Netflix doc-follows Window cleaner who finds lost Shakespeare portrait worth £200 million

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Press Release. For Immediate Release.

The Stuff of Dreams – available on Netflix UK from March 21st.

Documentary - 57 minutes. Production company - Barkingmad TV.

Producer/Director – Madoc Roberts.

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Window cleaner, Steven Wadlow battles for twelve years against the art establishment to prove he owns a portrait of William Shakespeare, worth two hundred million pounds.

For the last 11 years Steven Wadlow has been trying to prove that the painting which hung above the television for forty years is a genuine portrait of William Shakespeare and that he has made one of the most remarkable art discoveries of all time. Not the traditional portrait of the bard, it shows a man aged 31 with hair and no beard. However, Steven believes he has proof that it is the only portrait painted when Shakespeare was alive.

“One expert has suggested, if it were proven to be Shakespeare, it could be worth anything from 100 to 200 million, which is obviously worth investigating further.”

But Steven didn’t always like the portrait.

“It used to scare me, wherever you are in the house, it's looking at you. It always used to remind me of those portraits on Scooby Doo.”

The portrait underwent extensive scientific analysis at some of the world’s leading art institutions including the Hamilton Kerr Institute and UCL.

Cutting edge technology revealed underdrawings, including a mysterious coat of arms and overpainting that had been added in order to disguise the true identity of the sitter. At each stage Steven feared his painting could be exposed as a fake, or a later copy like so many other portraits of Shakespeare. However, Steven’s painting passed every test.

Steven’s father bought the painting for £900 from art restorers working on the Great Tew estate in the 1960s, Today the estate near Banbury is known for its celebrity residents, including the Beckhams, Simon Cowell, Claudia Winkleman, Prince Harry and Megan Markel.

“What I discovered was that the manor house had once been home to a missing portrait of Shakespeare.”

Art experts believe that this vanished portrait of Shakespeare was used as the model for the earliest engraving of Shakespeare which appeared on the first folio of his plays printed in 1623. Steven’s portrait had many similarities with this missing portrait.

“Like my painting, it was oil on panel and like my painting was painted in 1595. 1595 would be very convenient, because in 1595 Shakespeare was 31. On my portrait is a 31.”

Whilst Steven’s research was going well, there was one big problem, the establishment refused to accept a portrait of Shakespeare with hair and no beard.

“You feel like you're banging your head against a wall or trying to get through closed doors because you're not part of the establishment.”

Steven turned to cutting edge facial recognition technology, which showed that his portrait was closer to the engraving than all the other more famous portraits that claim to be of Shakespeare.

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“I suppose, if I'm being totally honest, it has become a bit of an obsession, the obsession to prove some people wrong. If I'd have known 10 years ago, we'd still be at it now, trying to find answers. Would I have begun all this? Probably not, to be honest.”

On the cold winter mornings when the windows he had to clean were covered in ice Steven sometimes felt like giving up, but one important lesson he has learned during his search, is patience.

“Just when you think you've hit a brick wall, something comes along.”

This time it was a call from Lumiere technology of Paris. Lumiere have handled thousands of the greatest artworks in the world including the Mona Lisa. Lumiere’s multispectral technique revealed a previously undiscovered earlier version of the famous smile.

So, with the portrait under his arm Steven took a fateful trip to Paris. An analysis of the results led the French experts to a startling conclusion. Steven’s portrait depicts Shakespeare as an actor, possibly playing a role in one of his own plays.

“The conformity with the mouth, I am 100% sure this is the same. For me, it really is a portrait of Shakespeare.” Steven was stunned by the expert’s conclusions.

“That was an amazing day. After all these years and all the, is it Shakespeare? Isn't it Shakespeare? And then today we have the company that discovered the under drawings on the Mona Lisa, saying that our painting is Shakespeare. You just can't get better than that.” ----------

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If you would like to interview Steven Wadlow or clips and stills from the film, please contact: madoc@barkingmad.tv

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