

FRAZETTA: PAINTING WITH FIRE

by Daniel Wible

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2002, Un-rated, 96 Minutes, Dark Kingdom



CREDITS

“Frazetta: Painting With Fire” is a lovingly crafted look at the great fantasy artist Frank Frazetta. If you’ve never heard the name, then I’m sure you’ve at least seen any number of his uniquely imaginative and powerful images. They’ve adorned art galleries, covered science fiction novels, inspired movies, etc., etc. Indeed Frazetta’s works, or at least his influence, have burrowed deep into our pop cultural psyche. Yet I’m sure the average person has probably never even heard of the man. I myself had only a working knowledge of Frazetta before seeing this film. Sure, I had heard of him and knew he was an artist. I can even remember having seen many of his most celebrated paintings, though I might not have known they were his at the time. For you see, Frazetta’s works are hard to forget. They explode off the canvas and burn themselves into your brain. Their trippy visions of magical realms and the warriors who rule them are haunting and ever so vivid.

“Frazetta” perfectly captures the spirit of these works and reveals the truly complex artist who gave them life.

Through a deft mix of animation, still shots, and interviews with his adoring contemporaries and friends, “Frazetta” traces the life and career of “one of the 20th century’s greatest artists”. We meet the child prodigy who almost missed his artistic calling because of a lifelong passion for sports. We then meet the struggling young comic book artist, whose work was often criticized as too being “old fashioned.” Next we meet the man, reborn as a painter, coming into his own and breaking all the rules. He learns and masters various styles such as oil painting, pen and ink sketches, watercolors, and sculpture. Finally, the legend is born: Frazetta. His great works begin to flow like an ejaculation of pure creativity: the Death Dealer series, the Conan series, Egyptian Queen, The Silver Warrior, Neanderthal, and the list goes on and on. His name soon becomes synonymous with fantasy art of the highest caliber. Yet, as the film ultimately argues, Frazetta’s complete mastery of form transcends mere genre canoodling and well advances on classical Art. His devoted followers can, and often will, expound for days on the master’s genius for taking virtual “snapshots” of wholly alien worlds.

Beyond just highlighting an amazing career, the film does an exemplary job of humanizing the legend. It turns out that Frazetta, the man, is a bit of an oddity: a loving family man with a fantastically dark imagination. When you see him fawn over his beloved grandchildren, it’s hard to believe this is the same man capable of such nightmarish depictions. The film also paints Frazetta as a true fighter, having survived multiple strokes and thyroid cancer. Like the battle-wearied warriors in his paintings, Frazetta has stared death, as well as madness, in the face many times and continues to walk away a stronger man.

The makers of “Frazetta” obviously have great affection for, and intimate knowledge of, the artist’s oeuvre. Their enthusiasm is infectious. This film teases you with just enough of the “power and drama” that is Frazetta as to leave you begging for more. Lucky for me, I just discovered that the Frazetta Museum (located in East Stroudsburg, PA) is right in my own backyard! If you’ve ever had an interest in fantasy art, or just great art in general, seek out “Frazetta: Painting With Fire”, an illuminating look at an extraordinary new world. Needless to say, for Frazetta devotees, the film is a must.



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