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Frazetta - Painting with Fire

[Razor Digital](#) // Unrated // \$19.99 // November 30, 2004Review by Ian Jane | posted January 4, 2005 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

The Movie:

After spending over half a century breaking new ground in the fields of fantasy and comic book illustration, Frank Frazetta finally gets his due in the form of this feature length documentary come love letter from director Lance Laspina. Even if you're not familiar with the name Frank Frazetta, whether you know it or not you have to have seen some of his artwork. It may have been a movie poster hanging in a theater, it may have been a magazine cover, it may have been a comic book, it may have been a record album cover, or it may have been one of the dozens of paperback covers that he was responsible for bringing to life. But the fact remains, his artwork is everywhere – you just need to know what to look for.

Frank Frazetta – Painting With Fire takes a look at Frazetta's artistic legacy through some interviews with his contemporaries and with the man himself. The film uses plenty of examples of his artwork to accentuate just how powerful some of his images are, while educating us on such interesting side notes as the fact that Frazetta used no models for his work, the images came right out of his head and onto the paper – no small feat.

Gushing with praise for the subject are such renowned comic book artists as Neal Adams (best known for revolutionizing **Batman** in the 70s by giving him nipples!), Bernie Wrightson (co-creator of **The Swamp Thing**), Al Williamson (famed E. C. Comics and **Flash Gordon** artist), the late John Buscuma (who worked on many a silver age comic for Marvel), Dave Stevens (creator of **The Rocketeer**), Mike Kaluta (who worked for Warren Publishing and illustrated the definitive **Shadow** series in the seventies), Simon Bisley (best known for his work on DC's **Lobo**) and Kevin Eastman (co-creator of **The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**). Rock star Glenn Danzig (whose Verotik publishing company put out a few Frazetta inspired comics as well as a collection of his pencil sketches) and filmmakers Ralph Bakshi (who collaborated with Frazetta on **Fire And Ice**) and John Milius (who directed **Conan The Barbarian** based on Frazetta's take on the character) are also on hand to lend their expert testimony to his greatness. Even Bo Derek stops by for a comment or two on how Frazetta's work has touched her.

If it all sounds like a lot of gushing and praise, well it is. There's a context to it all but the film literally fawns over its subject to the point of tedium at times, and while this is an interesting movie, it really only has one moment of intrigue where some of the interviewees are asked about the legitimacy of Frazetta's work based on its subject matter – a move which kind of defeats the purpose of the documentary in the first place. Those issues aside though, Laspina's film does a nice job of tracing Frazetta's roots back to his childhood in New York where he almost walked into a major league baseball career, up through his days doing **Lil' Abner** through the paperback and Conan years right up until 2003 where the Frazetta Museum is opened up in Pennsylvania.

The highlight for many of us will be the look back at the time that Frank Frazetta spent working for the notorious E. C. Comics. He worked with Al Williamson on a few of the science fiction stories that E. C. published in magazines like **Weird Science** and his collaborative work with Williamson remains popular among fans and collectors to this day.

So while the feature lacks any real critical analysis or the like (and I honestly can't blame the filmmakers, I'd gush over Frazetta too), it does do a great job of filling the viewer in on Frazetta's origins and giving a nice look at just how widespread his influence has been in the fields of comic and fantasy illustration. Its admiration is sincere and heartfelt, and the interviews, art, and photos used throughout the movie prove to be pretty interesting.

The DVD

Video:

Despite the fact that the packaging states that the film is widescreen on the back of the keepcase, it is in fact a fullframe presentation and this appears to be the film's original aspect ratio as framing looks pretty decent throughout. There is some mild compression noticeable in a couple of spots and some light edge enhancement but it's never severe enough to be distracting. The colors in the paintings and artwork look quite good and for a low budget independently made documentary, the image looks pretty solid on this DVD release.

Sound:

Frazetta – Painting With Fire comes with an English language Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround Sound mix with optional subtitles available in English and Spanish. Dialogue is thankfully clean and clear, and seeing as that's the bulk of this feature's audio mix, that's a good thing indeed. There aren't any major problems with this mix at all. Background music levels are mixed in nicely against the speeches, interviews and testimonials and there aren't any problems with hiss or distortion.

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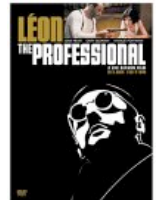
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Extras:

On the first disc there are two extras – a commentary with director Lance Laspina (who is joined by the producer of the film as well), and a behind the scenes documentary. The commentary fills in the blanks on a lot of ideas and thoughts that Laspina wanted to incorporate into the film but due to time and budgetary constraints was unable to. He’s got a wealth of stories to share about how the interviews went with certain people and how things turned out on camera versus how he thought they would turn out during production and this track does make for an interesting aside to the feature itself. The behind the scenes documentary is pretty basic, but it does have some fun footage of behind the camera hi-jinks and some an alternate look at how things moved during the course of production.

The second disc in this set contains a whole bunch of other supplements as well. First up is **Frazetta Drawing A Panther Left Handed**. This is exactly what it sounds like – you get to see the man do his thing, and with his left hand, no less (he’s right handed). There’s also a great **Frazetta Rare Art Gallery**, and a **Photo Montage**, both of which contain a wealth of images from his past as well as a plethora of the man’s artwork from various phases in his career. There are literally hundreds of images in these galleries that run the gamut from pencil sketches to finished oil paintings, and even a few sculpted pieces as well. For a fan of his art, this is a great resource and despite the fact that it takes forever to get through due to the sheer size of the galleries, it is very much worth checking out.

Next up there’s a section entitled **Outtakes And Interesting Stories** and another one that is semi-related that contains a selection of **Deleted Scenes**. Contained in these two sections are some outtakes from the film, a few scenes that didn’t make it into the final cut of the movie for whatever reason, as well as a few longer versions of the interviews that did make it into the movie. Most of these are pretty interesting and worthwhile segments, and I’d have to assume that they weren’t cut for quality purposes but mainly to keep the running time down to the standard hour and a half. There are also a few home movies from Frazetta’s personal collection contained in this section as well, giving further insight into his past and his history and giving this set a bit of a personal touch.

The **Fire And Ice** visual diary details Frazetta’s work on the animated film he co-created with Ralph Bakshi. Sean Hannon, who acted in the film, does some reminiscing about the movie and about working with Frazetta and Bakshi on the project. Rounding out the extra features are biographies for everyone who was interviewed in the feature, and some sketches from Frazetta’s peers that were influenced by his work.









Final Thoughts:

If you’re a Frazetta fan, consider this a mandatory purchase – even if you’re only marginally familiar with his work, there’s still a lot to interest anyone who digs art in general on this set. Despite some abundance of gushing, the documentary is interesting and informative and this two disc DVD set contains a wealth of great extra features. **Frank Frazetta – Painting With Fire** comes highly recommended.

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