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Remediating Van Gogh: A Study of the Film "Loving Vincent"

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The historical relationship between painting and film is inextricable and ongoing. From the invention of pigment suspended in a medium to the development of perspective and the camera obscura, "traditional" mediums such as painting are continuously evolving. Just as painting's historical trajectory was forever transformed by the nineteenth century invention of photography, and then by film and digital reproductive technologies during the twentieth century, it continued in defiance of continued declarations of its alleged "death," the expanded creative and historical problem field of painting continues to mutate into the twenty-first century. A good example of painting's expanded potential can be found in "Loving Vincent" (2017) - an experimental animated biographical drama film about the life of celebrated Dutch Post-impressionist painter Vincent Van Gogh. With a duration of 1 hour 35 minutes "Loving Vincent" is the world's first fully oil-painted feature film. Produced for the relatively modest sum of 5.5 million dollars, the film took six years to complete and employed a team of 125 internationally recognized painters. Working collaboratively from different locations around the world, the painters adopted and utilized the same painting techniques developed and used by Van Gogh to create each of the film's 66,960 frames, each frame being a purpose-created oil painting on canvas. This paper discusses 'Loving Vincent' with a particular emphasis on the theory of remediation (Bolter and Grusin), the formal logic by which new media technologies refashion and re-contextualize prior media forms, and new "poetic" potentialities in the practice of painting.