

Programme Notes



Monday 20th November 19:30

Dalíland (15)



This unconventional biopic features Ben Kingsley as surrealist Salvador Dalí, one of the most famous artists of the 20th century. Focusing on the later years of the artist's life, it is told through the eyes of the fictionalised James Linton, a young assistant keen to make his name in the art world, who helps Dalí prepare for a big gallery show.

James forms a bond with his new employer, and as well as supporting his creative efforts he joins in enthusiastically with his unconventional

and decadent life. He also witnesses first-hand the problems in Dalí's artistic and personal life. To fund his extravagant lifestyle, Dalí is signing anything put in front of him and passing off photocopies as original artworks. Meanwhile there is increasing tension between him and his wife/muse/sparring partner, Gala, who attempts to make James the latest in her series of toy boys.

The film is directed by Mary Harron, who specialises in unusual biopics, often featuring contemporary artists (*I Shot Andy Warhol*, *The Notorious Bettie Page*). Here she concentrates on Dalí's declining years, when arguably he ceases to be a significant artist and becomes simply a work of art in his own right. Flashbacks takes us back to the beginnings of Dalí's career when he worked on his most important paintings, and compares this period of productivity to the later years.

Ben Kingsley's portrayal of the aging Dalí is masterly. The evocative portrait of the artistic world of the 1970s is full of superb detail, and there's a great soundtrack too. Sadly, one thing this low-budget film doesn't include is any of Dalí's art itself: the film's producers weren't able to secure the rights to show any of it.

Reviews

The latest of the director's splendidly offbeat biopics captures the madness, the comedy and the tragedy of the surrealist legend who turned his very identity into a work of art. It's both a highly entertaining movie and, by the end, a haunting one. Dalíland starts off as a lip-smacking tour of the art world's most delirious sideshow. But it turns into a deadpan tragedy about a man who made his very identity into a work of art, and in doing so squeezed life itself right off the canvas.

Owen Gleiberman, Variety

Ben Kingsley's actorly manner nails Dalí in his megalomaniac sunset years in this portrait of the painter and his disintegrating marriage, framed in a coming-of-age tale. He is a formidable screen presence, perfect for the role of a man who grandiosely talks about himself in the third person. The cleverness of Kingsley's performance is the twinkle in his eye that leaves you wondering whether Dalí has disappeared entirely up his own myth.

Cath Clarke, The Guardian

Director Mary Harron paints an evocative portrait of the cult of celebrity that's full of pinpoint period detail, while her early career as a music journalist pays dividends on some savvy soundtrack choices. Kingsley is a convincing Dalí, although for large stretches of the film he's not called upon to do much more than stand around looking enigmatic, while Briney's fresh-faced innocent makes for an effective counterpoint to the chaos around him.

Terry Staunton, Radio Times

Cast

Salvador Dalí	Ben Kingsley
Young Dalí	Ezra Miller
Gala	Barbara Sukowa
James Linton	Christopher Briney
Captain Moore	Rupert Graves
Amanda Lear	Andreja Pejic
Christoffe	Alexander Beyer
Jeff Fenholt	Zachary Nachbar-Seckel
Young Gala	Avital Lvova

Credits

Director	Mary Harron
Writers	John Walsh
Cinematography	Marcel Zyskind
Editing	Alex Mackie
Music	Edmund Butt
Country of origin	USA/France/UK
Language	English/French/Spanish
Running time	97 minutes
Year of release	2022

Film Facts

Dalíland had its world premiere at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival.

Mary Harron's first feature was *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996), about Warhol's would-be assassin Valerie Solanas. Other films included *The Notorious Bettie Page*, the TV movie *Anna Nicole* (about Anne Nicole Smith), and *Charlie Says* (about Charles Manson and life inside the Family).

The *Dalíland* scenes set in New York were actually filmed in the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool.

Quote from Mary Harron:

"It's about the beginning and the end of someone's career and marriage. It's bittersweet and there's a lot of comedy in it."

Quote from Ben Kingsley

"[Dalí] was exhausting and exhilarating to portray. His artwork, writing and public appearances were one risk after another. He was not a character that one could portray carefully."

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