WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA AND WILD BUNCH
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FESTIVAL DE CANNES
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MARION COTILLARD

MELVIL POUPAUD

Brother and Sister

A FILM BY
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Synopsis

A brother and a sister in their early fifties… Alice is an actress; Louis was a teacher and poet. Alice has hated her brother for more than twenty years. They haven't seen each other in all that time – if by chance Louis ran into the sister, she'd ignore him and run away… But following the sudden death of their parents, brother and sister will be forced to see each other again.

Interview with Arnaud Desplechin

by Anne-Claire Cieutat

Can we imagine that the members of the Vuillard family, who are at the heart of your filmography, continue to love and hate each other behind your back and in new guises?
Indeed, I think the Vuillards live independently. This time, they knocked on my door with a very theoretical question: when is there an end to hate – this other face of love? How can hate be made to dry up? But as much as *A Christmas Tale* was built around digressions, *Brother and Sister* was to contain none, but to tend towards a single target: the end of hatred.

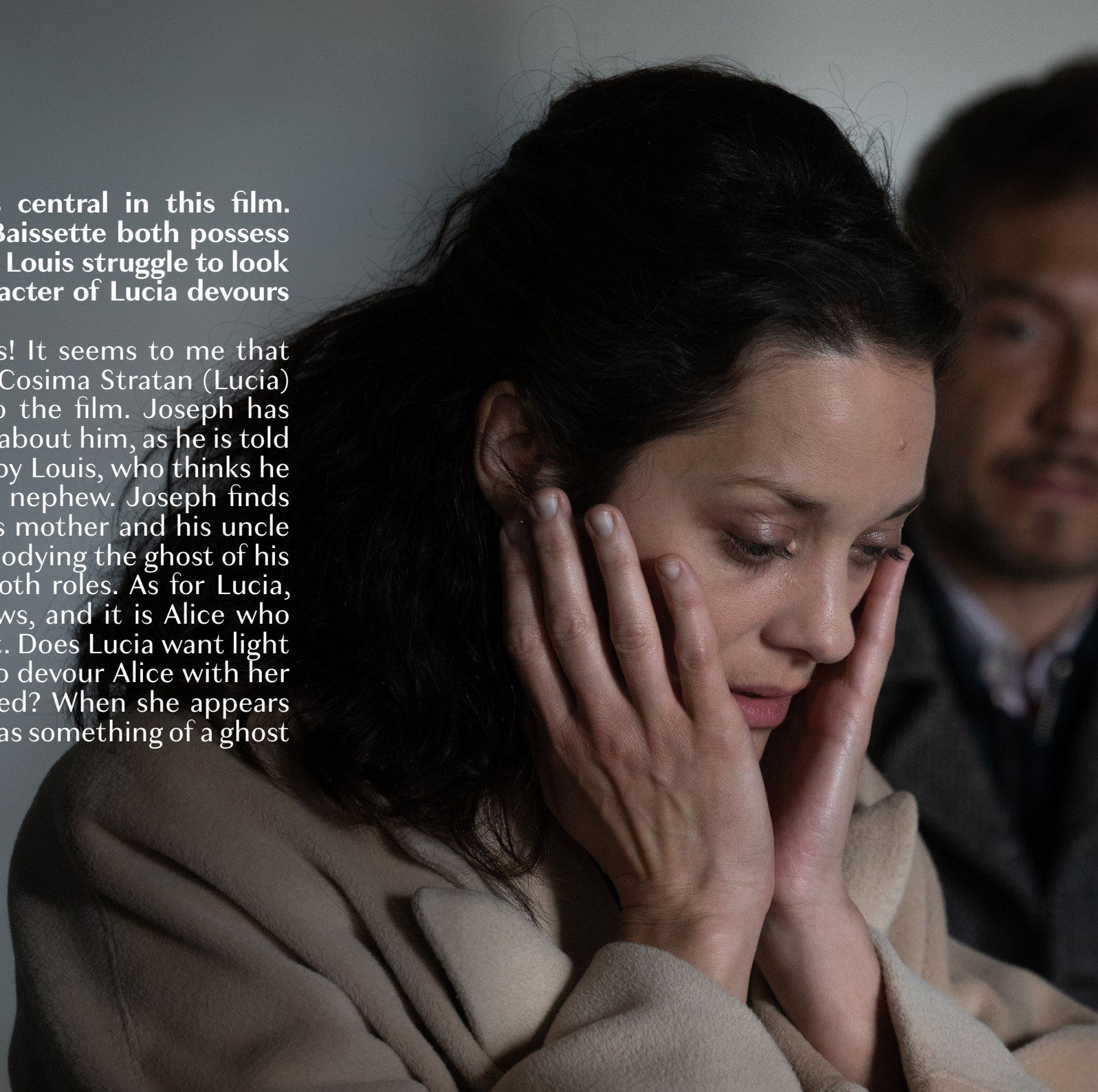
Alice's hatred for her brother Louis is so intense that she summons up archaic figures such as Eteocles and Polynices or Cain and Abel. This connects the most intimate and raw life to a universal bedrock
I have a big flaw: as soon as I touch everyday life, I can't help but turn it into myth. And a modest quality: as soon as I touch myth, I can't help but turn it into everyday life! My concern with this story, for me who was born a Catholic, was to find a way out of hatred that wasn't Christian. How to find in terms of cinema something that wouldn't be vapid. I tried to find two answers: the sequence at the synagogue. And the meeting at the supermarket, the tuchē*, when suddenly, Alice suddenly stumbles on Louis. Alice is a prisoner of hatred, as Louis is prisoner of the position he occupies as the object of this hatred, and suddenly, one falls on the other as you might stumble on a pebble, and this brings them back to life. This encounter, this tuchê, offered me, cinematographically speaking, an exit from hatred. Hatred is always a waste of time.

**For Lacan, tuchē describes the moment of the 'encounter with the 'Real', the 'trauma' that functions as the cause of a given sequence.*

This emotionally powerful sequence takes place in a context that couldn't be more trivial: in the supermarket fresh goods section!
I was thinking of two dogs meeting on a neon-lit plastic surface at one in the morning. Suddenly heads collide in this complete trivial setting, eyes finally open. And in an instant, the Other exists. The existence of the person facing us becomes evident, regardless of whether we loved or hated him. So, we put the items back in the shopping bag and we continue: nothing has happened, and everything has happened. This illumination enchanted me. It was a very strong scene to shoot, and we were all waiting anxiously and impatiently.

The theme of the gaze is central in this film. Marion Cotillard and Max Baissette both possess spectacular gazes. Alice and Louis struggle to look at each other. And the character of Lucia devours Alice with her eyes.

It's partly a film about gazes! It seems to me that Max Baissette (Joseph) and Cosima Stratan (Lucia) bring a poetic dimension to the film. Joseph has something of Marley's ghost about him, as he is told at the beginning of the film by Louis, who thinks he sees his deceased son in his nephew. Joseph finds himself crushed between his mother and his uncle and suddenly, here he is embodying the ghost of his cousin and having to play both roles. As for Lucia, the fan, she is in the shadows, and it is Alice who brings her back into the light. Does Lucia want light or shadow? Does she want to devour Alice with her eyes or to herself be devoured? When she appears leaving the theatre, she too has something of a ghost about her.



After Abel and Junon in A *Christmas Tale*, the parents here are named Abel and Marie-Louise – the latter couldn't be more widespread and French.
I had warned Nicolette Picheral, who plays Marie-Louise and whose face I find very beautiful, that she would be more a photographer's or an artist's model, rather than a character, since I was going to film her only in a coma. She doesn't appear as a mythological figure and couldn't be called Juno. She is on the side of the body, and that's all she has left, being on respiratory support. A mass of trivial questions accompanies her: is she breathing? Will she die? I had in mind for this powerful moment the hospitalisation of Jean Douchet. I saw in him such nobility, such humour in the face of his hospitalisation, it enriched me. This mother who Louis hated, how to reconcile with her without making amends? Magic plays a part, in the scene where Louis flies away. But Marie-Louise, yes, you couldn't find a more French name. And in the name of she who didn't love her son, we hear 'Louis'. Louis is called by his mother's name. Abel is more mythological! To think I gave King Lear to Joël Cudennec to read! He is magnificent as the father, both tender and authoritarian.

Bodies in this film slip away, fall, are threatened with disintegration.
That's cinema, isn't it? Actors incarnate. The violence of feelings and events that runs through the film overflows, and it must go through the bodies. I am overwhelmed when actors offer me everything. Especially when Alice and Louis start to cry. It reminds me of the beautiful title of Stanley Cavell's book, *Contesting Tears*. Suddenly the body speaks, fluids are exuded and the characters, like the actress/actor themselves, are laid bare.

At the heart of *Brother and Sister* there's a mystery: Alice's hatred for Louis. You plant clues here and there as to why but without ever imposing an interpretation.
When they meet in the brasserie, Faunia (Golshifteh Farahani) asks Louis why Alice hates him. Louis replies that it wouldn't be very moral to answer this question; he's the object of Alice's hatred and that's enough for him. *Brother and Sister* belongs to the familial genre of film, intimate, but I kept moving the question to place the film in a broader spectrum. Why do you hate someone? Why? There are never any satisfying answers. Like Louis, I think that asking the question 'why?' is immoral. There is no reason to hate someone beyond oneself. Alice is a prisoner of that. Her father tells her she is in a prison and must get out. Alice has lost the thread of this hatred. Of course, the film sows clues! Alice never ceases to assess her life with Lucia. And there will be no final word to that. The hatred must simply stop. They must stop playing the game of hate. I could put it the other way round: Alice and Louis must start to play at last! Their parents are dying, and Alice and Louis find themselves in their parents' bedroom… Louis goes naked into the bed where his sister is lying, at last they are eight or nine years old. Here, finally, they laugh.

Alice has chosen to be an actor, a performer. Why did you choose this profession for her, and for Louis to be a poet, an author?
In the bar scene, Alice proposes to be Louis' voice by reading his texts, and boorishly he refuses. The argument between brother and sister takes place in this moment in their history together. Alice offers him something, and Louis doesn't even notice that he has wounded her so deeply that it will not heal. I didn't want Louis to be a novelist. I was more interested in him being a poet. I knew that I would use a fragment of Peter Grizzi's poem, *Some Values of Landscape and Weather*. It guided me toward this occupation. I love talking about professions I don't know. How does a poet live? No one knows! Louis makes a living by renovating houses in the country and lives off his friend, Zwy. He also gives one-to-one tuition. I wanted him to be a little on the edge of society. Alice is a famous actress. Unlike Louis, she lives in the real world.

What play is Alice appearing in on stage?
The Dead, an adaptation of John Huston's film, of which I'm an absolute fan, and which is itself an adaptation of a James Joyce's short story. I couldn't help making the connection between the title, *The Dead*, and little deceased Jacob, which adds to the irremediable nature of the dispute. I found this finale very beautiful, with snow falling, lending a fairy tale aspect to the spectacle.

Snow, which we find in its natural form in a sequence where Louis is walking in the street. The film contains a great number of rhymes and counterpoints. How did you work with Julie Peyr when writing the script, on the tight interweaving of present and past in this story where the course of time seems frozen?

Julie Peyr and I constructed the screenplay around games of patterns, layers. Inventing these games of echoes, and weaving them from one scene to the other, was a lengthy process. To find the edge of each scene took time. In the middle of writing it, we wrote the adaptation for *Deception*.

The value of tears in *Deception* is a lesson I learned for *Brother and Sister*, by the way.

Louis and Alice have loved each other, but indeed, something froze. It wasn't a question of explaining it, but getting rid of it, in order to come back to life, to open up, to leave. There's no need to seek the genealogy of hatred, you'd drown in it. The film had to move forward like an arrow, but at the same time, this past never ceases to haunt them. Julie and I felt that these flashbacks should be brief. These scenes from the past leap back into their memories. They are beset by memories and don't know what to make of them.

Louis deplores Alice's "frightening taste for holiness". Her "love of goodness" terrifies him, he says.
Well, Alice screwed up with her nephew, that's for sure. She pays the price when she opens her mother's locket. But apart from that, she has always wanted to be on the side of good. Louis, on the other hand, doesn't care about good and evil. As Naïla Guiguet said – she was our eyes throughout the writing – we want to see Alice behaving like a badass. Hence the scene in the brasserie where she throws her chair. At the end, on the roof with Louis, she's mocking and harsh. She had to stop behaving like a saint. Being yourself is already a lot of work! To be on the side of good, that seems very dangerous to me!

Louis possesses, with his slender build, his taste for opium and alcohol, his ethereal presence, has something of the *poète ascensionnel*. The film plays this way, in its geography, between top and bottom, the cave and the flight sequences echoing each other.
Louis possesses a combination of aggressivity and extreme sweetness, which comes from Melvil Poupaud himself, who I find incredibly charming. Louis has an excessive side, whereas Alice is all about moderation. She needs to learn excess. I thought it was romantic. After little Jacob's death, Louis and Faunia run away to an isolated part of the Pyrenees – the location we shot in is spectacular. They can't recover from the loss of their son and have found the place where not to bury him. It is this house that Louis' nephew misses. I liked that Louis' declaration of love to Faunia takes place in a mythological place like a cave where the first human markings were made. So, there is in the film this mixture of violence and sweetness that allows his soul to fly away.

On different levels, and this scene contributes to it, *Brother and Sister* is traversed by archaic forces.
I love this cave scene. As I was saying, there are myths nestled in the recesses of the film. They are like small tools here and there, allowing us to repair life, create openings.

The word "fear" often comes into play in the dialogue.
Before shooting, I like to read the dialogue with all the actors, separately. With Marion Cotillard, after corresponding, and seeing each other, we did a reading. Marion asked me whether Alice hated her brother or not. I told her I didn't know! It was for her to find the answer, or for the both of us, together... When we read the script, we noticed the word "hate" came up too often. Yet, it wasn't what I meant. Of course, hate is another face of love, an awkward face. We kept the word in some places, especially when Alice says to Louis:" I think I hate you." But the truth is that Alice doesn't know how to hate. So, in the end, the word that stayed was "fear". A fine word! Louis and Alice are terrified by their feelings, not by what happens to their parents, not by life's brutality. I thought this fear was more interesting, because it's so much more human than the motif of hate. This is how Marion and I created the film together.

Through the presence of the character of Lucia, who is Romanian, of Golshifteh Farahani, who is Iranian, and of Africa in the epilogue, *Brother and Sister* is a film with open borders, which places it, again, in a much broader perspective than the strict question of family.

It's difficult for me to talk about it, but Jean Hatzfeld's books made a big impression on me... I didn't stop thinking about how I was going to open up this story of a Caucasian family, in Northern France, to the world. I thought about the mother of a friend, an Iranian Jew... Cosima Stratan brings Romania and its cinema. Salif Cissé who plays the pharmacist, brings recent memories of *All Hands on Deck!* Patrick Timsit brings a filmmaking so different to my own! And the film ends in Benin...

I wanted to flee, and this was strategic of me. Were we going to stay locked in a family huis clos like in *A Christmas Tale* or were we going to get out of it? In this case I really felt like going somewhere else. At the end, Alice goes to Africa, towards her childhood, since she evokes the books she read as a young girl about The Kingdom of Abomey. In addition, Benin is marked by the figure of Behanzin, the first king who managed to defeat the French army with the help of the Amazons. I really liked that story.

The accident that befalls Abel and Marie-Louise, whom Louis describes as heroes, has to do with fate. How did you write and film this terrifying sequence?

The extreme violence of this accident summons Alice and Louis to themselves... At the beginning of the film, when Louis

stumbles upon a poster of the play Alice appears in, Zwy tells him "You're up against it, my friend". Both Louis and Alice are.
I lived through this utterly terrifying scene myself, fortunately without the truck, on a road in the South-West, where a young woman went off the road in front of me. She got out of it, unlike in the film. Since I'd lived the scene, it was easy to shoot! Fidèle, their brother, is touched by his parents' heroism. Suddenly he needed to see his parents as bigger than himself. At the same time, when we see their apartment, we can see it is modest. But there is a need for mythology in children.

We understand that the apartment is in Roubaix.
Yes, but this time I didn't shoot in a house! Abel, being a sale representative, couldn't afford to live anywhere else. This is my second film shot in an apartment, which reminded me of the one where Nora's father lived in *Kings and Queen*. And a small apartment too, so we had to get out! At the same time, in this modern place, the layers of the past have accumulated. We can find old things, layers of memories put away in boxes at the end of the film, as in my documentary, *L'Aimée*, allowing them to move on.

How did you choose your actors?
Since *Brother and Sister* is a long-term film, I got into the habit of not writing for actors. It would limit my imagination. When I put my pen down, I knew the part of Louis was for Melvil Poupaud. I'm so impressed by his maturity. I was looking forward to seeing him in a part rich in despair. I simply thought,

it's about time! We met, and he mentioned Jack Nicholson in *Five Easy Pieces*, how could we not get on? Marion? Marion… I made this film for Alice, in order to free her and I knew Marion would know how to free her with me. If there is an actress we cannot judge, whom we love unconditionally, it is Marion Cotillard! She's self-evident and I can't explain why. I love her unconditionally. Marion's face, it's like a map guiding us, but a map of what? Of childhood, its terrors, of wonder, or a sadness I don't know how to probe. In telling the story of this Caucasian Christian family, I wanted the film to be open. After *Paterson* by Jim Jarmush, where Golshifteh Farahani plays a child-like woman, I wanted to see her in the role of a woman. Zwy is Louis' best friend, and Jewish. In this film he has no digressions or disguises. Patrick Timzit arrived, like a foreign body to my cinema, we simply recognised each other. To play Fidèle, crushed by both his brother and his sister, it was difficult to find an actor who could manage to exist between these two monsters. Siksou achieved it with great charm. Cosmina Stratan as the Romanian fan was obvious to me. Come on, *Beyond the Hills!* Max Baissette is wonderful. He's older than his character, but looks very young. He had Joseph's childhood and his maturity. Max's singularity enchanted me just as much as Louis flying away!

***Brother and Sister* mixes violence and sweetness, sometimes within the same scene. How did you work with your actors to achieve such subtle variations?**

I am against rehearsals in cinema. We read the texts to amend them. On set, Melvil respected the text down to the last comma. Marion and I dared to question the text still, before starting each shot. Every evening I tried to refresh it a bit, to surprise the actors.

I was overwhelmed, totally shaken, by what Marion and Melvil offered me. We were transported by Melvil's fallen prince, and by Marion, for whom nothing is impossible and who makes light of every obstacle.

You reunited with cinematographer Irina Lubtchansky. How did you work together on the contrasts and colours of the film, which begins with shadow and mourning and ends under the radiant ochre of Benin, echoing the red bricks of Roubaix?

These colours respond to each other. We were evoking the games of gazes between who is looking and who is seen in the film. Alice devours Lucia with her eyes, and vice versa. During the grading, Irina and I wanted to give the feeling that Lucia is struck with light when Alice leaves her, as Louis is in the shade when Zwy is luminous. Irina managed it masterfully.

How did you work on the cinematographic grammar: camera movements, the sequence-shot in the theatre, the intense close-ups of the actors' faces?
It's wonderful to invent things with Irina. Melvil Poupaud plays with his whole body in space. He has a slim figure à la Cary Grant and yet plays a tragic role à la Jack Nicholson, and that was easy for Irina. As for the close-ups you mention, during the grading I never stopped telling her that she absolutely got on well with Marion Cotillard, I'm thinking of the last shot of the film!

***Brother and Sister* ends thus:" I am alive". Cinema and life at last reconciled at the present tense?**
Well, yes. For me the function of a spectacle is that life wins over death, youth over old age, that we decipher the motifs, that we manage to mend the fabric. Yet, Alice says this last line in tears... Louis starts the film in exile in the Pyrenees, Alice ends it in exile in Benin.
And she concludes with: "I am alive!". You could also hear: "Let's hope I'm alive!" The function of cinema is to sweep away scepticism. Yes, we are alive, imperfect and wonderful. I love the ending of Billy Wilders' *Some Like It Hot* so much: "Nobody's perfect." Evidently the world is heading for disaster, we don't stop dissembling and not getting along, and yet, we must move toward life.

Your title is simplicity itself.
The film says the contrary to what the characters express. “I’m no longer your sister”, “I’m no longer your brother”. Yes, you are brother and sister. The title runs as straight as the story. Alice and Louis don’t want to live with this idea and yet, in the end, they live with it. As simple as that.

Arnaud Desplechin

DIRECTOR

FILMOGRAPHY

2022 BROTHER AND SISTER
EN THERAPIE Season 2
2021 DECEPTION
2020 ANGELS IN AMERICA (theatre)
2019 OH MERCY!
2017 ISMAEL'S GHOSTS
2015 MY GOLDEN DAYS
Jacques Prévert Award for Best Screenplay
Lumière Award for Best Director
César Award for Best Director
2014 LA FORÊT (Arte Film)
2012 JIMMY P.
2008 A CHRISTMAS TALE
César Award for Best Supporting Actor – Jean-Paul Roussillon
2007 L'AIMÉE (documentary)
Award for Best Documentary – Venice FF
2004 KINGS AND QUEEN
César Award for Best Actor – Mathieu Amalric
Louis Delluc Award
2003 LEO UNPLUGGED
2000 ESTHER KAHN
1996 MY SEX LIFE... OR HOW I GOT INTO AN ARGUMENT
1992 THE SENTINEL
César Award for Best Young Actor – Emmanuel Salinger
1991 LA VIE DES MORTS (short)
Angers Film Festival Procirep Award
Jean Vigo Award

Marion Cotillard

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2022 BROTHER AND SISTER by Arnaud Desplechin
2021 ANNETTE by Léos Carax
2019 NOUS FINIRONS ENSEMBLE by Guilllaume Canet
2018 ANGEL FACE by Vanessa Filho
2017 ISMAEL'S GHOSTS by Arnaud Desplechin
2016 ROCK'N ROLL by Guillaume Canet
ALLIED by Robert Zemeckis
FROM THE LAND OF THE MOON by Nicole Garcia
IT'S ONLY THE END OF THE WORLD by Xavier Dolan
ASSASSIN'S CREED by Justin Kurzel
2015 MACBETH by Justin Kurzel
2014 TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
European Film Award for Best Actor
2013 THE IMMIGRANT by James Gray
BLOOD TIES by Guillaume Canet
2012 THE DARK KNIGHT RISES by Christopher Nolan
RUST AND BONE by Jacques Audiard
CinEuphoria Award for Best Actress
2011 MIDNIGHT IN PARIS by Woody Allen
2010 LITTLE WHITE LIES by Guillaume Canet
2009 INCEPTION by Christopher Nolan
NINE by Rob Marshall
2008 PUBLIC ENEMIES by Michael Mann
2007 LA VIE EN ROSE by Olivier Dahan
Oscar for Best Actress
César Award for Best Actress
Golden Globe Award for Best Performance by an Actress
A GOOD YEAR by Ridley Scott
DIKKENEK by Olivier Van Hoffstadt
2005 MARY by Abel Ferrara
CAVALCADE by Steve Suissa
2004 A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT by Jean-Pierre Jeunet
César Award for Best Supporting Actress
2003 BIG FISH by Tim Burton
LOVE ME IF YOU DARE by Yann Samuell
TAXI 3 by Gérard Crawczyk
PRETTY THINGS by Gilles Paquet-Brenner
2001 TAXI 2 by Gérard Crawczyk
2000 BLUE AWAY TO AMERICA by Sarah Lévy
1999 TAXI by Gérard Pirès
1998 THE GREEN PLANET by Coline Serreau
1996 MY SEX LIFE… OR HOW I GOT INTO AN ARGUMENT by Arnaud Desplechin

Melvil Poupaud

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2022 BROTHER AND SISTER by Arnaud Desplechin
15 WAYS TO KILL YOUR NEIGHBOUR by Santiago Mitre
2021 UFOs Season 2 by Antony Cordier
2020 THE YOUNG LOVERS by Carine Tardieu
2019 UFOs Season 1 by Antony Cordier
SUMMER OF 85 by François Ozon
AN OFFICER AND A SPY by Roman Polanski
GOLDEN YOUTH by Eva Ionesco
2018 BY THE GRACE OF GOD by François Ozon
WHEN MARGAUX MEETS MARGAUX by Sophie Fillières
2017 THE LADY IN THE PORTRAIT by Charles de Meaux
2016 IN BED WITH VICTORIA by Justine Triet
2015 MAD LOVE by Philippe Ramos
LE GRAND JEU by Nicolas Pariser
FACE DOWN by Kamen Kalev
BY THE SEA by Angelina Jolie
2014 FIDELIO: ALICE'S JOURNEY by Lucie Borleteau
2012 LAURENCE ANYWAYS by Xavier Dolan
2010 THE EDGE by Géraldine Bajard
THE COUNTERFEITERS (TV Movie) by Benoît Jacquot
BLACK HEAVEN by Gilles Marchand
2009 HIDEAWAY by François Ozon
2008 A CHRISTMAS TALE by Arnaud Desplechin
2007 TOWARDS ZERO by Pascal Thomas
UN HOMME PERDU by Danielle Arbid
2005 TIME TO LEAVE by François Ozon
2003 FEELINGS by Noémie Lvovsky
2000 COMBAT D'AMOUR EN SONGE by Raoul Ruiz
TIME REGAINED by Raoul Ruiz
1997 GENEALOGIES OF A CRIME by Raoul Ruiz
1996 A SUMMER'S TALE by Eric Rohmer

Golshifteh Farahani

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2022 BROTHER AND SISTER by Arnaud Desplechin
UNE COMEDIE ROMANTIQUE by Thibault Segouin
2019 ARAB BLUES by Manele Labidi
BLIND SPOT by Patrick-Mario Bernard and Pierre Trividic
2018 THE NIGHT EATS THE WORLD by Dominique Rocher
GIRLS OF THE SUN by Eva Husson
2017 SHELTER by Eran Riklis
CHRISTMAS & CO. by Alain Chabat
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: SALAZAR'S REVENGE by Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg
2016 PATERSON by Jim Jarmush
SOPHIE'S MISFORTUNES by Christophe Honoré
GO HOME by Jihane Chouaib
2015 TWO FRIENDS by Louis Garrel
2014 EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS by Ridley Scott
EDEN by Mia Hansen-Løve
2013 MY SWEET PEPPER LAND by Hiner Saleem
2012 JUST LIKE A WOMAN by Rachid Bouchareb
THE PATIENCE STONE by Atiq Rahimi
2011 THERE BE DRAGONS by Roland Joffé
CHICKEN WITH PLUMS by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud
2010 IF YOU DIE, I'LL KILL YOU by Hiner Saleem
2009 ABOUT ELLY by Asghar Farhadi
2008 SHIRIN by Abbas Kiarostami
BODY OF LIES by Ridley Scott
2006 HALF MOON by Bahaman Ghobadi
2005 BAB'AZIZ: THE PRINCE THAT CONTEMPLATED HIS SOUL by Nacer Khemir
2003 TWO ANGELS by Mamad Haghighat

Cast

Marion Cotillard	Alice
Melvil Poupaud	Louis
Golshifteh Farahani	Faunia
Patrick Timsit	Zwy
Benjamin Siksou	Fidèle
Joël Cudennec	Abel
Cosmina Stratan	Lucia
Francis Leplay	Borkman
Max Baissette de Malgaive	Joseph
Nicolette Picheral	Marie-Louise
Clément Hervieu-Léger	Pierre
Alexandre Pavloff	Simon

Crew

Director	Arnaud Desplechin
Screenplay	Arnaud Desplechin Julie Peyr
Director of Photography	Irina Lubtchansky
Editor	Laurence Briaud
Original Score	Grégoire Hetzel
Production Designer	Toma Baqueni
Costume Designer	Judith De Luze
Casting	Alexandre Nazarian
Sound	Nicolas Cantin, Sylvain Malbrant, Guadalupe Cassius et Stéphane Thiebaut
First Assistant Director	Marion Dehaene
Executive producer	Martine Cassinelli

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