

# MOVIES

## 'Wolf at Door' well-done tribute to Gauguin

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Emerald Contributor

"Wolf at the Door" is the story of the famous French painter, Paul Gauguin, and the struggles he went through for his art. The movie focuses on the stage in his life and career in which he returned from Tahiti with his most famous paintings, only to experience critical and public misunderstanding about his art and his way of life.

### Review ★★★

"Wolf at the Door" is not the first film about a famous painter. In fact, it's not the first film to feature Gauguin as a character. One of the more famous films about an artist is "Lust for Life," made in 1955, starring Kirk Douglas as van Gogh and Anthony Quinn as Gauguin (Quinn won an Academy Award for his performance). In that film, Gauguin is portrayed more as a tormented, violent man who seeks out physical combat as a substitute for more healthy connections with people. He was a cynical man who rejected affection and love and even the friendship of the more sensitive and lonely van Gogh.

In "Wolf at the Door" Gauguin is portrayed more sympathetically. As played by

Donald Sutherland, Gauguin is far less prone to violence than Anthony Quinn's character, and much more reflective.

This is not to say that Sutherland's Gauguin is passive. The film does feature his fight with a sailor and another scene in which Gauguin breaks a government official's glass desk top with his cane. But Sutherland's Gauguin is more sensitive and appealing. In spite of his irresponsibility toward his family and friends, he is seen to be a charming, likeable man who shirks his responsibilities more out of a passion for his art than out of indifference to other people.

Part of the reason why Gauguin is seen more sympathetically is because he is presented through the eyes of a 14-year old admirer, the daughter of his landlord, who also wishes to model for him. The daughter, whose name is Judith (Sofie Graboel), establishes a rapport with Gauguin, although even she cannot completely penetrate his independence and loneliness.

The acting in "Wolf at the Door" is excellent. Sutherland gives one of his best performances as the artist. He is utterly convincing as Gauguin, and conveys the artist's "vision" without resorting to explaining it in words.

The supporting cast members are equally fine. One of the highlights of the film is the appearance of Max von Sydow as August Strindberg. Strindberg



Courtesy Photo

Gauguin, left (Donald Sutherland) and Strindberg (Max von Sydow) develop a curious friendship despite their different artistic temperaments in "Wolf at the Door."

is portrayed as a chauvinist and a misogynist, and yet von Sydow still manages to make him strangely sympathetic.

"Wolf at the Door," directed by Henning Carlsen, and pro-

duced by a Danish film company, is photographed exquisitely. The acting is done with finesse and reveals a respectful understanding and quiet appreciation of Gauguin.

It's a low-key film, with the focus on character. There is nothing momentous about it, but it is perfectly satisfying within the context of its modest aims.

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