



The distinction between life and art is one that all genuine works of art live to unmake, even if the circumstances in which we experience art have a way of maintaining the barrier. An art museum, for example, is designated as a place apart from the zones of ordinary existence. We enter to gaze upon beautiful artifacts at a safe distance, standing at the boundary between tedium and rapture. But really, and fortunately, a museum is no different from anywhere else, since beauty and meaning are everywhere, provided we know how to look.

*Museum Hours*, Jem Cohen's quietly amazing, sneakily sublime new film, is partly a reflection on such aesthetic puzzles. Shot on high-definition digital video and super-16-millimeter film in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the film lingers over great paintings by Rembrandt, Bruegel and other European masters, inviting us to contemplate the complex, half-observed tales they might tell. In one scene, an art historian (Ela Piplits) tries to initiate a crowd of skeptical tourists into the mysteries of Bruegel's *Conversion of St. Paul* (1567), and Mr. Cohen's camera supports her arguments by finding details in the picture that might be easy to overlook.

The museum is also the setting for a contemporary story of cross-cultural friendship. Johann (Bobby Sommer), an Austrian man in his 60s who once

worked as a road manager for hard-rock bands, now makes his living as a security guard at the museum. A tolerant, philosophical fellow, he muses (in voice-over narration) on both the artworks and the tourists and schoolchildren who shuffle past them, finding the spectacle of spectatorship endlessly interesting.

In the course of his duties, Johann meets Anne (Mary Margaret O'Hara), a Canadian woman who has come to Vienna to sit at the bedside of a cousin who is in a coma at a local hospital. Johann serves as Anne's interpreter and advocate in her dealings with the medical authorities, and also becomes her impromptu tour guide

Mr. Cohen, a New York filmmaker and video artist with an eye for rough urban landscapes and eccentric artistic characters, is a patient observer and a cunning, subtle storyteller. *Museum Hours* seems to wander and ruminate, collecting stray moments and fleeting impressions that gradually — and perhaps only in retrospect — snap together to reveal an intriguing pattern of emotion and significance. Watching the film is not really like looking at a painting, but the way the art historian looks at Bruegel has something in common with the way Mr. Cohen instructs us to pay attention to the world.

**A. O. Scott, The New York Times**

**WRITING CREDITS:** Jem Cohen/Natalie Lettner/Mary Margaret O'Hara/Bobby Sommer **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Jem Cohen/Peter Roehsler

**CAST:** Anne Mary Margaret O'Hara | Johann Bobby Sommer | Gerda Els Piplits

VOTING FOR *Miss Violence* A17 | B27 | C5 | D2 | E5 | Rating 71.9% | Attendance 62

Our next screening | *Living in Emergency* | Tuesday 15 March 2016. 8.00pm

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