

# Hugo

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There are so many words that can describe the new film from Oscar winner Martin Scorsese: dazzling and spectacular come to mind. Critics and audiences agree for the most part: the film is stunning, a winner, and “must-see.” And when you figure out what the film is about, you know why the film industry would fall in love with it and will likely lavish it with many, many awards. And I can agree with almost all of that. Almost.

Hugo is a film about pioneer filmmaker Georges Méliès. For a student of film, there is so much to take in. The history, the folklore, the recreation of productions that breathe life into those old reels. And certainly there is no better character study than Méliès (played by Ben Kingsley). A magician, an entrepreneur, a visionary, Méliès made more than 500 films over his career. His most famous short, A Trip to the Moon, depicts a rocket ship landing in the eye of the moon. To say his work was creative is an understatement. This alone makes Hugo mandatory viewing for every film student.

Scorsese, certainly no slouch in filmmaking, creates a true sense of place with textures and colors that are beautiful. He truly depicts what must have been such energy and passion for the new art form that was early cinema. But for those not so interested in film history, perhaps this story is so much “media on media. Do common folk really care to see a reporter talking about how a certain news story was covered by a certain newspaper? So it is the redeeming value of focusing on Méliès that perhaps leaves this film open to criticism.

You will see this film at the Oscars no doubt—and much deserved. The industry loves when one of its own gives homage to its roots with such a spectacular work. But I’ll stopped short of calling Hugo a masterpiece, and while it had many moving moments it didn’t move me deep down (and I wish it had). I know, I know, this is all blasphemy from a guy who runs the film festival in town—and one who makes movies at that! I was inspired somewhat by Méliès’ life and passion for his work, his creativity and drive. It made me want to ramp up on my own productions that have been languishing for lack of time (or as most indie filmmakers will cry about: funds).

You shouldn’t miss the spectacle of color and brilliant cinematography of Hugo on the big screen. But when you’re done, catch some of Méliès’ work as well; you’ll have richer insights into what made this man so passionate about his work.

Review by Tom Sims, Executive Director, Cape May Film Festival