

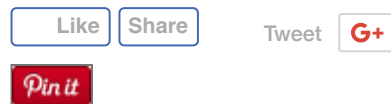


_(/)

Film Review: Final Portrait

Alberto Giacometti paints a portrait of his friend James Lord in this sterile exercise that fails to gain dramatic traction from the artist's quest for perfection.

By [Erica Abeel \(Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93\)](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93) Mar 21, 2018



Reviews

Specialty Releases



[\(/www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button](http://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button)

What could the creators of *Final Portrait* have been thinking? This film asks the viewer literally to watch paint dry as renowned artist Alberto Giacometti (Geoffrey Rush) paints, wipes out, cusses, and re-paints a portrait during some 18 sittings by his friend, the dapper James Lord (Armie Hammer). It's as exciting as watching a writer write.

Writer-director Stanley Tucci, the esteemed actor and Academy Award nominee, attempts to compensate for

Portrait's schematic premise by sketching in *la vie boheme* in the artist's Paris atelier, which could be situated in some Montparnasse of tourist fantasy. But the film never gains amplitude, keeping claustrophobically focused on Giacometti's maddening struggle to complete the portrait. You can lecture, write books and perhaps make a short doc about the artistic process, but, at least in the case of *Final Portrait*, you can't pistol-whip it into a dramatic feature film.

In 1964, while on a brief trip to Paris, Lord, a wealthy art writer and a kind of American *flaneur*, is asked by Giacometti to sit for a portrait. The process, Giacometti assures Lord, will take only a few days. Flattered and intrigued, Lord agrees. "A few days" expands into weeks, possibly months of sittings that point to no conclusion because Giacometti, who can never find satisfaction with the work—or even understand the nature of "finished"—continually destroys it. "That's the terrible

thing," he explains to the dismayed Lord. "The more one works on a picture, the more impossible it becomes to finish it." In an ongoing motif, Lord is repeatedly seen phoning home to say he'll be cancelling his flight yet again. Given that it's Armie Hammer on the phone, we itch to know whom he's calling, what awaits him stateside, and more—but no such luck.

Tucci pads Lord's mind-numbing sittings—which feel like they occur in real time and bring new meaning to "static"—with vignettes from Giacometti's turbulent life. The archetypal "art monster," he mistreats his forlorn, heat-starved wife Annette (the marvelous Sylvie Testud, disserved by the role)—at one point throwing cash at her for a warm coat—and makes no secret of his craving for Caroline (Clémence Poésy), a prostitute and his lover of four years. After the studio has been ransacked, he buys off Caroline's pimps for a princely sum. His dealer arrives with a fortune in franc notes, and Giacometti, who has no use for banks, playfully asks Lord where in the atelier they should store the bundles of cash. The production designers took great care to recreate an authentic image of the artist's atelier, with his famous sculptures of elongated figures as a backdrop; you can all but smell the turpentine and overflowing ashtrays and feel the dank chill. The set acts as another leading player.

Rush pulls out all the stops to convey an artist in frantic pursuit of some unattainable ideal, uncorking such lines as "There is no better breeding ground for doubt than success." He bears a remarkable physical resemblance to Giacometti and nails his grotesque self-absorption, doggedness and, at moments, madness. But Rush's performance works more as an acting-class exercise than a dramatic engagement with other players. The most glaring void is his unexplored relationship with Lord, who is called upon merely to puzzle at the painter's frustration, act genteel-y pissed off and squirm from sitting in the same position in a freezing studio. Why did Armie Hammer lend himself to this sterile exercise? The script wants nothing of him except his beauty, using him simply as a poster boy for "rich WASPy American." I suppose you could *almost* make an hour-plus feature simply by pointing the camera at this actor's face—but not quite. That Hammer accepted such an underwritten role is especially disappointing after his indelible turn in *Call Me by Your Name*. The main takeaway from *Final Portrait* is that he is in need of a new agent. It's said that Lord, who was homosexual, conducted a full-blown affair with the older, overbearing Dora Maar, though in his *Picasso and Dora: A Memoir* (1993), he never explicitly admits to a consummation. Now there's a film I'd like to see.

Click [here \(http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4494718/?ref=nm_sr_1\)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4494718/?ref=nm_sr_1) for cast and crew information.

Movie Reviews, Box Office News, and More

SHOWEAST (<http://www.filmexpos.com/showeast>) **CINEEUROPE**

(<http://www.filmexpos.com/cineeuropa>) **CINEASIA** (<http://www.filmexpos.com/cineasia>)



The cutting-edge and future-proof IMB
SR-1000 Standalone IMB™

For inquiries, please contact us at marketing@gdc-tech.com



ABOUT US (</about-us>) **CONTACT US** (</contact-us>) **ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES**
(</advertising-opportunities>) **MOVIE REVIEWS R** (<http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/about-us/rss.jsp>) **SS FEED** (<http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/about-us/rss.jsp>)

© 2018 FilmJournal International. All rights reserved. Read our **[TERMS OF USE](http://www.filmjournal.com/terms-of-use)**
(<http://www.filmjournal.com/terms-of-use>) & **[PRIVACY POLICY](http://www.filmjournal.com/privacy-policy)** (<http://www.filmjournal.com/privacy-policy>).