



THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT

a film by Peter Greenaway

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE in association with KINO LORBER

A GREENAWAY CLASSIC

One of the most ambitious and controversial filmmakers of his era, Peter Greenaway had his international critical and commercial breakthrough in 1982 with his 17th-century costume romp *The Draughtsman's Contract*. The film launched him to the forefront of global arthouse cinema, and he became a director of international status with this witty, stylized, erotic country house murder mystery.

Newly remastered in stunning 4K by the BFI National Archive, Zeitgeist Films is proud to bring back this cinematic gem to U.S. arthouse screens.



SYNOPSIS

In an apparently idyllic 17th-century Wiltshire, an ambitious draughtsman is commissioned by an aristocrat's wife to produce twelve drawings of her husband's estate, in return for which he will receive payment, board and bed—hers. Extravagant costumes, a twisted plot, elegantly barbed dialogue, and a score by frequent Greenaway collaborator Michael Nyman make the film a treat for ear, eye and mind.

ABOUT DIRECTOR PETER GREENAWAY

Peter Greenaway embarked on his career as a filmmaker in 1966 at age 24. After graduating from Walthamstow College of Art, he began a long period of employment as a film director and editor at the Central Office of Information, a UK government department responsible for making public information films. Both of these institutions have heavily marked his film work, bringing together a strong visual sense as befits a painter, and an obsessive exploration of the absurdity of bureaucracies and the possibilities or otherwise of the documentary form. These two elements can be seen throughout his early short films.

Throughout his career, as well as making films, Greenaway has remained active as a fine artist, exhibiting paintings at Lord's Gallery in 1964; illustrating three books in 1970 (The Alphabetical Gang Lion; Gang Lion and the Visual Flush and Tulse Luper and the Centre Walk); producing the Water Papers (a set of fifty drawings) in 1974 (exhibited at Arts 38 and Curwen Gallery in 1976) and the paintings and drawings involved in A Walk Through H (1978) and The Draughtsman's Contract in 1982. With the making of the astonishingly successful The Draughtsman's Contract, Greenaway not only entered the domain of the feature film, but he also helped to change the face of British film itself. Bizarre, intensely personal films were no longer perceived as crazy projects but as commercially viable (with help from the newly established Channel 4). Thus began a long, successful career in which Greenaway's talents and obsession found a platform in films such as A Zed & Two Noughts; Drowning by Numbers; The Cook, The Thief, His, Wife and Her Lover; Prospero's Books; The Pillow Book and The Tulse Luper Suitcases.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Intervals (1969)
Windows (1974)
Dear Phone (1976)
H Is for House (1976)
A Walk Through H (1978)
Water Wockets (1978)
Vertical Features Remake (1978)
The Falls (1980)
The Draughtsman's Contract (1982)
Four American Composers (1983)
Making a Splash (1984)
A Zed & Two Noughts (1985)
26 Bathrooms (1986)
The Belly of an Architect (1987)
Drowning by Numbers (1988)
Fear of Drowning (1988)
The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover (1989)
Prospero's Books (1991)
Rosa (1992)
The Baby of Mâcon (1993)
Stairs 1 Geneva (1995)
Lumière and Company (1996)
The Pillow Book (1996)
8 1/2 Women (1999)
The Death of a Composer: Rosa, A Horse Drama (1999)
The Tulse Luper Suitcases (2003)

ON THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT



"A masterpiece."
—Time Out London



"Astonishingly elegant...extraordinarily detailed...mind-bendingly rich. The Draughtsman's Contract is fun."

—Vincent Canby, The New York Times

"Its pleasures do not fade.... One can still marvel at this cerebral romp of a film that combines both 17th-century country house murder mystery with a witty treatise on sex, lies and draughtsmanship. Greenaway fashions this cinematic world with elegant precision—even the shadows and clouds in his film seem to be on as nimble a cue as Michael Nyman's band who play the boisterous score. A playful puzzler to watch over and over, that might just be the aesthete's version of Gameboy."

—The Guardian (UK)

"★★★★ What we have here is a tantalizing puzzle, wrapped in eroticism and presented with the utmost elegance. I have never seen a film quite like it. The raw materials of this story could have been fashioned into a bawdy romp like Tom Jones. But the director has made a canny choice. Instead of showing us everything, and explaining everything, he gives us the clues and allows us to draw our own conclusions. His movie is like a crossword puzzle for the senses."

—Roger Ebert

"The film is mannered and idiosyncratic; the speeches are so arch and twitty they seem to be pitched higher than a dog whistle, and the people talking are popinjays in perukes shaped as geometrically as the shrubs at Marienbad."

—Pauline Kael

"The Draughtsman's Contract proclaimed the arrival of Peter Greenaway with a blast on the Baroque Trumpet. Few directors can have contrived so piercing an annunciation of their talent...his masterpiece."

—The Independent (UK)5

PETER GREENAWAY ON THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT

"I had for a long time resisted the idea of the classic European art movie, which, as I saw it then, was too much related to the business of writing literary scripts, processing narrative in predictable formulaic terms, narrowing down the filmic vocabulary, and obeying all the orthodox narrative verities, but I was persuaded, indeed challenged, to create a film world where the characters no longer talked directly into the microphone and the camera, as in the earlier film-essays, but to one other. The result was *The Draughtsman's Contract*. In a way I had not reneged on previous preoccupations. Here was formalism of another kind, using the stiffness and theatricality and artificiality of Restoration drama, using elaborated spoken texts that often, but never completely, threaten to defy comprehension because of their extended conceits and indulgent word-play, and using music that always announces its self-conscious presence as though it was a concert piece existing on its own terms and not merely fulfilling the obligations of illustrative film-musak.

In a way *The Draughtsman's Contract* was Vertical Features Remake (1978) with actors. And with its excessive straight-jacketing of the English landscape, it was another catalogue movie, but this time with actors walking the world, but actors deliberately behaving like statues or mannequins, marshalled into a strict regime of times and places.

The time is 1694, the subject is a conspiracy of murder, more Patricia Highsmith than Agatha Christie, the characters are effete provincial aristocrats, the ambience bitter and sweet. Sexual exploitation is paramount. A draughtsman demands sexual favors in return for practicing his art on a country-house; a contract for twelve imaginative couplings with the mistress of the house for twelve prosaic drawings, both to be taken at his predatory pleasure and with an eye to his rigid timing. We believe the draughtsman is in control and we watch his progress of gross sexual exploitation with some respect, for he is an unapologetic immoralist, he is handsome, well turned out, a disadvantaged outsider trying to get inside, and an artist of some talent if not a huge imagination. But the movie takes a reverse turn half way through and the predator becomes the victim, quite how and why, if not already guessed in a plot of women holding onto hereditary

in a household of virtual eunuchs, is quickened in the last minutes with the freely commissioned thirteenth drawing and the thirteenth copulation. The artist is not employed after all to draw but to sire. His prowess as a stud is more understood and valued than his prowess as draughtsman.

It is a movie of Catholics and Protestants, interiors and exteriors, manners and snobbisms, insiders and outsiders, and the various manipulative equations of sex and money and power and art, played in an almost color-coded idealized English Wiltshire landscape of white, black and green.

It is of course a fiction, but 1694 was the year of the first Married Woman's Property Act, the formation of the Bank of England and the year of William of Orange's Protestant consolidation of anti-Stuart Catholic Whiggery, a few short years after the Battle of the Boyne. The world in England had changed. Modern history begins. But, entertaining, and hopefully as educative as this might be, it is all really an elaboration of the film's original premise, which is: Should an artist draw what he sees or draw what he knows? Sight and knowledge are not at all the same thing. Seeing and believing. Just because you have eyes does not mean you can see. The eye is lazier than the brain. Because of such contradictions and inadequacies, the draughtsman is framed, and in both meanings of that phrase. And because of the film's ubiquitous optical-device, a frame on an easel, and because of the obsessive framings of the movie-camera itself in making the film, we are framed too. And we know that cinema itself is a framing device in both meanings of the word.

Perhaps with profit the argument that seeing and knowing are not the same thing, should be always applied to cinema. And in the end The Draughtsman's Contract perhaps ought to be called The Filmmaker's Contract. What is the profit to a filmmaker, if he only films what he sees and not what he, and also his audience, undoubtedly know?"

THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT

a film by Peter Greenaway

CAST

Anthony Higgins Mr. Neville
Janet Suzman Mrs. Herbert
Anne Louise Lambert Sarah Talmann
Neil Cunningham Thomas Noyes
Hugh Fraser Louis Talmann
Dave Hill Mr. Herbert
David Gant Mr. Seymour
David Meyer One of The Poulencs
Tony Meyer One of The Poulencs
Nicholas Amer Mr. Parkes

CREW

Peter Greenaway Writer/Director
David Payne Producer
Curtis Clark Cinematographer
Bob Ringwood Art Director
John Wilson Editor
Sue Blane Costumes
Michael Nyman Music



TECHNICAL DETAILS

Title: The Draughtsman's Contract

Genre: Mystery

Original Release: 1982

Remaster Release: 2022

Origin: UK

Languages Spoken: English

Duration: 108 min.

Format: 4K DCP

Shot in: Color

Remaster Produced by: BFI Production Board in association with Channel 4

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