



Art and Craft Discussion Guide

Directors: Sam Cullman, Jennifer Grausman,
Mark Becker
Year: 2014
Time: 89 min

You might know these directors from:

Sam Cullman

If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front
(2011)

Jennifer Grausman

Pressure Cooker (2008)

Mark Becker

Pressure Cooker (2008)
Romántico (2005)

FILM SUMMARY

Those who encounter Mark Landis describe him as an odd man, an eccentric philanthropist. Well, there's more than meets the eyes when it comes Landis, who in truth is a forgery artist struggling with mental illness. ART AND CRAFT offers the portrayal of a man openly living a false reality, revealing the most humble origins of his seemingly deceptive plot.

Once the directors have introduced us to the world of Landis, complete with its antique photographs, coffee-stained countertops and sad perimeters, we meet Matt Leininger. A modern man, Leininger juggles fatherhood and forgery-busting from his Cincinnati living room. Having been duped by Landis, he is doggedly determined to stop the fine-art-forgery dead in his tracks and single-handedly save the art world from this evil trickster.

A simple enough plot, except Landis never asked for a single penny for any of the artworks he donated to numerous museums across the United States over the course of 30 years. He asked for nothing finite, countable, or prosecutable in a court of law. According to Landis, all he asked for was to belong, to feel as if he was a part of the world, not the eternal outcast he had come to accept as his lot in life. With this in mind, Leininger begins to look more like a righteous do-gooder than a savior of the art world. When Landis and Leininger finally meet at an exhibition the showdown is less dramatic than expected, the awkwardness placing no one in the right or wrong.

Masterfully executed, ART AND CRAFT is a tale of belonging. In a subversive manner, Landis created foolproof replications of some of the art world's all-time greats, and this film does him justice by inviting us to join him on his faltering quest to fit in. Whether Leininger is a symbol of our conscience or our curse is for us to decide.

FILM THEMES

Landis used his awe-inspiring skills to make his own ends meet, struggling with mental illness a world devoid of the emotional reinforcements we all require, drawing into question the notion of right and wrong along the way.

DECEIT FOR BELONGING

Does ethical behavior pay off in the world in which we live? For Landis, absolutely not. He watched his father take the moral high ground and fail as a businessman. And he learned through his own deceptions that the world was ready and willing to accept whoever he claimed to be, without question. "I got addicted to being a philanthropist," he stated. Perhaps he really meant, "I liked being loved, belonging as a legitimate member of society." For who doesn't love a philanthropist, a lover of humanity offering free gifts, bestowing wealth and value at no charge, with an incredibly crafted storyline to back it up? In order to feel kindness and to belong, Landis employed deceit, making sense **of** and sense **to** the world around him.

THE STIGMA OF MENTAL HEALTH

Landis struggled with mental illness for the majority of his life. Hospitalized at a young age he grew up inhabiting the outskirts of society. Though the days of electroshock therapy and lobotomies are behind us, mental illness has a long way to go before being seen as a non-stigmatized medical diagnosis. Landis is living proof of the detrimental effects of outcasting people suffering from mental illness, throwing little more than a band-aid their way. Until mental illness is given its "due diligence," millions will live in a world of isolated suffering.

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

In order to be embraced by the art world, Landis knew there were a game to be played. He would be accepted if he flaunted himself as a wealthy philanthropist, serving the memory of his beloved mother or made-up sister. If he came sauntering in wearing suit and tie, pulling up in a slick car, he would be welcomed with open arms and gracious words. If, on the other hand, he were to unravel the web he had spun, revealing the truth that he was a lonely man living with the memory of his dead mother and a rampant mind barely balanced by medication, with an incredible ability to copy great artworks that he picked up as an only child growing up anonymously, he would have been sent back through the door. When society demands an illusory dance, the lonely abide.

THE DEFINITION OF CRIME

Early on in the film, good versus bad seemed clear-cut. Good: Leininger. A man on a mission to protect the art world from the wrongdoings of a wicked person. Bad: Landis. A schizophrenic man with a penchant for deviancy. As the story unfolded and all the pawns were laid out, the definition of right and wrong lost its clear-cut defining lines, and just what makes one action a crime and the other a legal act blurred. With money never introduced into the equation, the answer remained elusive. The issue instead became one set of moral guidelines against another.

“Nothing’s original under the sun. Everything goes back to something.”

Mark Landis

“He knew right where to hit us, our soft spot: art and money.”

Mark Tullos, Hilliard Museum Director

“We all like to feel useful, whatever ability we happen to have. We like to make use of it.”

Mark Landis

FILM FACTS:

- After premiering at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival, ART AND CRAFT went on to receive a number of awards and nominations, including winning a Cinema Eye Honors Award and a National Board of Review Award.
- ART AND CRAFT was directed by the team of Sam Cullman, Jennifer Grausman, and Mark Becker. Cullman previously produced award-winning documentary “The House I Live In,” while Grausman and Becker co-directed “Pressure Cooker.” Grausman also worked as the Manager of Exhibition and Film Funding at The Museum of Modern Art and had a special interest in art forgery. After reading a piece in “The New York Times” about Mark Landis, she contacted him on the telephone and established a trusting relationship over a number of conversations. Cullman and Grausman did the majority of the filming on their own over the course of 3 years.
- Mark Landis watches TV while working on his forgeries and finishes one artwork per film, the average work taking 2 hours from start to finish.
- The first time Mark Landis and Matt Leininger saw the film was at its Tribeca premiere. The directors were sitting behind them in the theater, and said they were both pleasantly surprised.
- Landis’s work is a part of a touring exhibition entitled “Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World,” which highlights the work of five art forgers from the 20th century to present.
- Mental illness is a serious issue both in the U.S. and across the globe. In the U.S. alone, around 1 in 5 adults experiences a mental illness in any given year, with 1 in 20 adults experiencing a serious mental illness that interferes with or limits life activities. 1% of the U.S. adult population suffers from schizophrenia.
- The term schizophrenia, first coined in 1908, roughly translates into “splitting of the mind.” Before the term, the symptoms particular to schizophrenia were considered to be a part of dementia, although it was soon discovered that some patients actually improved with age.
- The Menninger Foundation, where Landis was sent when he first had a nervous breakdown at the age of 17, was founded in 1919 in Kansas and was the first established group psychiatry practice. The Menninger School of Psychiatry, opened in 1946, was the largest training center for psychiatrists in the U.S. at the time.
- Roman sculptors were the first art forgers of their time, making copies of Greek statues to sell. Many talented artists have turned to forgery, one being Dutchman Han van Meegeren, whose forged works became so popular that his own son went on to forge his father’s forgeries.
- There are three different types of forgers in the art world: the artist, those who sell a fake piece as something it is not, and those who discover a fake artwork but sell it as an original.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Learn** more about NAMI - [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#). Participate in their mission to alleviate sufferers of mental illness.
2. **Educate** yourself on the facts of mental illness at [NIMH](#) or similar sites. The stigma of mental illness is perhaps why Mark Landis felt so isolated and was drawn to forgery as a means of seeking attention and recognition.
3. **Commission** an original artwork from Mark Landis. Find out more on his [website](#).
4. **Visit** [the Association of Art Museum Curators](#) website. It’s a network for curators to share knowledge and expertise, and the website offers links to many useful resources for those interested in the field of art curation.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.