



CERTIFIED COPY (COPIE CONFORME)

Spring
Season
2011

Review by David Jenkins, Time Out:

On the evidence of its chic promotional poster and a trailer intercut with wistful platitudes ('He... a writer in search of meaning. She... an art dealer in search of originality'), you'd swear that *Certified Copy* was the result of a ludicrous clerical error saddling Iranian maestro Abbas Kiarostami with the script for a droll coffee-table rom-com while, elsewhere in Europe, a baseball-capped minnow struggled to fashion an abstract visual essay on the nature of the subjective conscious. Of course, that's not entirely the case. But while it's true that Kiarostami appears to have drawn a line under a decade of provocative visual experimentation – resulting in such poetic cinematic workouts as *Five, Ten* and *Shirin* – not long into his latest it becomes clear that this is just as challenging, ambiguous and moving as anything he's made before.

Like those earlier titles, the act of consuming *Certified Copy* requires a willingness to engage in a game of intellectual hide-and-seek. In the past, Kiarostami challenged us to think about off-camera space – what is happening outside the frame that could influence what's on the screen. Here, he offers a decontextualised fragment of a relationship which only begins to make sense if we consider the details outside the story's timeframe. Juliette Binoche stars as a ruffled, slightly manic antique dealer, opposite English opera baritone William Shimell as an arrogant cultural commentator on a brief Italian stopover to deliver a lecture on the value of copies in art. Over the course of a single afternoon, they meet, drive into the Tuscan countryside, go for lunch, wander around a gallery and discuss the nuances of art, love, family and possible discrepancies in Shimell's thesis. When a waitress naturally assumes the pair to be romantically entangled, Kiarostami takes that cue to have his characters mutate into what appears to be a bickering wedded couple. The game is set: is this love or just a copy?

There's a pleasingly self-aware quality to the dialogue in the film, as if Kiarostami is anticipating the inevitable auteurist deconstructions of its meticulous structure and composition. In a telling line, Shimell admits, 'I only wrote the book to convince myself of my own ideas,' as if this rambling tale is organically working itself out as it goes along. Binoche and Shimell are superb: she expressive, impulsive and emotional;



he haughty, dogmatic yet vulnerable. If there's a problem with the film, it's the idea that two people would instinctively choose to immerse themselves in unbroken role play.

It makes the ambiguities ring a little false and dampens the easy naturalism to which the film obviously aspires. But if Kiarostami's fingerprints are occasionally evident on the screen, the pair's off-kilter chemistry and the unquestionable artistry of the filmmaking prevents this from descending into an exercise in cold, technical pyrotechnics. And in true Kiarostami style, the final shot is an absolute doozy.

Emanuel Levy:

The latest work from Abbas Kiarostami, arguably Iran's best known and most accomplished director, is *Certified Copy*, an art-house romantic drama that feels deceptively simple—there are only two characters—but actually boasts a multi-layered narrative with strong philosophical and existential overtones.

Though it's lushly shot in Italy and features two European stars, French actress Juliette Binoche and William Shimell, the British opera singer (here in his feature debut dramatic role), *Certified Copy* bears some of the recurrent thematic concerns of Kiarostami's work over the past four decades. It's a poignant yet playful meditation on the fine line between art and life, artifice and reality, realism and surrealism, original work versus first and second rate copies.

William Shimell makes his screen debut as a serious, a bit stiff academic James Miller. Visiting Arezzo in Tuscany, Miller discusses a new book, lecturing on authenticity and fakery in art. Rather provocatively, he suggests that copies can be just as worthwhile artistically as the original works...

Making his first feature outside his native Iran, Kiarostami returns to narrative filmmaking after a decade of experimental video projects. *Certified Copy* received a lot of publicity as the first European, English-speaking, feature from the Iranian director. Both thematically and visually, the movie evokes Roberto Rossellini's 1953 masterpiece, *Voyage to Italy*, a meditative tale featuring Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders as a married couple trying to reconcile their faltering relationship while driving through Italy.

Offering the rare combination of sensual and cerebral pleasures, *Certified Copy*, which is elegantly shot and precisely framed, could be read as a romantic fable about second chances.