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'Certified Copy' contemplates the value of itself

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Certified Copy

Directed by Abbas Kiarostami

Written by Abbas Kiarostam

2010, France, Italy, Iran

At the heart of *Certified Copy* lies an enigma, the solving of which might be entirely beside the point of this new film by incumbent king of Iranian cinema and champion of art, Abbas Kiarostami. Mad as it may sound, *Certified Copy* could be one third of a triple-bill, the other two being *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Inception*. All three are – explicitly or otherwise – mindbenders. They are playful puzzles in which the true nature of the central relationship is called somewhat into question, amongst other things being questioned. Of course, some are keener on bedazzling the viewer than are others.

In *Certified*, what begins as the tale of two complete strangers civilly debating art on a country drive ends up being a tragedy of two estranged lovers lamenting their 15-year-old sham of a marriage. The transition is so sudden yet so elusive it is nearly impossible to determine the exact point at which a gently running creek becomes whitewater. And like trout, questions leap forth unexpectedly from the foam. Are they strangers, or do they in fact have a history together? Is their interaction simply roleplay for the sake of reviving a dying romance or an elaborate game of pretend between two emotionally arrested individuals, or are the characters themselves just as clueless as the next man and his dog? If reality and illusion are virtually inseparable, which is ultimately more compelling, more appreciable, of greater value?

This ambiguity delightfully mirrors the central premise of the titular book, the latest work by writer James Miller (opera singer William Shimell in a charming acting debut) for which he is in Tuscany on promotional duties. Juliette Binoche's art-dealer, Elle, portrayed very early on as a spirited and slightly offbeat individual, requests a meeting during which she can pick his brains about his claim that a great copy is as good as its original. Miller obliges, they take off in her car and the rest is required viewing. Eschewing ice-breaker niceties, they wander through the village of Lucignano, relishing each other's company and getting on one other's nerves. Conversation veers and meanders, Italian becoming French becoming English becoming an inaudible whisper; stranger becoming lover becoming heartbreaker. Yet, for all its narrative simplicity, *Certified* demands full attention and reflection, and certainly opinions. Unlike *Inception*, this is devoid of exposition and excess; but unlike *Marienbad*, it doesn't stretch the intrigue quite far enough.

For a film that lives or dies on the strength of its lead roles, *Certified* is wonderfully vital. Binoche's Best Actress triumph at Cannes is wholly deserved for a performance that is all-encompassing in its naturalism, joyful in its inherent vulnerability. It almost unfairly overshadows Shimell's efforts, which are laudable if not praiseworthy. As for Kiarostami, foregoing – for the very first time – the rolling, oven-baked hills of his homeland, his quirks and cinematic obsessions are still on show. Make no mistake, *Certified* bears the unmistakable odour of the master himself. Long-takes follow the couple through a mise en scene of rough walls and muted tones, the camera tagging along like a quietly delighted third-wheel. Binoche and Shimell frequently address the camera head-on, whether in conversation over coffee or applying lipstick in the mirror of a lady's room. Close-ups are held with sensitivity, lending scenes a disarming and sometimes disquieting intimacy. Then there is the love of chit-chat, of anecdotes and amateur philosophy, which at times becomes a little indulgent verging on tangential. The threat of tedium certainly hangs around the edges as a result. To be fair, there is often the sense that Kiarostami's style, when removed from the "exoticism" of his national cinema and placed in the heartland of cinematic artifice, loses its inventiveness and punch. Yet a genuinely intriguing notion combined with the graceful hand of a master and an equally masterful Binoche make *Certified Copy* a bona fide pleasure to watch and later wonder about.

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A 23 year old Nigerian Australian - Sydney-based medical student , film enthusiast and fledgling writer- Also a soccer fan and filmmaker in-utero

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