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THE EYES OF ORSON WELLES

Mark Cousins

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SYNOPSIS

Short synopsis

Granted exclusive access to hundreds of private drawings and paintings by Orson Welles, filmmaker Mark Cousins dives deep into the visual world of this legendary director and actor, to reveal a portrait of the artist as he's never been seen before – through his own eyes, sketched with his own hand, painted with his own brush. Executive produced by Michael Moore, *The Eyes of Orson Welles* brings vividly to life the passions, politics and power of this brilliant 20th-century showman, and explores how the genius of Welles still resonates today in the age of Trump, more than 30 years after his death.

Long synopsis

Orson Welles was a towering 20th century icon of screen and stage. His films as a director and actor, such as *Citizen Kane*, *Touch of Evil* and *Chimes at Midnight*, are among the greatest and most innovative ever made. He was a genius who hobnobbed with presidents, campaigned for progressive politics and loved some of the world's most

beautiful women. He sits alongside the likes of Picasso, Chaplin and Monroe as one of the most famous cultural figures of the past hundred years.

But one aspect of his life and art has never been discussed. Like Akira Kurosawa and Sergei Eisenstein, Welles loved to draw and paint. As a child prodigy, he trained first as an artist. But a solo drawing trip to Ireland in his mid-teens took his career in a whole new direction. He talked his way onto the stage at Dublin's Gate Theatre, and instant stardom followed. Yet Welles continued to draw and paint throughout his life, for his own pleasure, and his ground-breaking film and theatre work was profoundly shaped by his graphic imagination.

When he died over 30 years ago, he left behind hundreds of character sketches, set designs, visualisations of unmade projects, illustrations to entertain his children and friends, doodles in the margins of personal letters, and images of the people and places that inspired him. Most of these have been

locked away since his death, and many have never been made public.

Now, for the first time, Welles' daughter Beatrice has granted Mark Cousins access to this treasure trove of imagery, to make a film about what he finds there. These drawings and paintings are a window onto the world of Welles, and a vivid illustration of his creativity and visual thinking.

The Eyes of Orson Welles is a film for the cinema which avoids the techniques of conventional TV documentaries. With his trademark lyrical voiceover, Cousins presents new digital scans of the artworks, and specially-made animations which bring vividly to life the magic of Welles's graphic world. The animations are the work of graphic designer Danny Carr. These are intercut with clips from Welles' films, recordings of Welles' radio performances and TV interviews, and encounters with Beatrice Welles, telling the personal stories of the images. An original score by young Northern Irish composer Matt Regan gives the film emotion and expressivity. The title music is Albinoni's famous Adagio, a nod to the fact that Welles was the first filmmaker to use it for a movie soundtrack in his 1961 adaptation of *The Trial*.

The film is told in three central acts – Pawn, Knight and King – with an epilogue on the theme of Jester. The Pawn sequence looks at Welles' politics, his sympathy with ordinary people, those images that deal with the modesty of human beings – children, decent people who are not in positions of power. The Knight section looks at Welles' obsession with love, his romances with the likes of Dolores del Rio and Rita Hayworth, and his quixotic attachment to what he himself saw as outmoded chivalric ideals. The King section looks at Welles' fascination with power, and its corruption, through illustrations that deal with figures such as Macbeth, Henry V, Kane and Welles himself – the epic mode of human beings, the law makers and abusers. The Jester epilogue explores the images that are about fun or mockery, with a surprising intervention by Welles himself.

Cousins also travels to key locations in Welles' life – New York, Chicago, Kenosha, Arizona, Los Angeles, Spain, Italy, Morocco, Ireland – to capture beautiful images which are relevant to and locate the artworks, and

serve to dramatize some of the defining moments in Welles' career and personal life.

Mark shot the film with two handheld cameras, one tiny HD camera and one 4K camera which gives a new "Steadicam-style" of tracking shot without the need for tracks and dolly. It's the sort of technology that Welles would have loved, and could only have dreamed of as he spent a lifetime wrestling with the creative and financial limitations of traditional film-making techniques. This shooting style reflects the immediacy of Welles' sketches and paintings in their swift engagement with the visual world. These cameras are like Mark's paintbrushes, giving him a direct, personal and tactile contact between his hand and the captured/created image, without the intermediation of cumbersome equipment and crews.

In the end, this essay film is about much more than the drawings and paintings. Just as Leonardo Da Vinci's sketchbooks show his passions, his changes of mind, his trains of thought and visual thinking, so this film is an encounter with the imagination of this great artist, who extended cinema, was profoundly political, engaged with questions about power, existentialism, memory, destiny, filiation, psychology, space and light. These ingredients make *The Eyes of Orson Welles* not only a portrait of a great man, but an account of the 20th Century, and a meditation on the continuing relevance of his genius in what Mark describes as these "Wellesian" times.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I didn't want to make a film about Orson Welles.

When I first saw his films in my teens, they felt like ancient oaks, or giant construction cranes. I loved them, of course, but when I became a filmmaker I thought that I'd have nothing new to say about them. There are lots of documentaries about Welles, and many scores of books. He's so canonical. In my work I've tried to look more at African or Indian cinema than American movies: Guru Dutt, rather than Orson Welles (though they have much in common).

But then I heard that lots of Welles' drawings and paintings still existed. I was intrigued. I like the off-duty aspect of sketching, the ticking over, getting rid of stress, hypnotic, zone-y quality. A lot of my work in recent years has been about looking. Maybe Welles' artworks could help me see how he looked?

So how to make such a film? From the start I knew that I shouldn't try to copy Welles' style – low camera position, very wide angle lens, big foregrounds. My film about him should be more detached than that. For a while now, I've been doing what I think of as "side of the playground" or "corner of the pub" camera work – observational, not intervening, certainly not interviewing. It's not hard to do, to be honest, but the frame matters a lot in such filming, which I like.

At Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival, I met Welles' daughter Beatrice Welles and Philip Hallman of the University of Michigan's Department of Screen Arts & Cultures Hatcher Graduate Library, who had acquired a lot of Welles' artworks. They told me stories about the filmmaker's drawings. As they did so, I realised that I'd like to give the film I'd make a mythic structure – a series of chapters called Pawn, Knight, King and Joker (later changed to Jester, on the suggestion of producer Adam Dawtrey). Many filmmakers' work is too fine-grained for such a big, blocky approach, but the archetypal level is where Welles' films are most alive, and so I went for that.

I watch and like lots of arts documentaries on TV, but as *The Eyes of Orson Welles* was for the cinema (as well as TV), I wanted to avoid many of the TV tropes, particularly

on on-screen presenter. Too often I feel that, visually, they are in the way. I value what they have to say, but don't need to see them as they say it. Also, I wanted to be a bit more innovative with the writing of the film, so decided to make the whole script a letter to Orson Welles rather than, say, a presentation to the audience. With a letter, the viewer would, hopefully, have a sense of eavesdropping. And letters have a different tone, and other intimacies, registers, and feelings.

Producers Mary Bell and Adam Dawtrey joined the team, as did my regular editor Timo Langer, graphic designer and Welles fan Danny Carr (I wanted to see some of the lines being drawn) and composer Matt Regan. The music was particularly important, because I wanted each chapter to have its own sonic feel – a folky guitar for Pawn, romantic violins for Knight, big brass instruments for King, and an accordion for Jester. Vincent Longo at U Mich had already studied the artworks, so was a real sounding board and Glen Shepherd, a brilliant young filmmaker in Scotland, helped with research. Creative Scotland and the BBC in the UK backed the project, as did Charles Tabesh of FilmStruck/TCM in the US, with whom I'd worked several times before. This tricky problem of who could provide the distinctive voice of Welles was solved when I bumped into actor and renaissance man Jack Klaff at Summerhall in Edinburgh. We recorded some of his lines at 7am, when his voice is deeper. Ali Murray did the sound design, and spent ages recording pen nibs, brushes, pencils and felt tips on paper.

In the edit, the structure of the film didn't change. The first cut was exactly two hours, so we tightened it by ten minutes, losing a few things (the battle scene in *Chimes at Midnight*, the backgrounds in *The Lady from Shanghai*) and adding a new, final, chapter, *Bees Make Honey*. During gaps in the edit, I headed off to Morocco, Ireland, Spain and Italy to film places relevant to our story and Welles' development as an artist. I used a DJI Osmo Pro camera to get shots half way between tracking and hand-held. I wanted a sense of someone – Welles? – walking through the world.

And then the film was finished. What did I get from it? What did I learn from it? As a result of it, do I feel any different about Orson Welles who, as I say in the film, threw a rope to me? I answer that question in the short film The Boots of Orson Welles....

Mark Cousins

Edinburgh, 2018

ABOUT MARK COUSINS

Mark Cousins is a Northern Irish filmmaker, writer and curator living and working in Scotland. He started by making films for TV about neo-Nazism, Ian Hamilton Finlay and the cinema of Iran.

Then, in the mid 90s, he became director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, rethought the festival and took it to Sarajevo in defiance of the siege. He is now one of its patrons. He cofounded the charity Scottish Kids are Making Movies, focusing on children and creativity, which has become a theme in his work.

Next Cousins was the TV host of BBC2's Moviedrome. He co-edited *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary* ("Indispensable" - Times Literary Supplement), which is still used in film courses around the world. He directed and presented BBC2's *Scene by Scene*, which ran for five years, screening career interviews with, amongst others, Martin Scorsese, Jane Russell, Paul Schrader, Bernardo Bertolucci, David Lynch, Roman Polanski, Jeanne Moreau, Steven Spielberg, Lauren Bacall and Rod Steiger. ("A revelation" - Times).

Together with Robert Carlyle and Irvine Welsh, Cousins is a director of the production company 4Way Pictures. In 2004 he helped establish Sylvain Chomet's Studio Django in Edinburgh. Between 2001 and 2011, he wrote for *Prospect*. His 2004 book *The Story of Film*, was published in Europe, America, China, Mexico, Brazil and Taiwan. The Times said of it "by some distance the best book we have read on cinema."

Cousins adapted the book into a 930-minute film, *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* ("The place from which all future revisionism should begin" - New York Times). It played in many festivals including Berlin, Telluride, Toronto, Palm Springs and Hong Kong, and at art centres such as the Walker in Minneapolis, BAM in Brooklyn, the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art in Beijing, Bozar in Brussels, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Michael Moore gave it the Stanley Kubrick Award at his Traverse City Film Festival. It won the Peabody Award, was nominated by BAFTA Scotland, and received other prizes.

Cousins has been guest curator at film festivals around the world, is Honorary Professor of Film at the University of Glasgow and has honorary doctorates from the Universities of Edinburgh and Stirling. He was Co-Artistic Director of Cinema China and The Ballerina Ballroom Cinema of Dreams, with Tilda Swinton. They devised The Scottish Cinema of Dreams in Beijing and did *A Pilgrimage* (www.a-pilgrimage.org).

In 2009 Cousins wrote, directed and filmed his first feature documentary, *The First Movie*, about kids in Kurdish Iraq. It won the Prix Italia, was nominated for a Royal Television Society award and won several other international prizes. He and Swinton launched the 8 ½ Foundation, an ambitious two-year event which created a new movie birthday for children in Scotland. It was nominated for the Human Rights Award. He published his fourth book, *Watching Real People Elsewhere* in the UK, America, and China.

In 2012 he was nominated for the London Awards for Art and Performance and the Screen International award. He was guest curator at the Eye Cinematheque in Amsterdam.

His next feature film, *What is this Film called Love?*, played in 20 countries, at the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London, and was nominated for Best Director by BAFTA Scotland. PJ Harvey called it "revelatory and inspiring". In 2012, Cousins' work showed in Karlovy Vary, Montenegro, Bratislava, Moscow, Rio, Dubai, Bosnia, San Francisco, Sweden, Seattle, Chicago, Berwick, Inverness, Edinburgh, CPX Dox, and Hong Kong.

In 2013 he completed *Here be Dragons*, a film essay about Albania which won the main prize in the Romania Film Festival, and *A Story of Children and Film*, which was in the Official Selection in Cannes, and received five star reviews around the world. He curated *Cinema of Childhood*, a series of 17 films which toured the UK and Ireland for a year. He has twice been nominated for the Spirit of Scotland award and received the Visionary Award in Traverse City and the Saltzgeber Prize for outstanding contribution to film at the Berlin Film Festival. His more recent films include *Life May Be*, co-directed with Iranian filmmaker Mania Akbari, and 6

Desires, an adaptation of DH Lawrence's book *Sea and Sardinia*. *Life May Be* was called "transcendent and extraordinary delicate". It won the Don Quixote prize in Switzerland. *6 Desires*, in which Jarvis Cocker plays the voice of Lawrence, had its world premiere at the London Film Festival, and its international premiere at Sundance. ("Beautiful" – Jonathan Glazer). Cousins is now a columnist for the film magazines *Sight and Sound* and *Filmkrant*, and wrote a limited edition booklet about Abbas Kiarostami, *First Life, Second Life*.

Cousins' *The Oar and the Winnowing Fan* was a radical takeover of the *DazedDigital* website. His film *I am Belfast*, about his home city, which has a new score by David Holmes and cinematography by Christopher Doyle, was released by the British Film Institute. The film industry magazine *Variety* compared it to the great soviet director Dziga Vertov; it won the Stanley Kubrick Award. He made *But Then Again, Too Few to Mention*, a short film commissioned by the British Council, and *Your Eyes Flashing Solemnly with Hate*, a short film about Pier Paolo Pasolini. His BBC and BFI film *Atomic*, a collaboration with the band Mogwai, was called "a masterpiece", "sublime" and "overwhelming". It has played in Hiroshima, Chernobyl, Coventry Cathedral and the Edinburgh and Holland International Festivals.

Cousins curated a season of films for the Romanian Cultural Institute in London. In 2016 he made his debut as a fiction director with the "shame musical" *Stockholm my Love*, which stars Neneh Cherry and which was also shot by Doyle. This was released in the UK by the BFI.

In 2017 he completed *Bigger than The Shining*, a secret project which is showable by film festivals if they publish its name only. He also published his latest book, *The Story of Looking*, about humankind's visual engagement with the world, which the *Guardian* said was like "a wise man looking at the stars", and which Richard Ayoade called "masterful." In 2018 it will be published in the USA, Italy, Russia and China.

In 2017, he was also given permission by the estate of Orson Welles to make a film – *The Eyes of Orson Welles* - about the filmmaker's graphic art, and has had retrospectives in the UK, Finland and Greece.

At the start of 2018, he has just completed a 2 hour, four screen, commission for the Rotterdam Film Festival, *Storm in My Heart*, and is editing a 22 hour film, *Eye Opener*, which looks again at cinema, from the perspective of women directors.

CREDITS

The Eyes of Orson Welles

Director, cinematographer and writer
Mark Cousins

Producers
Mary Bell and Adam Dawtrey

Executive producers Mark Bell, Mark Thomas and
Michael Moore

Consultant
Beatrice Welles

Editor
Timo Langer

Composer
Matt Regan

Voice of Orson Welles
Jack Klaff

Sound Mix and Sound Design
Ali Murray

Animation and Visual Effects
Danny Carr

Dialogue Editor
Stephen C. Horne

Voice-over recording
Iain McKinna, Offbeat

Location Managers
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Vincent Longo (USA), Seán Burke (Ireland)

Research
Vincent Longo and Glen Shepherd

Images of Orson Welles' artworks courtesy of
Beatrice Welles

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Interfoto, Warner Bros, Collection Christophel,
Antonia Reeve, National Gallery of Scotland

Georges Menager, Pierreci, Harris Brisbane Dick
Fund, 1937, Metropolitan Museum of New York

Mercury Productions, DACS 2018, Dave Hogan,
Hulton Archive, Museo Nacional Del Prado

The Alexandra Exter Association, National Gallery
of Art Washington DC

Audio footage from "The Fall of the City" by
Archibald MacLeish, Columbia Workshop Radio
Series, courtesy of CBS Broadcasting Inc and
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Audio footage from "Hello Americans" and "Heart
of Darkness" courtesy of CBS Broadcasting Inc

Adagio Per Archi E Organo In Sol Minore

Written& Composed by Remo Giazotto, Tomaso
Albinoni

Performed by Capella Istropolitana

Conducted by Richard Edlinger

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Founded in 2004, Dogwoof has so far released 18 Oscar®-nominated documentaries, with three wins and two BAFTA awards. These include 'The Act of Killing', 'Restrepo', 'Blackfish' and 'Cartel Land'. Dogwoof recently launched its first film production investment fund, focusing on feature docs, docu-series, and remake rights, gearing up the company towards vertical integration.

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