

## **“Portrait of a Lady on Fire”**

We are in 17th Century France as Marianne (Naomie Merlant) is being rowed through churning waves to a rocky cove. Once ashore she slowly makes her way to an isolated country manor. She has been retained to paint a portrait. However, it is no ordinary commission. The subject's mother is adamant on one condition - under no circumstances can her daughter Heloise (Adele Haenel) be told she is being painted. Marianne is to pose as a temporary companion and use their encounters as a chance to observe Heloise in order to later paint her. Why must Heloise be kept in the dark? As the story unfolds you will learn the surprising answer.

Commanded by her mother, Heloise has recently returned home from a convent. Deeply unhappy at leaving a life she loved, she is a distant and acerbic soul and it is no easy job for Marianne to gain her confidence. But, as they spend more time together, Marianne learns why Heloise was summoned home and why her mother has commissioned her portrait. It explains how this high spirited young woman has been forced to cede control over her own life. Through multiple conversations Heloise and Marianne are drawn closer to each other and ultimately become lovers. But, unlike a fairytale, they are not destined to live happily ever after.

Some of the things which make “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” such a memorable film are:

The two leads. The director (Celine Sciamma) makes extensive use of close ups. Watching Marianne's and Heloise's as various emotions glide across their faces is masters' class in acting. You don't need words to know what they are feeling;

. The dialogue between the two women as their relationship slowly evolves. Sometime it is so literate and dead on that you wish you could take notes to remember it all;

Years ago film critic Roger Ebert said that watching a film in which you learn how a task is performed is a special cinematic pleasure. He would have loved the

many sequences in this film where we view the detailed process by which an artist transforms a blank canvas into a finished painting;

The cinematography - Some shots are paintings unto themselves;

Marianne's visit to an art show long after she and Heloise have parted. There she sees a painting which breaks her heart. No words are needed to convey her overwhelming sense of loss.

(Amazon Prime)