

Entertainment & Leisure

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Oscar winner's theory of war, art and everything

By **MATTHEW WILSON**

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THE director of a documentary film on war artists presented by Oscar-winning actor Eddie Redmayne is coming to Henley for a special Q&A screening at the Regal Picturehouse cinema.

Margy Kinmonth is already known to Picturehouse audiences as the director of *Royal Paintbox* — a 2013 exploration of the royal family's relationship with art fronted by Prince Charles.

Royal Paintbox was first shown on ITV, but cinemagoers got to enjoy the uncut version followed by a question and answer session with the filmmakers.

Now *War Art with Eddie Redmayne* is set to follow the same template.

While the date of the screening is still to be confirmed, Maureen Murray of Foxtrot Films says the plan is for *War Art* to feature in the Picturehouse's autumn season.

This follows on from the film's world television premiere in May. *War Art* was also the closing film at the HowTheLightGetsIn festival at Hay-on-Wye, with further screenings planned for Australia, New Zealand and South America.

Closer to home, among the war artists featured in the film are John Nash, who taught at Oxford's Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art from 1924 to 1929, and Stanley Spencer from Cookham, Berkshire.

In 1916 the 25-year-old Spencer was sent to Macedonia with the 68th Field Ambulance unit, later transferring to an infantry regiment.

Spencer spent two and half years on the front line in Macedonia, eventually being invalided out of the army following persistent bouts of malaria.

Travoy's Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing Station at Smol, Macedonia, September 1916 — to give it its full title — was clearly the consequence of Spencer's experience in the medical corps.

The dressing station was an old Greek church which Spencer drew such that, with the animal and human onlookers surrounding it, it would recall depictions of the birth of Christ, but to Spencer the wounded figures on the stretchers spoke of Christ on the cross while the lifesaving work of the surgeons represented the resurrection.

He wrote: "I meant it not as a scene of horror but a scene of redemption."

Paying tribute to the fortitude of the men, he added: "One would have thought that the scene was a sordid one ... but I felt there was grandeur ... all those wounded men were calm and at peace with everything, so the pain seemed a small thing with them."

The film's executive producer Maureen Murray told the *Standard* that *War Art* is in the running for this year's prestigious Rose d'Or Award



Moving: Eddie Redmayne with Stanley Spencer's 1919 painting *Travoy's Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing-Station at Smol, Macedonia, September 1916*. Inset, the cover of the *War Art* DVD

— popularly known as the Golden Rose of Montreux.

She said: "Let's hope Stanley Spencer and all the other artists in the film find themselves honoured on the podium at the awards ceremony to be held in Geneva on December 9."

One participant who is certainly no stranger to award ceremonies is the film's presenter, Eddie Redmayne.

His portrayal of Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything* saw him scoop the Academy Award for best actor, together with a Golden Globe Award, a Screen Actors Guild Award, and a BAFTA.

But in *War Art*, the actor draws on his own background as a history of art student at Trinity College, Cambridge. The camera follows him

as he meets present-day war artists, soldiers and historians and travels to Flanders, where he comes face to face with reminders of the fallen.

Redmayne said: "I have attempted as an actor to play someone from the First World War and of course when prepping you do as much research as you can. You try and imagine what it was like to be living like that, to be on the ground.

"But with that period I have always found it impossible — not photography nor accounts could really ever capture that horror. But for me it was the art and all sides of the art, people trying to depict the undepictable, that perhaps came closest."

War Art director Margy Kinmonth

added: "The war artists were not just observing the conflict — their inventiveness also played a part in helping to fight the enemy.

"My film uncovers the innovation, bravery and creativity of the war artists, showing work never before seen on film, some of which was censored by the authorities that had commissioned it.

"I was interested in the many artefacts, like long-lost sketchbooks, left behind to help us to piece together the picture, 100 years later."

War Art with Eddie Redmayne is out now on DVD, priced £19.99, and is available to buy from the filmmakers' website store.foxtrotfilms.com