



## **BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL**

### **EIFFEL (12A)**

Director: Martin Bourboulon

Starring: Romain Duris, Emma Mackey, Pierre Deladonchamps

France/Belgium/Germany, 2021, 1 hour 48 minutes SUBTITLES

The story of the construction of the Eiffel Tower is inflected here through the character and motivation of the engineer who gave it its name. Gustave Eiffel was already experienced and well-known, his most recent achievement being the metal framework of the Statue of Liberty, given to the United States by France in 1886. His next ambition was to have a part in the design and construction of the Paris Metro. Instead, he accepted the alternative commission of building a tower that would act as the entrance to the 1889 World's Fair that was to take place in Paris. The film places at its centre the issues of Eiffel's motivation for this abrupt change of direction and his success against considerable odds. In consequence, the Tower's story sits alongside a fictionalised romance. Romain Duris plays Gustave Eiffel and Emma Mackey is his childhood sweetheart Adrienne Bourgès, now married and encountered anew.

During the two years of the Eiffel Tower's planning and construction, there were many technical challenges, for example the securing of the foundations in unstable and marshy ground, and the erection of the unusual structure using the new engineering material of steel. In addition, it was publicly deplored for aesthetic reasons during its planning but justified by virtue of its superlative height (at over 300 metres it was to be the tallest construction in the world and indeed remained so until the erection of the Chrysler Building in 1930), commercial profitability, and its demonstration of the extraordinary possibilities of modern engineering.

It has reportedly taken 25 years for the film to make it to the screen from its first conception, with inevitable changes in direction, casting and production. There has even been a delay of four years after the completion of filming before the director, Martin Bourboulon, signed it off. There is an ironic similarity between the film and the Tower itself, at least in terms of evident creative tensions and conflicting ambitions. The modernity that the Tower symbolises is echoed in the film's extensive digital effects that provide powerful scenes of its construction. The film's mixture of familiar Hollywood genres such as the biopic and the fateful romance replicates the fusion of creative and commercial considerations that underpinned the rationale for the Tower itself. In fact, some early reviewers have suggested that *Eiffel* is conceived as a version of *Titanic*, though of necessity without the cataclysmic dénouement to that story of engineering and romance.

Preview courtesy of Vertigo Releasing

Notes compiled by Catherine Neale