

## WHEN ART MEETS THE CINEMA

### 1. Uwagi ogólne

Materiał został przygotowany dla studentów zarządzania kulturą i mediami oraz filmoznawstwa na II stopniu studiów, ale może zostać wykorzystany (w całości bądź we fragmentach) również na innych kierunkach, ponieważ dotyczy znanych filmów, w tym filmu *Loving Vincent*, nominowanego w 2018 roku do Oscara w kategorii animacja długometrażowa.

### 2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2+, C1, C1+

### 3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń: 90 minut

### 4. Cele dydaktyczne

Zasadniczym celem tych zajęć jest rozwijanie u studentów sprawności rozumienia ze słuchu oraz rozumienia autentycznego (jedynie skróconego) tekstu pisanego. Aby studenci mogli osiągnąć te cele, teksty oraz materiały wideo zostały wzbogacone o zadania wymagające dyskusji oraz wyciągania wniosków na podstawie przeczytanego/usłyszanego fragmentu mimo braku możliwości zrozumienia każdego słowa.

Dodatkowym celem jest przeciwiczenie i utrwalenie zdań pytających, z którymi czasem problem mają nawet studenci na tak wysokim poziomie zaawansowania językowego.

## 5. Uwagi i sugestie

Lekcja koncentruje się na trzech filmach pokazujących życie słynnych malarzy. Wszystkie trzy zostały nakręcone w taki sposób, że malarstwo staje się integralną częścią filmu. Do tematu wprowadza dyskusja (ćwiczenie 1).

Pierwsza część lekcji (ćwiczenia 2–8) skupia się na filmie *Loving Vincent*. Ćwiczenia na rozumienie ze słuchu przybliżają niecodzienną technikę tworzenia tego dzieła oraz wprowadzają niezbędne słownictwo, a recenzja podsumowuje rezultaty tej pracy. Praca nad artykułem polega na zadawaniu pytań do podanych odpowiedzi oraz dopasowywaniu słów do definicji. Całość zakończona jest dyskusją.

Druga część lekcji (ćwiczenie 9) wymaga pracy w parach. Studenci mają do przeczytania dwa różne teksty (na temat filmów *Girl with a Pearl Earring* oraz *Frida*), które potem porównują, odpowiadając na te same pytania. Jeśli brakuje czasu, można to ćwiczenie pominąć.

# WHEN ART MEETS THE CINEMA

## I. Discuss.

1. Have you seen any films focused on famous artists and their masterpieces? Did you like them?
2. Is it possible to successfully combine two forms of art in one work?

## II. You're going to watch a documentary on the making of *Loving Vincent*. Fill in the gaps with 1–3 words.

In *Loving Vincent* painters are re-imagining (1) ..... of his original works. To do this, they need almost 67 thousand paintings whose size, when put together, would cover the area of (2) ..... and ..... combined. Dorota Kobiela got the idea for the film after reading (3) ..... at the time of (4) ..... In the film each frame was painted but the movement is a combination of (5) ..... and (6) ..... Some of the original paintings had to be (7) ..... (they all need to be the same size) or the creators had to change the (8) ..... to fit (9) ..... The black and white (10) ..... were based on the photographs from those times. Sometimes new paintings were invented to (11) ..... in the story. Van Gogh's ambition was to paint (12) ..... that would show the (13) ..... of the sitter. The actors had to bring the character of the paintings (14) .....

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOtwJL4iV8s>.

**III. Watch a BBC programme showing the work of the painters for that movie and mark the statements true (T) or false (F).**

1. The painters can make some mistakes as such details will disappear in the animation anyway. T/F
2. The painters get black outlines of each scene recorded by the actors. T/F
3. There are up to 3 strokes of colour in every brushstroke. T/F
4. Completing one camera move can take as long as 3 weeks. T/F
5. The completed scenes are marked on the board with yellow. T/F
6. The flowers that the journalist painted will be seen on the screen for 1 second. T/F

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CQKHWvK8Ro>.

**IV. Discuss.**

1. In the second video the whole enterprise is called 'labour of love.' What does it mean?
2. Does it feel this way for the artists working on the project?
3. Would you like to have taken part in it?

**V. Read a review of the film. What's the author's opinion? Do you agree?**

*By Susan Wloszczyna, 22 Sep 2017*

A truism when it comes to dining out? If you eat at a restaurant whose **main selling point** is that its towering height or location near a natural wonder affords a feast for the eyes, chances are the food there will fall into the category of a disappointing afterthought.

That can also be the case when it comes to films whose primary attraction is their visual pizzazz. Too often there is a lack of what is actually there beyond the wow factor. Consider the gorgeous backdrops of the 1998 Robin Williams-starring afterlife fantasy *What Dreams May Come*: Looks, 10; story, ugh. *Avatar* might be the ultimate example of this syndrome as its eye-popping 3-D effects only underlined its barely multi-dimensional sci-fi screenplay.

**Faring** slightly better script-wise is the ambitious animated biopic *Loving Vincent*. That would be Vincent as in Van Gogh, the tormented 19th-century Dutch painter, who absorbed the essence of then-popular Impressionism and re-imagined it with his trademark brawny brushstrokes. That technique lent a unique vibrancy to his vividly hued renderings of the French countryside and portraits of acquaintances that are highlighted in the film. As a result, his output seems to be uniquely suited for what is being sold as the first-ever fully painted feature film. This rather melancholy if stiff account of the artist's final weeks before he died in 1890 from what he claimed was a **self-inflicted** gunshot is neither consistently riveting nor all

that original. But the movie at least benefits somewhat from focusing on this singular tragic soul – yes, Van Gogh is shown famously cutting off his left ear – whose work continues to fascinate us today.

What is faultless, however, is the dedication and ambition of Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman, the movie-making team behind this Polish-U.K. collaboration. Consider that this production required the services of 125 painting animators to create 65,000 oil-painted frames that incorporated 120 of Van Gogh's better-known works – a process that took ten years to complete. If you ever wanted a masterpiece hanging in a gallery to come to life, your wish has been fully granted many times over.

Their visual experiment is intensely **mesmerizing** to watch as Van Gogh's familiar stars radiate in the nighttime skies, flickering halos hover around candles, a river pulses with shimmery waves, rain falls like strips of rectangular confetti in shades of black and gray and golden wheat waltzes in fields. Bursts of kinetic energy vibrate in nearly every scene as if the screen were radioactive. But this electric surge is more than just window dressing. It captures the very reason why Van Gogh, whose genius was mostly unsung during his brief life, is often considered the father of modern art. A **social misfit** prone to bouts of depression, Van Gogh would devote the last decade of his 37 years to answering his calling. The result was over 800 oil paintings that bared his emotions in a way that offered a portal into the next century and continues to speak to us today.

But movies can't live by beautiful undulating images alone. *Loving Vincent* takes the form of a mirthless murder mystery that integrates Van Gogh's portraits and landscapes with hand-painted live-action footage of actors. This derivative detective story **probes** whether Van Gogh committed suicide or was shot by someone else. Assuming the role of investigator and narrator is Armand Roulin (Douglas Booth), a bitter young man in a canary-yellow jacket who has a weakness for alcohol and barroom brawls. A year after the artist's death, he is reluctantly tasked by his postmaster father (Chris O'Dowd) to deliver Vincent's final letter addressed to his beloved younger brother, Theo. Armand heads to Paris, where he learns from noted paint supplier Pere Tanguy (John Sessions) that Theo met his own demise months after his sibling died. The elder man also fills him in on the history of Vincent's transformation from an unemployable failure to a prolific producer of fine art.

Style definitely **trumps** substance here, as most of the actors are better defined through their vocal performances rather than their shape-shifting physical presences. Van Gogh himself shows up primarily in moody black-and-white photographic-like flashbacks told from his point of view as played by look-alike Polish theater actor Robert Gulaczyk. In fact, my favorite scene involves a smiling little girl at the inn running to Vincent and briefly sitting in his lap as he sketches a chicken with skinny legs – just like hers, he teases. In those few minutes, he is momentarily at peace and smiling for once. Helping to set the right melancholy mood is a superb score by Clint Mansell, propelled by strings and piano.

Only a fool would fail to use a version of Don McLean's ode to the artist, *Starry Starry Night*, to conclude *Loving Vincent* and, in this case, Kobiela and Welchman do exactly that. If you are hungry for dazzling **eye candy** and don't mind a less-than-meaty narrative, this might please your palate.

Adapted from: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/loving-vincent-2017>.

## VI. Write questions for the following answers.

1. ....  
It's compared to a restaurant to prove that the film is visually stunning but the narrative is poor.

2. ....  
The fact that the film was so painstaking to complete, with over a hundred artists painting thousands of original pictures.

3. ....  
Because it shows the famous paintings come to life in a spellbinding way.

4. ....  
Because his colourful paintings showed his real emotions the way modernist artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did. They still make a strong impression on the audience.

5. ....  
The film tells the story of a detective trying to discover the truth behind Van Gogh's death.

6. ....  
He's mostly shown through black and white flashbacks.

7. ....  
The film ends with the song *Starry Starry Night* by Don McLean.

## VII. Match the words/phrases underlined in the article with the synonyms.

- a thing that is pleasant to watch – .....
- fascinating, amazing – .....
- doing – .....
- biggest advantage – .....
- done to himself – .....
- investigates, studies – .....
- outdoes, is better than – .....
- a person unable to adjust to the rules posed by society – .....

**VIII. Read a quote by another film critic and explain it in your own words.**

“In our age of untruths and glib simplifications, it is no surprise that famous artists get treated like Disneyfied theme park rides.”

Jonathan Jones, *The Guardian*

1. Do you agree with it?
2. Is it true of other films combining different art forms?

**IX. Work in pairs. Read a review of another biopic of a famous artist and tell your partner about it.**

1. What is the film about?
2. What is the reviewer’s opinion about it?
3. Do you agree with this opinion? / Do you feel encouraged to watch the film?

***Girl with a Pearl Earring***

By Roger Ebert, December 26, 2003

*Girl With a Pearl Earring* is a quiet movie, shaken from time to time by ripples of emotional turbulence far beneath the surface. It is about things not said, opportunities not taken, potentials not realized, lips unknissed. All of these elements are guessed at by the filmmakers as they regard a painting made in about 1665 by Johannes Vermeer. The painting shows a young woman regarding us over her left shoulder. She wears a simple blue headband and a modest smock. Her red lips are slightly parted. Is she smiling? She seems to be glancing back at the moment she was leaving the room. She wears a pearl earring. Who was she? What was she thinking? What was the artist thinking about her?

Tracy Chevalier’s novel speculating about the painting has now been filmed by Peter Webber, who casts Scarlett Johansson as the girl and Colin Firth as Vermeer. I can think of many ways the film could have gone wrong, but it goes right, because it doesn’t cook up melodrama and romantic intrigue but tells a story that’s content with its simplicity. The painting is contemplative, reflective, subdued, and the film must be, too: We don’t want lurid revelations breaking into its mood.

Sometimes two people will regard each other over a gulf too wide to ever be bridged, and know immediately what could have happened, and that it never will. That is essentially the message of *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. The girl’s name is Griet, according to this story. She lives nearby. She is sent by her blind father to work in Vermeer’s house, where several small children are about to be joined by a new arrival. The household is run like a factory with the mother-in-law, Maria Thins (Judy Parfitt) as foreman. Nobody ever says what they think in this house, except

for Maria, whose thoughts are all too obvious, anyway. She has set her daughter to work producing babies while her son-in-law produces paintings. Both have an output of about one a year, which is good if you are a mother, but not if you are a painter.

In one flawless sequence, Griet is alone in Vermeer's studio and looks at the canvas he is working on, looks at what he is painting, looks back, looks forth, and then moves a chair away from a window. When he returns and sees what she has done, he studies the composition carefully and removes the chair from his painting. Eventually he has her move up to the attic, closer to his studio, where she can mix his paints, which she does very well. And then of course they start sleeping together? Not in this movie.

The moments of greatest intimacy between the simple peasant girl and the famous artist come when they sit side by side in wordless communication, mixing paints, both doing the same job, both understanding it. Do not believe those who think this movie is about the "mystery" of the model, or Vermeer's sources of inspiration, or medieval gender roles, or whether the mother-in-law was the man in the family. A movie about those things would have been a bad movie. *Girl With a Pearl Earring* is about how they share a professional understanding that neither one has in any way with anyone else alive. I look at the painting and I realize that Griet is telling Vermeer, without using any words, "Well, if it were my painting, I'd have her stand like this."

Adapted from: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/girl-with-a-pearl-earring-2003>.

## ***Frida***

*By Roger Ebert, November 1, 2002*

Julie Taymor's biopic tells the story of an extraordinary life. Frida Kahlo (Salma Hayek), born of a German Jewish father and a Mexican mother, grew up in Mexico City at a time when it was a hotbed of exile and intrigue. As a student, she goes to see the great muralist Diego Rivera at work, boldly calls him "fat" and knows that he is the man for her.

Then she is almost mortally injured in a trolley crash that shatters her back and pierces her body with a steel rod. She was never to be free of pain again in her life and for long periods had to wear a body cast. Taymor shows a bluebird flying from Frida's hand at the moment of the crash, and later a gold leaf falls on the cast: She uses the materials of magic realism to suggest how Frida was able to overcome pain with art and imagination.

Rivera was already a legend when she met him. Played by Alfred Molina in a great bearlike performance of male entitlement, he was equally gifted at art, carnal excess and self-promotion. The first time Frida sleeps with him, they are discovered by his wife, Lupe (Valeria Golino), who is enraged, of course, but such is Diego's power over women that after Frida and Diego are wed, Lupe brings them breakfast in bed ("This is his favorite. If you are here to stay, you'd better learn

how to make it.”) Frida’s paintings often show herself, alone or with Diego, and reflect her pain and her ecstasy. They are on a smaller scale than his famous murals, and her art is overshadowed by his.

Frida Kahlo seems to have painted in order to lose track of time and escape pain: When she was at work, she didn’t so much put the pain onto the canvas as channel it away from conscious thought and into the passion of her work. She needs to paint, not simply to “express herself” but to live at all, and this is her closest bond with Rivera.

Biopics of artists are always difficult, because the connections between life and art always seem too easy and facile. The best ones lead us back to the work itself and inspire us to sympathize with its maker. *Frida* is jammed with incident and anecdote – this was a life that ended at 46 and yet made longer lives seem underfurnished. The film opens in 1953, on the date of Frida’s only one-woman show in Mexico. Her doctor tells her she is too sick to attend it, but she has her bed lifted into a flatbed truck and carried to the gallery. This opening gesture provides Taimor with the set-up for the movie’s extraordinary closing scenes, in which death itself is seen as another work of art.

Adapted from: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/frida-2002>.

## KEY

### II. You're going to watch a documentary on the making of *Loving Vincent*. Fill in the gaps with 1–3 words.

In *Loving Vincent* painters are re-imagining (1) **94** of his original works. To do this, they need almost 67 thousand paintings whose size, when put together, would cover the area of (2) **London** and **Manhattan** combined. Dorota Kobiela got the idea for the film after reading (3) **Van Gogh's letters** at the time of (4) **her own crisis**. In the film each frame was painted but the movement is a combination of (5) **live action** and (6) **CGI animation**. Some of the original paintings had to be (7) **extended** (they all need to be the same size) or the creators had to change the (8) **colours** to fit (9) **the season**. The black and white (10) **flashbacks** were based on the photographs from those times. Sometimes new paintings were invented to (11) **fill in gaps** in the story. Van Gogh's ambition was to paint (12) **modern portraits** that would show the (13) **soul** of the sitter. The actors had to bring the character of the paintings (14) **to life**.

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOtwJL4iV8s>.

### III. Watch a BBC programme showing the work of the painters for that movie and mark the statements true (T) or false (F).

1. The painters can make some mistakes as such details will disappear in the animation anyway. T/F
2. The painters get black outlines of each scene recorded by the actors. T/F
3. There are up to 3 strokes of colour in every brushstroke. T/F
4. Completing one camera move can take as long as 3 weeks. T/F (*no – up to 3 months*)
5. The completed scenes are marked on the board with yellow. T/F (*green*)
6. The flowers that the journalist painted will be seen on the screen for 1 second. T/F (*normally 1/12 of a second, but here the flowers weren't good enough and were erased*)

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CQKHWvK8Ro>.

### VI. Write questions for the following answers.

1. *Why is the film compared to a fancy restaurant in the first paragraph?*

It's compared to a restaurant to prove that the film is visually stunning but the narrative is poor.

2. *What's the unquestionable strength of the film?*

The fact that the film was so painstaking to complete, with over a hundred artists painting thousands of original pictures.

3. *Why is the film visually appealing?*

Because it shows the famous paintings come to life in a spellbinding way.

4. *Why is Van Gogh considered to be the father of modern art?*

Because his colourful paintings showed his real emotions the way modernist artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did. They still make a strong impression on the audience.

5. *What's the film about?*

The film tells the story of a detective trying to discover the truth behind Van Gogh's death.

6. *How is Van Gogh shown in the movie?*

He's mostly shown through black and white flashbacks.

7. *How does the film end?*

The film ends with the song *Starry Starry Night* by Don McLean.

## VII. Match the words/phrases underlined in the article with the synonyms.

- a thing that is pleasant to watch – **eye-candy**
- fascinating, amazing – **mesmerizing**
- doing – **faring**
- biggest advantage – **main selling point**
- done to himself – **self-inflicted**
- investigates, studies – **probes**
- outdoes, is better than – **trumps**
- a person unable to adjust to the rules posed by society – **a social misfit**

## IX. Work in pairs. Read a review of another biopic of a famous artist and tell your partner about it.

1. What is the film about?

2. What is the reviewer's opinion about it?

### *Girl with a Pearl Earring:*

1. It shows the process of the creation of the famous painting by Vermeer and it hypothesizes about the role of the model in this process.
2. Positive: the film is slow-paced, mysterious, showing intimate moments and communication without words.

### *Frida:*

1. It shows the turbulent life of the famous Mexican painter.
2. Biopics are difficult to make in general, but this one is extraordinary. It shows the connection between the artist and her art perfectly.