

Switch now

From just **£7.99**
a month for the first 3 months

The Perfect Shot

Be a World Cup FIFA-accredited photographer

TIMES ONLINE



Many voters believe the politicians are liars. Is the feeling mutual? **Martin Ivens**

NEWS ELECTION '10 COMMENT BUSINESS MONEY SPORT LIFE TRAVEL DRIVING ARTS ARCHIVE OUR PAPERS SUBSCRIPTIONS

FILM MUSIC STAGE VISUAL ARTS TV & RADIO BOOKS THE TLS GAMES & PUZZLES

Where am I? Home Arts & Entertainment Film **Film Reviews**

From The Sunday Times

April 11, 2010

Boogie Woogie: sex, drugs and overpriced art

A new film offers a sly take on London's gallery scene and you can't help but wonder who inspired its unsavoury characters



(Vertigo Films/Handout)

Rogues' gallery: Amanda Seyfried stars in Boogie Woogie

IMAGE : 1 of 2

Richard Clayton

RECOMMEND? (1)

One of the best gags in the new film Boogie Woogie, a satire on the London art scene at the height of its Noughties boom, comes after the credits. It's the disclaimer: "Any similarity to the name, character or history of any actual person, living or dead, or to any actual event, firms, institutions or other entities, is entirely coincidental and unintentional." A cynical art-world insider would say to that, "As if!" Boogie Woogie is The Devil Wears Prada and Hangs Out at Private Views, but with a lot more sex and naughty bits. A cast including Danny Huston, Stellan Skarsgard, Gillian Anderson, Amanda Seyfried and Heather Graham gallivants through a tale of boob jobs and betrayals, drug-taking, multiple bed-hopping and interludes of lesbian seduction. Amid the sharp business practices, art is an aphrodisiac ("It's so alive!"), though the real turn-on is being able to demand "How much?" This is collecting as a form of conquest. And in the hunt for sexual trophies, the gallerinas who prettify the sales desks are fair game. Those in the know may snigger at the scenario's little details, but the rest of us will be wondering, "Is that what really goes on?"

Manhattan art circles have already played this guessing game. The novel by Danny Moynihan on which Boogie Woogie is based set the story in 1990s New York. Who was the model for Art Spindle, the irrepressible dealer at its centre? Artforum magazine opined that Spindle was "too bourgeois to be Larry [Gagosian]". Artforum was probably only being polite. The dealer Gagosian has elsewhere been described as "a combination of corporate raider, a dark lord, Peggy Guggenheim and a railroad magnate"; in another profile, "a feeding machine".

Spindle propels the plot like a shark on a charm offensive. His target is a canvas by Mondrian, a fictionalised version of one of the painter's Boogie Woogie series, owned by a veteran collector and his wife (played by Christopher Lee and Joanna Lumley). In reality, Gagosian pursued the unfinished Victory Boogie Woogie in the mid-1980s, persuading a wealthy Connecticut couple to sell it to Si Newhouse, the owner of Condé Nast Publications, for \$12m (£7.9m). In 1998, the Dutch government was helped by a bank to buy it for the nation — for \$40m (£26.4m). A Mondrian in a diamond-shaped frame was created for the film with the consent of the artist's estate, but burnt afterwards at their behest.

FEATURES IN A FLASH



Five-second films

TILDA SWINTON



Why her new film was a labour of love

THE BIG QUESTION



Should classic films and shows be remade?

BLOCKBUSTER BUZZ



Times Online

[MY PROFILE](#) | [SHOP](#) | [JOBS](#) | [PROPERTY](#) | [CLASSIFIEDS](#)

TODAY

Tiger Woods is not the only swinger in the...
Richard Dawkins: I will arrest Pope Benedict...
Polish president dies in plane crash after...
Whistleblowers on US 'massacre'...

Our best value offers are online

Join today →

£25 M&S voucher

Believe in better

† Previous Sky* box £49. Further terms apply.

FOCUS ZONE

Mapping Business:

We are backing British business, what is the confidence of the nation and what businesses are succeeding?



Need to Know
[Mapping Business](#)

Visit Las Vegas
[Corsica Travel](#)
[More reports](#)

Online Sudoku with daily prizes



Encounters Dating

We'd love to find you someone special



WEEKLY ARTS EMAIL

Sign up for the best of our Arts coverage



Compare broadband deals

Save on broadband, TV & phone deals



Cinema Tickets

Join Times+ and enjoy free cinema tickets and popcorn



POPULAR SEARCHES ON TIMES ONLINE

[2010 movies](#) | [avatar](#) | [bollywood news](#) |

Now that Moynihan's screenplay has moved the story — paralleling the shift of the art market's centre of gravity — to London, it has gained some local colour. Art was mocked up under Damien Hirst's auspices, to give the film visual authenticity, including a piece by the Chapman brothers and Robert Gordon McHarg III's Him, a waxwork of Charles Saatchi. There is also a genuine Hirst spin painting. The character of Spindle has acquired some local colour, too. He's still a thrusting American (played, with monstrous glee, by Danny Huston), but "those big glasses are a bit of a giveaway", says a British collector who has seen Boogie Woogie.

We get the hint: mega-dealer, trademark big glasses — Jay Jopling, the founder of the White Cube gallery. "Jay's the closest thing in London to one of those oversized American art dealers," the collector adds. "I don't know that he's as Machiavellian as Art Spindle, or as cynical. When a curator comes in with an idea for a show, Art chucks it in the bin; that's not Jay's style. He's got much better manners than that. He'd have the intellectual curiosity to at least look at the thing."

Duncan Ward, the film's director, admits the glasses are "a recognisable physical motif", but counters: "If Jay were to feel that was in some way mirroring him, he'd be wrong." Besides, the team that made the film has ties with the real art world. Ward's wife, the aristocratic curator Mollie Dent-Brocklehurst, helped Gagosian establish his London operation; and, Ward points out, Moynihan and Jopling are close friends. "Our guy, Art Spindle, is a fiction out of which realities can be drawn. [Insiders] looking at him will find fresh evidence at every turn, but they might not necessarily agree on who it is."

Another dealer whose name comes up in the guessing game is Anthony d'Offay, who closed his gallery in 2001 after 36 years. D'Offay had a beady eye for a bargain, and once was compared with "a vampire". His elitist manner — buttressed by serious intellectual credibility — made it feel like a "privilege to buy from him", another art-world source says. Ward just won't spill the beans. "Naming names is unfair, in that Boogie Woogie is a fiction. The only thing that's not fictional is its naturalism. That's the trick of it — you can be quite convinced this is based on real people because the actors are so naturalistic."

Art-world insiders who have seen the film are divided. The society photographer Johnnie Shand Kydd maintains: "When word went round that a film was going to be made, there might have been a few people a wee bit nervous about how they were going to be presented. But then everybody [on screen] is such an amalgamation of different facets of different characters. You can sort of see people being vaguely recognisable, but it's not a documentary, it's a comedy, a romp. You can't say A equals B or C equals D, and that's probably a blessing for a lot of people."

The art adviser Nathalie Hambro found Boogie Woogie's art scene more instantly recognisable. "I had to smile," she says. "The film really describes all the typical characters. In fact, they were hardly disguised for me. It's a kind of kiss-and-tell about ambition, manipulation, huge insecurities, and all done with a sense of humour. It's very well rendered." Hambro, when she first started working in the art world, was shocked by how ruthless and manipulative people were. "Then someone said, 'Nathalie, wake up. It's absolutely normal for people to be so cut-throat.'"

The young artists in the film, Elaine (Jaime Winstone) and Jo (Jack Huston), are as unscrupulous as the dealers, if it will further their careers. Their personalities, Ward says, are "a collage of a number of artists". Certainly, Tracey Emin's tent and Elaine's video piece are cut from similar cloth, and Jo's wonky wooden installations put me in mind of a cheesier Conrad Shawcross. Ward says he was thinking of the work of Carsten Höller, creator of the giant slides at Tate Modern, among others, but "taken down several notches". At any rate, Jo seems to borrow Russell Brand's dress sense. Which brings us to the sex and drugs — particularly the sex.

Ward laughs that Boogie Woogie must be one of the few movie adaptations that have had to tone down the sex in the original. However, he drolly acknowledges the high level of real-life randiness among arty types: "If they were a little fitter, they'd be in the football league." A dealer who has seen it all since the early 1980s says the film "captured everything right" on that score, although he suggests the drug-taking has been cleaned up. Whomever I ask about the, er, conviviality of the art world replies: "Oh, yes, seen plenty." Pressed for specifics, they were always "very, very drunk" and have calmed down since. Shand Kydd, a witness to the YBA years, chuckles: "I think it's safe to say I wouldn't be able to count many artists as friends if I started talking to people about it."

Boogie Woogie opens on April 16

Whip It
Get your 'wheely brilliant' puns here in BB's review...



Clash Of The Titans
The Blockbuster Buzz review



Scott Pilgrim versus The World
Trailer for the teen superhero action comedy drama

CHRIS MORRIS



The most hated man in Britain returns

CEMETERY JUNCTION



Ricky Gervais on film, fame and body image

NANNY MCPHEE'S BACK



Emma Thompson on reprising the role

[chess](#) | [dating](#) | [fashion](#) | [iron man 2](#) | [Michael Jackson](#) | [mortgages](#) | [movie trailers](#) | [music](#) | [podcasts](#) | [proms](#) | [recipes](#) | [savings](#) | [sudoku](#) | [theatre tickets](#) | [tron 2](#) | [university](#) | [guide](#) | [wine](#)

Shortcuts to help you find sections and articles

CLASSIFIEDS

CARS JOBS
PROPERTY TRAVEL

CARS

Stratstone, the No.1 Choice for Luxury Cars.
Europe's largest independent Jaguar Dealer group with 23 locations across the UK. To view our latest New Car Offers and Jaguar Approved Vehicles visit [Stratstone.com](#).

Jaguar XJ 220
1991
£POA
Preston

Car Insurance
The best policy at the best price
[Be Wiser Insurance](#)

Audi RS6 Avant 50t Fsi V10 Quattro 5dr Tip Auto
2008
£56,850
Essex

Search for more cars and bikes

[Place your advert now](#)

Search Ad Reference:

[SEARCH](#)

PRINT EMAIL SHARE

WEEKLY ARTS EMAIL

HAVE YOUR SAY

Would you like to post a comment? Please register or log in

Login [REGISTER](#)

[Terms and conditions](#)



Sign up for the best of our Arts coverage

Ads by Google

VIP trip to Cannes

VIP weekend at Cannes Festival?
Read on you might be going!
www.StellaArtois.com/Cannes

gallery63A

art gallery in kingston upon thames
selling paintings, prints, pottery
www.gallery63a.co.uk

Ricky Gervais Tickets

First 10 Rows + (Great Seats at Half Price) for Wembley Arena!
Double8Tickets.com/020-88-88-88-88

ALSO IN FILM REVIEWS

- The Infidel
- Shelter
- I Know You Know

ALSO IN FILM

- Relative values: Gurinder Chadha and her mother, Balwant
- Rachel Weisz on motherhood, movies and metaphysics
- In sickness and in wealth

Where am I? [Home](#) [Arts & Entertainment](#) [Film](#) **Film Reviews**

[CONTACT US](#) | [BACK TO TOP](#)

[NEWS](#) | [ELECTION '10](#) | [COMMENT](#) | [BUSINESS](#) | [MONEY](#) | [SPORT](#) | [LIFE](#) | [TRAVEL](#) | [DRIVING](#) | [ARTS](#) | [ARCHIVE](#)

Contact our advertising team for advertising and sponsorship in Times Online, The Times and The Sunday Times, or place your advertisement.

Times Online Services: [Dating](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Property Search](#) | [Used Cars](#) | [Holidays](#) | [Births, Marriages, Deaths](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [E-paper](#)
News International associated websites: [Milkround](#) | [Globrix](#)

Copyright 2010 Times Newspapers Ltd.
This service is provided on Times Newspapers' [standard Terms and Conditions](#). Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from Times Online, The Times or The Sunday Times, click [here](#). This website is published by a member of the News International Group. News International Limited, 1 Virginia St, London E98 1XY, is the holding company for the News International group and is registered in England No 81701. VAT number GB 243 8054 69.

ENABLED