of

Région Aquitaine Limousin Poitou-Charentes, Région des Pays de la Loire, Département de la Dordogne in partnership with the CNC, and Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals With the support in Portugal of República Portuguesa/Cultura, ICA - Instituto de Cinema e Audiovisual, RTP - Rádio Televisão Portuguesa, SA
A film by Albert Serra
With the participation

of ARTE Cofinova 12 and Ciné+ With the support in Catalonia of Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals and the participation of Televisió de Catalunya
Executive Producers
Montse Triola
Claire Bonnefoy

Cast

Jean-Pierre Léaud
Louis XIV
Patrick d'Assumçao
Dr Fagon

Marc Susini
Blouin, first valet of the king
Jacques Henric
Father Le Tellier
Bernard Belin
Georges Maréchal, first surgeon of the king
Irène Silvagni
Madame de Maintenon
Vicenç Altaió
Le Brun
Alain Lajoinie
Le Pelletier

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

French theatrical title
La Mort de Louis XIV

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nina Jacobsen
Brad Simpson
Screenplay
Jeff Kinney
David Bowers
Based upon the book by Jeff Kinney
Director of Photography
Anthony B. Richmond
Film Editor
Troy Takaki
Production Designer
Aaron Osborne
Music
Edward Shearmur
Sound Mixer
Mary H. Ellis
Costume Designer
Mary Claire Hannan

@Twentieth

Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC
Production Companies
Fox 2000 Pictures presents a Color Force production
Made in association with TSG Entertainment
Executive Producers
Jeff Kinney
Timothy M. Bourne
David Bowers
Film Extracts
Sons of the Desert (1933)

Cast
Jason Drucker
Greg Heffley

Alicia Silverstone
Susan Heffley
Tom Everett Scott
Frank Heffley
Charlie Wright
Rodrick Heffley
Owen Asztalos
Rowley
Dylan Watters
Manny Heffley
Wyatt Watters
Manny Heffley
Christopher A. Coppola
Mr Beardo
Joshua Hoover
Mac Digby

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

France, 1715. The 76-year-old absolutist monarch Louis XIV lies confined to his bed, suffering from multiple ailments, including a gangrenous leg. Between visits from his beloved dogs and members of the court, his advisers attempt to determine the best course of treatment. Everyone acts as if the king will live, despite bodily evidence to the contrary. At the dawn of a new age of science, superstition retains a tenacious hold, leading the king's entourage to debate whether professors of medicine from the Sorbonne

should be summoned or whether a 'charlatan' from Marseille should administer an elixir containing bull's sperm and frog's fat and brain juice. As the days pass and the king's leg turns increasingly black, all possibilities are pursued, but to no avail. A priest is called to administer the last rites. Louis dies and an autopsy is performed on his body. Despite his failure to save the king's life, chief physician Dr Fagon retains confidence in the power of the science of medicine, declaring: "Gentlemen, we'll do better next time."

US, the present. Setting out on a cross-country road trip with his family to attend Meemaw's 90th birthday party, Greg secretly hopes to make a detour to a videogame convention where YouTube star Mac Digby will be appearing. While at a hotel, Greg falls foul of the 'Beardo' family, who steal a present intended for his grandmother. Greg eventually retrieves it. The car breaks down close to Meemaw's house, but the family pushes it, arriving in time for the party.