

Mille et une productions, About Productions & Tony Arnoux present:



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD

Catherine Deneuve

Rabih Mroué



JE VEUX VOIR **بدي شوف**

a film by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

فيلم لجوانا حاجي توما و خليل جريج

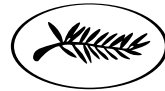


PRODUCERS MILLE ET UNE PRODUCTION: ANNE-CÉCILE BERTHOMEAU, FARÈS LADJIMI, EDOUARD MAURIAT / ABOUT PRODUCTIONS: GEORGES SCHOUCAIR / TONY ARNOUX / IN ASSOCIATION WITH: COFICUP 2- UN FONDS BACKUP FILMS / WITH THE SUPPORT OF: EDMOND ESSEILY, ZIAD ABDELNOUR, ABBAS JABER, BANQUE LIBANO-FRANÇAISE, FONDATION CMA CGM / WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF: CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA CINÉMATOGRAPHIE AND HUBERT BALS FUND / IMAGE: JULIEN HIRSCH / EDITING: ENRICA GATTOLINI / EDITING CONSULTOR: TINA BAZ LEGAL / PRODUCTION COORDINATOR: MARIANNE KATRA / SOUND: GUILLAUME LEBRAZ, SYLVAIN MALLBRANT, EMMANUEL CROZET / MUSIC: SCRAMBLED EGGS, DISCIPLINE / ASSISTANTS: WAEL DEEB, EMILE SLEILATY / SCRIPT: ZEINA SAAB DE MELERO / COSTUME: NADINE FENIANOS / DISTRIBUTION: MADISTRIBUTION / WORLD SELLERS: FILMS BOUTIQUE / STILL PHOTOGRAPHY: PATRICK SWIRC, NADIM ASFAR

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SYNOPSIS

Baddi Chouf

(I want to see)

A film in between documentary and fiction
by **Joana Hadjithomas** and **Khalil Joreige**

Lebanon / France - 2008 - color

Duration: 1h15

After the July 2006 war, we feel helpless.

We no longer know what to write, what stories to recount, what images to show. We ask ourselves: "What can cinema do?"

That question, we decide to translate it into reality with the help of an "icon", an actress who, in our eyes, symbolizes cinema, Catherine Deneuve. She will come to Beirut to meet our preferred actor, Rabih Mroué.

Together, they will drive through the regions devastated by the conflict.

Through their presence, their meeting, we hope to find the beauty which our eyes no longer perceive.

It is the beginning of an unpredictable, unexpected adventure...

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An interview with Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

THE BEGINNING

On July 12, 2006, the day before we were due to leave for Beirut, war broke out in Lebanon, and we were stuck in Paris. For the first time, we were living the war at a distance, as spectators. The war was a real upheaval in our case, a rupture.

We then questioned our ongoing work, the scenario we were writing at the time. We were full of doubts when we met Tony Arnoux who, as in a reverse process, had been stuck in Lebanon by the war. He had come back, intending to do something. He was willing to help us meet a great actress if we wanted to. We immediately thought of Catherine Deneuve. We started writing. Our producers, Mille et une productions and About productions, went along. The project was born from this sense of urgency, from this same concept of cinema. Catherine accepted this project with great generosity, offering us, without any compensation, her participation, her presence in the film. She came over to act in the film with no salary, no insurance for the sake of Lebanon. The project was born from this sense of urgency, from this same concept of cinema.

FACED WITH WAR IMAGES

In the face of a very violent war, of the spectacular images of television, what kind of images could we produce?

What can cinema do in such situations of extreme violence?

Our sadness and pain had to be countered by something in the realm of adventure. Very soon, we found the set up of the film: Introduce fiction by way of a cinema icon, in a situation which seems to admit only a flood of images hastily termed real or documentary images. And through the presence of the icon, ask some questions: What can fiction, what can cinema do? Suggest to Catherine Deneuve, an actress we greatly admire and who, through her choices, represents Cinema, to drive till the border of South Lebanon together with Rabih Mroué, an great artist and actor with whom we often work in collaboration. The idea seemed close to alchemy. In such a context, what would their meeting produce? What 's going to happen?



A FILM, AN ADVENTURE

The preparation of the film was very complex, uncertain. We soon realized that filming in those regions would be difficult. The production had to obtain authorizations from practically everybody: The Lebanese army, UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon), Hezbollah, Israel (through Unifil), the French embassy... Making the film therefore became one of the stakes of the story. It turned into an adventure which we had to capture and which modified the way the filming was conceived: We chose to work in HD and to film nearly constantly. And decided that should anything unexpected happen, we'd welcome it, even prompt it. Catherine and Rabih would play their own parts, just as we'd all do: the directors, the team, the bodyguard, the soldiers we met, the UNIFIL Commander, the French ambassador...

At the outset, the film was to be a short (the shooting with Catherine took six days, plus one more without her...) but while filming, we no longer thought in terms of length, We were totally free on the temporal and rhythm levels since there was no commercial stake. We filmed a lot, and fast. The duration of the film was not integrated at the outset but during the editing.



CATHERINE DENEUVE

She was an evidence. We had a great desire to film her. In his book on Catherine Deneuve, Louis Guichard wrote about her: "No other artist in the world can project so many emotions through a mask of immobility". (...) Palimpseste artist, woman-cinema, Deneuve brings to the screen all that she has been, without burdening it. There lies the real mystery".

Catherine Deneuve is like a screen on which each one of us projects his feelings. She embodies a certain idea of cinema, of a cinema with a history. She also embodies intelligence. You feel she always maintains the right distance. Her film choices reflect a spirit, a trend of thought. She is far more than an icon, she is free. Her freedom, her availability, her openness, we discovered them more and more as we worked with her. She could have feared a possible danger to her image, let alone the physical danger. But she immediately said yes.

Why did she accept this adventure ? Probably because it caught her interest, because she appreciated our work but also, as she declared in many interviews, because she felt like doing something in favor of Lebanon, «deeply moved by this country which constantly attempts to rise and keeps falling back».

RABIH MROUÉ

Rabih, somehow, represents us, the film makers, in the film. He is the actor with whom we mainly work in Lebanon. He is a very important artist and performer who creates a new relation to theatre and representation. We have cooperated for a long time and we share the same esthetic and political interests. Moreover, Rabih is from a village of South Lebanon, Bint El Jbeil, which was almost completely destroyed during the 2006 war. He had not returned there since then, and in his own words, he was weary of going back. The place got heavy media coverage and was visited by many people. Rabih felt dispossessed, as if he was “a tourist in his own country”. We were also interested by his attitude. So we suggested to Rabih to drive to the south with Catherine and go to his village. As he put it: “Things with her will be different.” So there he was on the images, by her side, although he greatly mistrusts images.



THE MEETING

One of the stakes of the film was to see whether the “meeting” between Catherine and Rabih would take place. That meeting really occurred in front of our cameras. We recorded that instant, their embarrassment, and the way they built up a relation little by little.

Usually, in our modus operandi, the actors are not giving the scenario. Catherine and Rabih shared the instant without knowing where they were heading. We filmed them through a set up that enabled us to catch the unforeseen, that allowed them to improvise in the different sites and with the people they met. We were filming in chronological sequence, and witnessed what happened in front of us.

Catherine and Rabih shared together an experience, the discovery of the ruins, of the memory of South Lebanon, of the beauty of its landscapes, the discovery of each other, but also of fear.

It was important that Rabih should not be really fluent in French, which is not his mother tongue, and that he should not resort to English. (we had asked him to do so). The “meeting” became more effective, with things left unsaid, silences, a certain form of invisible and impossible sharing of some experiences. Even though they really sympathized, each one lived personally his own emotions.

Between Catherine and Lebanon, there was a real meeting. She was not there as a humanitarian envoy, she represented herself, not the Western world. She reacted as an individual and did not meet the Lebanese in general, but a few people in particular.

I WANT TO SEE

There are many things to be seen, but what do we see? Not necessarily the expected. We did not want to give our own vision of Beirut, to say “This is Beirut”, but we wanted the viewpoint to be more complex, devoid of bias. Catherine never pretends she knows, she is not affirming anything. She asks questions and Rabih tries, with her, to find answers to them. Catherine herself says: “I don’t know if I’ll understand anything, but I want to see”. In today’s world, it is important to be in a time of questioning. We are never finished with what there is to see, the important is to feel.

“I want to see” recalls the “You saw nothing in Hiroshima” in the film of Alain Resnais “Hiroshima mon amour”, as a kind of respectful tribute, an echo from one period to another, a same questioning about representation.

In the film, there is a sharing of the vision. As filmmakers, we ask Catherine and Rabih to help us see anew. Rabih needs Catherine’s vision, and she needs his. They are delegations, translations of visions which keep fabricated emotion at a distance and take the required time to allow emotion to rise, to take into account the complex situations, to relate to the other. In our cinema, the other, the viewer, is at work and contributes with us to a sharing of sensibility.



THE RUINS

The ruins are one of the starting points of our work. How to accept the ruins, live with their ghosts? We spent years filming the ruins of the civil war, wondering how to live with the problem, how to set them out without turning them into an esthetic viewing, without being fascinated by them. And once again, in 2006, we were faced with new ruins, new devastated sites, and permanent and latent tensions arising from the thousands of cluster bombs scattered in the landscapes of the south.

Filming Catherine Deneuve in the middle of the ruins was a risky proposal. But we were interested by this type of experience. We had to avoid exploiting one or the other, to remain at the right distance from each, to try and find a new way of seeing, of showing.



THE BORDER

On the Lebanese side of the border with Israel, there is a small road which is closed. Some time before we began filming, our request had been rejected: It was out of the question to walk along it or even to photograph it using a tripod. The more we thought about it, the more we wanted to use it in the film. Could the presence of Catherine Deneuve help us obtain temporary access to that road, just for the time required to film one scene? Can cinema get a road open?

Walking along that road was certainly highly symbolic. But we need symbols, and even more “possibles”, small victories. Suddenly, in a highly militarized environment, such a thing becomes possible. The road turns into a parallel territory which transcends nationalities, in the words of Godard: “one more country, one more continent”, that of art and cinema.

DOCUMENTARY OR FICTION?

It is very difficult, in this film, to make out the distinction. We say it's a film in between documentary and fiction. We had a very good knowledge of the sites, and we had personally been through most of the adventures of Catherine and Rabih in the film, and inserted them in the scenario.

The film's scenario is very close to the end product. However, all that happens belongs to the category of the documentary adventure. The actors didn't really know what was going to happen, where they were going. They were placed in situations we had personally been through, but there were accidents, unexpected occurrences, which we integrated into the film. In our work as visual artists and film makers, we often resort to this set up: Wait for something to happen, for a reality to appear suddenly in the shot, accept to be overcome by it... We had that and even more during the filming.

We can say that we truly lived a cinematographic adventure.

CATHERINE DENEUVE'S SMILE

At the end of the film, Catherine returns to some kind of reality: a gala dinner, a fashionable environment where she is the center of attention. We decided to film her in an already programmed gala, pretending she had come to attend it. Obviously, it was a mere pretext, but we believed it would be interesting to confront two realities so distant in fact, that of the adventure in the South and that of the gala where one can feel that Catherine is absent, it's clear that she's looking for someone, her eyes are shifting constantly. When her eyes meet those of Rabih, she smiles at last. Is it because she's inviting him to join her? Is she already back into her own world, the film being just a parenthesis? Her smile can be interpreted in so many ways! This smile reveals an astonishingly free and complex woman. What about Rabih, will he join her? When he drives off into the night at the very end of the film, is he alone in the car? Is Catherine by his side? It's open to interpretation.

It was important for us to end on this image. In Beirut, we like to drive by night, with the car windows open, music playing, to recover a certain freedom and reassert our desire to live. I want to see expresses the end of a certain carefree life, but also the hope that there is still life, a process of renewal that echoes the human cycle of destruction/reconstruction; and we wanted the film to express this movement. We are in need of fiction, dreams and beauty.

Interview by Claire Vassé



LIST OF CREW

Actors: Catherine Deneuve ; Rabih Mroué

Directors: Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige

Image: Julien Hirsch-

Sound: Guillaume Le Braz - Sylvain Malbrant – Emmanuel Croset

Editing: Enrica Gatolini , Editing consultant: Tina Baz Legal

Production coordinator: Marianne Katra

Assistants directors: Wael Deeb (first), Emile Sleilaty (second)

Script: Zeina Saab de Melero

Make up: Mina Matsumura

Hairdresser: Jean-Jacques Puchu-Lapeyrade

Costume dresser: Nadine Fenianos

Still Photo: Patrick Swirc, Nadim Asfar

Music: Scrambled Eggs – Joseph Ghosn /Discipline

Produced by: Edouard Mauriat, Anne-Cécile Berthomeau, Farès Ladjimi
(Mille et une productions - France)
Georges Schoucair
(About productions – Lebanon)
Tony Arnoux

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THE DIRECTORS

Born in 1969 in Beirut, they work together as visual artists and filmmakers. They have written and directed short films as “**Ramad**” (Ashes) in 2003 and “**Open the Door**” in 2006 as well as two fiction features, in 1999, “**Al Bayt el zaher**” (Around the pink house), then, in 2006 “**A Perfect Day**” which was enthusiastically received.

They also make documentaries, such as “**Khiam**” in 2000, and “**El film el mafkoud**” (The lost film) in 2003 and “**Khiam 2000-2007**” in 2008.

Their films have been shown in many festivals and have gathered numerous awards, but are also screened in art centers, museums and galleries.

Furthermore, they have created several photo and video installations. They teach at the University of Lebanon and contribute to several publications.

