

Document Citation

Title	Engima
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1988 Mar 02
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Enigma, Rouch, Jean, 1988

Enigma
(FRENCH-ITALIAN)

Variety, 3/2/88

A KWK Kinowerke/CNRS/INA coproduction. Written and directed by Jean Rouch, Alberto Chiantaretto, Marco di Castri, Daniele Pianciola. Camera (color), Rouch, Di Castri; editor, Françoise Beloux; art direction, Unistudio, Galliano Habitat. Reviewed at the Berlin Film Festival (Forum), Feb. 17, 1988. Running time: **80 MIN.**

Gilbert Gilbert Mazliah
Patron Gianfranco Barberi
Sabina Sabina Sacchi

Also with: Philo Bregstein, Giorgio Bono, Sandro Franchina, Sauro Roma.

Berlin — “Enigma,” a co-effort between Jean Rouch and three young Italo helmers making their feature film bow, fails to bridge satisfactorily the gap between all its heterogeneous elements.

Though filmmakers would no doubt describe its mysterious plot concerning an artist assigned to forge a De Chirico painting as enigmatic, it comes across as simply unreadable, and quite often uninteresting. A hard sell, pic may find some tv viewership with a little luck.

Premise is not without merits: curly-locked French painter Gilbert (Gilbert Mazliah) is invited to live in a fairy tale castle that has been transformed into a private art museum by millionaire collector Sir Richard (Gianfranco Barberi). His assignment is to produce a metaphysical painting of the city of Turin, a work projected by Giorgio De Chirico but never begun.

While Gilbert scours the modern city in search of inspiration (tailed by Sir Richard's beautiful, sphinx-like cohort Sabina Sacchi), he meets a group of kids and joins them on

their outings. Though whole cast has a distinctly non-pro look, Mazliah is good at projecting a quality of childlike curiosity, making his honorary membership in the kids' gang plausible. Best of all, he's a real artist able to make drawings on-camera.

In the empty, echoing halls of the castle, Gilbert plows ahead on a modern painting full of bright colors — more children's art than De Chirico, but the creative process is fun to watch. Outside, he seriously discusses with the band how they can get an old WWI submarine to work and take them to Egypt. They meet other characters including an eccentric philosopher (Philo Bregstein) and a magician (Sandro Franchina) who works in a car factory. The final voyage to Egypt, we are given to understand, is no less real for taking place in the kids' imagination.

Gilbert's final output, meanwhile, is three paintings of metaphysical intent. Their meaning remains as puzzling to the viewer as it is to his philistine patron; the one nice, comprehensible touch is a submarine in the background of one.

It may be a case of too many cooks (and Rouch can't resist throwing in some footage from one of his African ethnographic docs, for good measure), but “Enigma” is enough to send any adult scurrying for the nearest sub to Luxor. Or is it the first metaphysical kidpic?

— Yung.