

# WHAT'S ON IN & AROUND GRAPEVINE

April 2024

pull-out calendars of events

## Dustin Hoffman and Helen Hunt in Lucca

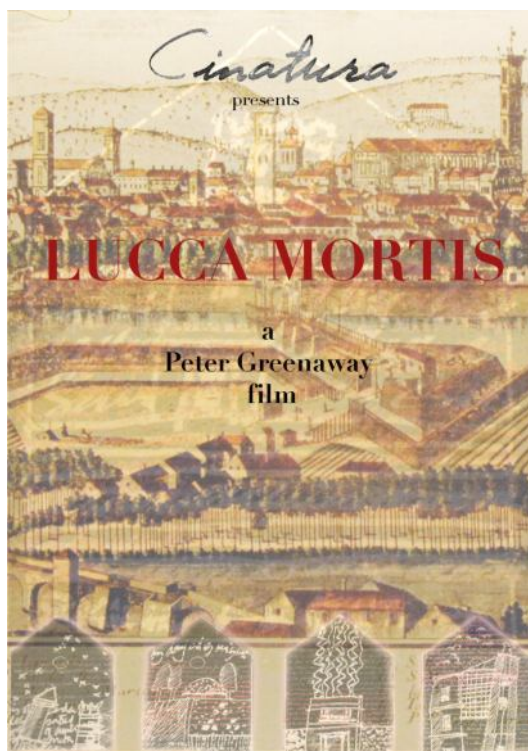
**T**he *Towers* (tentative title), a film now under production, is set in the year 2001, when New York City's Twin Towers crumbled to the ground after the shocking terrorist attack that resulted in retaliatory strikes in the Middle East.

Dustin Hoffman is Jacob, an elderly New York writer who decides to visit Lucca on sabbatical and to learn more about his distant Italian origins. The role of his co-star Helen Hunt is for now a mystery. (There are also a number of well-known Italian actors, Alessandro Gassman for example.) Few details about the plot have been revealed, but we can speculate based on Peter Greenaway's other films. One hint is offered by the title originally proposed for the film (but later rejected): *Lucca Mortis*.

According to the Lucca Film Festival website, *The idea of Lucca Mortis was born in 2013 as an evolution of the architectural cinema installation The Towers / Lucca Hubris, conceived by Greenaway together with dancer and author Roberto Castello, whose choreographies were presented in Piazza San Francesco by the Film Festival.*

In medieval times, Lucca contained many towers (like San Gimignano), but aside from church towers, Torre Guinigi is the only important remaining one. Wealthy families built tower homes (the taller the better) partly to show off their superiority, hence the probable origin of the title *Lucca Hubris*. From this point, it is a short distance conceptually to think of *Lucca Mortis*, especially after the Twin Towers disaster a dozen years earlier.

Lucca is no stranger to film-making and its visual uniqueness renders it an ideal setting for cinema projects. In fact, it hosts an annual film festival, at which Peter Greenaway has been guest of honor. One of the earliest films made in Lucca, *La Provinciale* (1953), starring Gina Lollobrigida, includes an iconic scene of her walking along Via dei Fossi. Another, *Il marchese del Grillo* (1981), starring Alberto Sordi, includes scenes in the gardens and residences of Palazzo Pfanner, while *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), based on the novel by Henry James, filmed by Jane



Campion with actors Nicole Kidman and John Malkovich, has scenes beneath the urban walls and in various elegant Lucca settings.

Many of Lucca's historic sites will be involved in Greenaway's film: from the walls with their bastions and tunnels, to the Guinigi Tower, Palazzo Ducale, Cortile degli Svizzeri, Piazza San Michele, Piazza San Frediano, Via Beccheria, Piazzetta del Libro or Corte del Biancone, Daris Libri in Via del Gallo, Piazza Antelminelli, Via del Battistero, Palazzo Giustiniani in Via Santa Giustina, the Atelier of Ricci Sartoria (tailor's shop), Piazza Anfiteatro, and Piazza San Salvatore.

Since Dustin's arrival earlier last month, the town's residents have been excited. First there was the call for extras. People stood in lines in the rain hoping to be cast for the film. Then came sightings and photo-ops with Dustin Hoffman. These have been reported and shared by many people, on social media and in the newspapers: some at our favorite

restaurants, at a newsstand that sells our magazine (Edicola Cerboncini in Via Santa Croce), with various English-speaking residents in Lucca, and even at my friends' tiny Casa del Bottone shop near Piazza Santa Maria. (Their sewing notions might be useful to Atelier Ricci, who are preparing costumes for the film.) Facebook photos abound, since Dustin Hoffman is an extremely open, friendly person. Finally, though filming has been underway since March 25th (and should be concluded by early May), the disruptions to our quiet small-town life – parking problems, temporary closures, and re-directed traffic – are accepted and seem more amusing than irritating to the local population.

The question remains, what will this film be about? Mortality, human nature, commonalities despite cross-cultural differences? I hope it will bring positive attention to our peaceful town. Surely the visual impact of Lucca's beautiful architecture and its well-preserved uniqueness will be appreciated by audiences worldwide.

– by Norma Jean Bishop

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