

## **F FOR FAKE**

**Directed by Orson Welles**

France-Iran-Germany 1975 | 88 mins | Cert PG

A BFI release

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**Release date: 24 August 2012**

**Opening venues: BFI Southbank, Curzon Renoir, Watershed Bristol, National Media Museum Bradford, Irish Film Institute, Dublin plus selected cinemas nationwide**

This dazzling disquisition on art forgery, cinematic trickery and magic was the last film to be completed by the great Orson Welles – an exhilarating blend of documentary, essay and fiction which eludes definition. Welles himself called it ‘a new kind of film’.

***F for Fake*** makes liberal use of re-edited footage from François Reichenbach’s TV documentary about the prolific art forger Elmyr de Hory – ‘a true Paganini of the palette’ – and his biographer Clifford Irving, himself the scandalous perpetrator of a hoax autobiography of Howard Hughes. To this, Welles added newly shot material in which he himself talks to camera while working at a Moviola. The result is a quick-witted, rapid-fire montage (the editing took Welles a whole year) held together by the director’s own mellifluous, mischievous commentary. Himself a master of illusion, Welles takes great pleasure in presenting and exposing the two brilliant hoaxers, alluding along the way to his own notorious history of prank-playing, in particular the occasion when he caused widespread panic with his radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*.

Throughout, the idea of authorship – of what is real and fake and whether or not it matters – is playfully and provocatively probed. Elmyr recounts how when he took his fake Mondrians, Matisses and Modiglianis to museums and galleries for authentication, all – without

a single exception – were judged to be genuine. ‘After that,’ he says, ‘I lost my faith in the concept of expertise’. By contrast, Welles proffers a moving meditation on the anonymous glory of Chartres, created by unknown artists: ‘Maybe a man’s name doesn’t matter all that much.’

Perhaps Welles’ most personal film and arguably his most undervalued, **F for Fake** had no proper distribution in the US, fared little better in Europe, and has not been widely seen in UK cinemas since its original release in 1976. Now re-released by the BFI in a high-definition transfer by Criterion (during the creation of which, substantial dirt, debris and scratches were painstakingly removed), **F for Fake** still teases and tantalises – a magical, mendacious masterpiece which makes us realise that ‘art is a lie – a lie that makes us realise the truth’. Or should we really believe that?

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#### **Notes to editors:**

**For for Fake** is on release in UK cinemas from 24 August, and plays at BFI Southbank and Curzon Renoir, Watershed Bristol, National Media Museum Bradford plus selected cinemas nationwide.

#### **About the BFI**

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- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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