



**DON'T  
LOOK BACK**



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
OFFICIAL SELECTION

EX NIHILO presents

**Sophie MARCEAU**

**Monica BELLUCCI**

# DON'T LOOK BACK

Directed by  
**Marina DE VAN**

Running time : 1h51

Psychological thriller - 2.35 - Dolby SR + SRD and DTS - Visa : 118217

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# SYNOPSIS



Jeanne (Sophie Marceau) – a journalist, married, with two children – has just had her first novel refused when she starts to notice strange changes in her home and in the appearance of those around her. Her body is beginning to change too...

Her family doesn't seem to notice these violent alterations in faces and places. But Jeanne realizes that something very deep, and deeply disturbing, is taking place. A photograph at her mother's house sends her in search of a woman in Italy.

Here, transformed into another woman (Monica Bellucci), Jeanne will discover the strange secret of her true identity.

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***What was the starting point for DON'T LOOK BACK?***

The fear of being unmasked. The fear that what is familiar – including oneself – can become foreign, other, something else. Jeanne sees her whole universe gradually transforming itself. The change starts with mundane occurrences: the position of the table in the kitchen, the difference in the colour of an eye. From these little changes, her whole reality is gradually “unmasked”. Her surroundings topple over into the unknown, as does her own face, which distorts and changes before becoming another. These stages interested me particularly: the moment where she welcomes the stranger within her without succumbing to it – as if the two faces are struggling inside her before one imposes itself upon the other.

***You directed the transformation quite literally by using two actresses for the same role.***

Yes. If I had wanted to tell the same story realistically I would have shown one actress playing a woman who checks herself in the mirror one morning and says. “What’s wrong with me today? I don’t feel so good... It must

be because of something that happened to me in my childhood.” I wanted to embody visually the anguish one feels when there is something unresolved with oneself. I love to be able to concretise a psychological concept. The transformation of Jeanne’s face tells us she is violently going through something that touches her identity, her “true self”. It’s a metaphor for what she feels but it matches a very real fact. Appearances are so intertwined with our emotions and our beliefs that our faces, and the faces of those close to us, vary from one day to the next.

***Your previous film, IN MY SKIN, scrutinized a body; here you scrutinize faces...***

Both films are centred on a character who experiences anguish in her relationship with her self, as if it were an unidentified object. What is “me”? What is “other”, foreign to me? What is the boundary between me and others? And through this, what is real, what is true? In IN MY SKIN the character experienced these questions through self-mutilation, by confronting her body. In DON'T LOOK BACK I wanted to tackle this anguish in a broader and more accessible fashion – and with more violence. One can always look at one’s own



body with a certain detachment. When the changes are in a face, no detachment is possible, only the horror of watching one's face – or the faces of loved ones – metamorphosing. There is also something taboo about it. No one cares about the position of a table but the transformation of a face distorts what is familiar, and that is truly disturbing. Of course, it's a daily occurrence, a basic experience we go through every day as we age.

***Despite the violence Jeanne experiences we still feel empathy for her. We don't watch her as if she were a clinical case.***

That's because we see her through her own eyes. Personally, I don't like changing or floating points of view in films. I like to settle inside a character as if I were at home! Adopting a point of view other than Jeanne's – for example the point of view of those close to her – would have removed the emotion, turned her into someone who had descended into madness. I wanted us to share her experience and her feelings when she thinks that the entire world – the way she sees it - could be unreal... I am not too fond of pathological labels – and even less because I believe our experiences with the most fundamental anguish are very close to the frenzy of people who are really mentally ill.

***Jeanne's journey is violent but there is a great softness about it...***

Anguish and the desire for truth in Jeanne are violent: she wants to see the truth and inflicts painful distortions on the way she perceives things in order to earn that knowledge. I need to recognise this violence of feelings, this turmoil, because that's how I experience life. But violence is not what interests me. Not for my character or with the audience. I don't like aggression, I don't like shock effects. I build my work from my own feelings. I try to share them with the audience, I transfer them into my character so the viewer feels safe, with no fear of being betrayed or taken hostage.

The softness you are referring to also comes from the importance of love in the film: if Jeanne's transformation moves us, it's also because her quest for the faces she loves and has lost is just as strong as her quest to understand what is happening to her.

***Without sharing Jeanne's peculiar past, everyone can relate to her identity confusion.***

Her past was above all a way of accentuating an experience we all go through. Even if we don't share such oppressive secrets from our childhoods we can all feel that we have built ourselves upon



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a truncated version of our family, our heritage, ourselves.

We all contain many faces. No need to be schizophrenic to feel this. It's enough just to be alive! An identity is built around a game of identification: what you would have liked to be, what you believed the others would have liked you to be. As it happens, this little Italian girl wanted to be the lost daughter of the woman who was adopting her because that way she satisfied the desire this woman had not to have lost her child, also the desire of her parents who didn't want to know her any longer and her own desire to be more than just a kid – a gifted child who wrote a book at the age of eight. Moreover it is when she fails in the writing of her novel that Jeanne's identification with her false destiny, this constructed image, enters a crisis.

## *A crisis incarnated in the mutation of the flesh...*

Yes, this phenomenon of distortion is what interested me, with all the different ruptures of the faces. The metamorphosis embodies itself in beautiful but monstrous stages where the face displays a little of each actress – some of Monica and some of Sophie. At the beginning it's almost animal-like in its dissymmetry, its weirdness, despite being the union of two very harmonious and beautiful faces.

The temporary disfigurement was very important for me because it evokes the suffering of being locked inside oneself, in a face that eludes the person who wears it. But I didn't want these distortions to take too much room; I didn't want to provoke repulsion or misunderstanding. I wanted us to be able to identify with Jeanne, not to perceive her as a monster.

## *And Jeanne's transformation into a little girl when she goes back to her childhood...*

Again, it's a pure cinematographic pleasure to translate an interior phenomenon into images. I could have shown the character remembering while looking at old photos, or falling back into childhood while keeping her 40-year-old body. But to be able to watch Jeanne as a child allowed me to translate her feelings directly, the way she feels and remembers as an adult, the way she relives a trauma. Beyond the metaphor again lies a simple truth: the feeling that one becomes a child again because of a certain gesture, an emotion, a sensation, some sort of shame. We can recognize in it a remote, buried life.

Here as well, rupture was vital. The return to childhood is always represented visually as an attractive rejuvenation, in images where the damage wrought by aging is erased at high speed. But if you

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think about it, to transform an adult into a child quickly would require the breaking of bones, the extraction of flesh, trying to cram a body into a box far too small for it! We're closer to Cesar's Compression (a prominent French artist who created large sculptures from crushed cars and scrap metal) than to a poetic soft focus! This painful, broken aspect is illustrated in the film by the shrunken, limping woman; by Jeanne's deformed body in Italy.

*A woman who rightly or wrongly believes she is another... This double motif has been used many times in the movies but usually the identity quest leads to the extraction of the "evil" or the false identity. Here, the two intertwine.*

That was vital for me. It was unthinkable that Jeanne (Sophie Marceau) should get rid of Monica's calm and lucid character for good, without a trace, as if getting rid of some parasite... It's way too naive to believe that one can get rid of the identity on which one has built oneself, however fictitious. That Jeanne would tell herself. "I thought I was a great writer, I'll just stop believing that and I'll feel fine." – it's moronic! The desire to identify with someone else invariably comes from oneself anyway – even if it's inherited from others. Rosa-Maria cannot erase all the time she was Jeanne as if it was an error of judgement. She must accept that Jeanne will always

be a part of her. But this intimate reconciliation is also what will allow her to be a writer. Because here again, if the true writer indeed was little Jeanne, Rosa-Maria still developed through her false identity a true and personal writer's impulse.

*First confrontation then acceptance of this divided identity...*

Well, she doesn't really have a choice! When all appearances have collapsed, what is there to do? Instead of freezing in contemplation of this face she no longer recognizes, Jeanne turns from it to act, to search for the truth of her story.

As we get deeper into the film the metamorphoses that take place around and within Jeanne shift. No longer really events, they become more overtly metaphorical, emerging with Jeanne's feelings and discoveries, with her recollections. Here the character melds with the directing! She accepts that her feelings colour her perceptions without feeling destroyed or called into question by the supernatural character of these changes. She understands that she's the actor in her own movie and that all the images are translation of the ideas, the sensations that shatter her but also guide her into a calm and peaceful world and identity.

*In your film, a living person comes to claim what's due her. Generally in this type of dual relationship, it's the dead...*

That's true, it's almost the story of a living being unable to exist in the body of a dead one, who attempts a coup d'état! I love that reversal. Like the character in *IN MY SKIN*, Jeanne searches in the place where she is alive, where her life is. That too is something we all know. Automatic reflexes ossify us, make us feel like zombies, like prisoners of an acquired identity that others also reflect back to us. Of course, all the pieces of our selves cannot talk the same time... it would be Babel! So we re-discover ourselves regularly, we realize that we have neglected one side of ourselves, sometimes even smothered it, allowed it to die, but we need it to be happy. In order to become adults, everyone has had to bury at least one person: oneself as a child. I don't know a single person who doesn't feel they have betrayed that child. The lethal car accident in the film that signals the concrete separation of the two little girls is merely a way of translating the notion of this traumatic event – real or imaginary – that we could all isolate inside our past and analyse as the memorable turn we were made to take in order to choose our identity – and that killed a part of us. Everyone has this type of memory, this decisive moment. True or false, it doesn't matter.

*How did you choose the two actresses for the role of Jeanne?*

At the beginning, I didn't have anyone particular in mind for Jeanne's face. Rather, abstract, plastic images: Bacon's paintings, speed effects... I thought a lot about pictures of demolished buildings ready for reconstruction, where you can still see the wallpaper, the places where furniture was, and scaffolding. Relics of the old and beginnings of the new... The combination: destruction and construction.

The casting came later. I wanted Sophie Marceau and Monica Bellucci, I pictured their two temperaments fitting the two periods of the film. Besides excellent actors, I needed a perfect balance of beauty to avoid any misunderstandings about Jeanne's angst – this could not have been the story of a beautiful woman who becomes ugly or beautiful! Sophie and Monica was an ideal pairing.

*Did they agree immediately?*

Yes. My producer sent both the screenplay and a DVD of my first film. It was important that they saw *IN MY SKIN*, which wasn't glamorous, to avoid any misunderstandings – that they knew who I am and that we would all be there for the same reason. I knew very quickly that they liked the project. They



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liked both the screenplay and IN MY SKIN and both wanted to meet me. I was terrified on the way to my first meeting with each one of them: I didn't feel up to it!

### *What was working with them like?*

I don't have so much experience of directing actors, having mostly directed myself! So I wondered whether I'd be able to direct women of that calibre, of that status and notoriety, whether I'd have enough authority, enough legitimacy in their eyes. Also whether I would find the right words. But I immediately felt respect, and attention, from my two actresses and that made me feel secure. I was fascinated to see them so attentive, so receptive. They seemed to have complete trust in me, and that allowed me a great freedom. While they were very involved, they were not into controlling, did not judge my choices, they made suggestions while never refusing my own desires and demands. I've never worked with such easygoing actors before: never in a bad mood, never a problem. They are both really sweet, delicate, and both gave me a sense of self worth. The interest they have in others communicates an almost intoxicating energy... I was high!

*The audience watching the transformation of two very famous faces goes through the same experience as Jeanne in a way: that distortion of the familiar...*

By using two icons I multiplied the emotion of the process tenfold. No one is interested in watching the transformation of someone unknown! In the end you can't even really see the transformation. But if this is about the transformation of the face of a woman the audience loves – it's not the fact that she is beautiful that counts, it's the fact that she is loved – it becomes a matter of transgression, of a violence that arouses our emotions. Anyway, it increases the impact, the clarity. The transgression when dealing with the face is a lot stronger if the audience knows and loves that face.

### *How did you approach the transition from one actress to the other?*

Sophie and Monica display very different temperaments in their acting. Sophie is very mobile, she acts with her body and her moves are fast, nervous. It's very hard to catch her eyes, her face. She is always on the run, evasive, an anxious nature, a little wild or very modest, I feel very close to that. Monica is very different, more hieratic, she offers herself. Her acting is minimal, less realist; she

relies first on her eyes. It is her gaze that guides her movements, the expression in her eyes. Her immobile face evokes a Gioconda, an enigma, which was a very precious tool for the character's mystery during the Italian part of the film.

To try to link the two superficially irreconcilable acting worlds of Sophie and Monica, to turn this into one character, that was most exciting for me.

For scheduling reasons we had to shoot Monica's scenes first. It was a bit of a headache to have Monica act without knowing what Sophie would do... and all the more because Monica would play Sophie's character later! I ended up directing Monica while trying to guess how Sophie would play the part, then directing Sophie with Monica in mind!

Overall I asked Sophie to slow way down during the last 20 minutes of her presence, to make fewer movements, to move her head less, to bat her eyelashes or screw her eyes up less often and to slow down her breathing. We needed to soften the transition between the live wire and the Madonna! I had to use certain memory/association 'tricks' in the way of filming and in the editing of certain scenes... and to trust the intrinsic identity of the character.

Monica and Sophie were very excited about acting together. It was one of the reasons that motivated them to make this film and that greatly helped me maintain the unity of the character.

***How do you explain the magnetism of these stars?***

I believe it is the strength of their interior lives. I don't believe that beauty alone is enough to captivate. The more alive, the more present in what is going on is, the more it shows on screen. Monica and Sophie are both very present, in themselves and in others. They know how to listen, they create bridges between themselves and others. All of which makes us concerned with their beauty, concerned by them – they touch us. A face with which we have no connection doesn't interest us for long. Sophie and Monica both have a powerful ability to involve us in the image of themselves that is presented to us. We feel looked at in return, we want to be involved in the magnetic field.

***The mother is the only one who shows her "right" face, from the start: the face of Rosa-Maria's mother... a terrifying mother, by the way...***

The mother is the first love object, the first person you want to please. Because she is a woman she also is an object of identification, an object of distinction and sometimes of reject. She has a central role in the construction of the identity. Here, she represents my hatred for childhood, a love object so blind that it becomes mutilating, all the



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missions that our parents put us in charge of when we are children: "You, you'll be a great this and you, you'll be a great that!" But all these missions that we reproach our parents for having given us, we also chose them, that's what the shared responsibility of the lie evoked at the end of the film represents. I put the mother in charge of the lie, meaning in charge of the swapping of the children, but I also gave some of the responsibility to Rosa-Maria. The mother's desire meets the child's desire, including the unhealthy side of it.

*The mother's face is the only one that changes in one go...*

Yes, first of all we had to vary things or one gets bored... But above all it allowed me to make the most of the expression "to reveal one's true face". I wanted to have this venomous connotation for the changing of the mother's face, because it's she who carries the lie, who generates it. She's a bluffer, a player who needs the energy and the risks of the lie. When her daughter suspects that she's lying, her true face appears in a burst of laughter, through a violent morphing. I wanted the laugh to split her face, as if the excess of her bluff suddenly revealed to her daughter's eyes all she wanted to hide. Despite all the pretences, the love of the mother is real: the film depicts love at first sight between a

mother and her child. In order to keep the love of this woman by whom she's enthralled, Jeanne will maintain the lie. And if the mother is afraid of the truth, it's also because she is afraid of the loss of love. The lie is what gives legitimacy to this authentic love.

The mother is a strong character but doesn't appear in many scenes. I needed an actress who was able to impose herself unforgettably in only a few shots. With Brigitte Catillon this force of personality is apparent straight away. She only has to speak and you immediately think she is unique.

*What about the brother who lends his face to her husband?*

The very talented French musician, Krishna Levy, told me: "This is a film about incest, where one learns with who one is allowed to have sex with or not!" That made me laugh. And it's not untrue!

*Meaning until where is one different from the other before one is able to sleep with him/her...*

Yes, I hadn't thought of that but it's true. Anyway, the character of the brother is really important in the film. I associate the beauty of childhood and love with my own brothers. So that's how I imagined it for my heroine. To me, the brother

represents both the accomplice and the witness of one's childhood, the proof that it really did exist in the way it did, the guarantor of a certain truth. Thus it was the best relic of childhood, the loss of which torments Jeanne constantly, to the point where this lost love, this lost brother, returns to her twenty years later in the guise of the man she marries. In my mind, the brother and the sister of this Italian family were very close, growing in a harsh reality with little love. He supplied the masculine face of love. Andrea Di Stefano plays this part very movingly. He has a great presence and talent; his performance is terrific.

### ***As for the fathers, they're just not present...***

Well... Yes, honestly, I don't know what to do with the fathers. I don't know what place to give them in the family. I'm more at ease when they're the missing pieces. I hope that my father won't hold this against me. As Rosa-Maria grows older she looks more and more like her real father - born out of adultery - and it's also because of her resemblance to him bearing mute witness to this that she's driven away. I loved the idea of the face being the place where sin is registered – what could be more tempting than to erase it?

This gave one more lead to the understanding of the theme of the face that transforms itself to show an

unspoken truth - that one was punished for having stated.

Interview conducted by Claire Vassé

### **MARINA DE VAN FILMOGRAPHY**

- 2009 *Don't Look Back* (feature film)
- 2007 *La promenade* (short)
- 2002 *In My Skin* (feature film)
- 1999 *Psy Show* (short)
- 1998 *Alias* (short)
- 1997 *La poseuse* (short)
- 1996 *Rétention* (short)
- 1995 *Bien sous tous rapports* (short)



# CAST



Photos: © Bernard Marchi

Jeanne	Sophie Marceau / Monica Bellucci
Teo / Gianni	Andrea Di Stefano
Teo 2	Thierry Neuvic
Nadia 1 / Italian Mother	Brigitte Catillon
Nadia 2	Sylvie Granotier
Fabrizio	Augusto Zucchi
Enrico	Giovanni Franzoni
Brown-haired Child (11)	Vittoria Meneganti
Blonde Child (9)	Francesca Melucci
Robert	Didier Flamand
Donatella	Serena d'Amato
Psychiatrist	Adrien de Van

# CREW

From an original idea by Marina de Van  
Screenplay Marina de Van  
Jacques Akchoti  
Directed by Marina de Van  
Director of photography Dominique Colin  
Camera operator Georges Diane  
Art director Véronique Sacrez  
Sound Carlo Thoss  
Marc Bastien  
Thomas Gauder  
Original Music Luc Rollinger  
Editor Mike Fromentin  
Post-production supervisor Lionel Kopp  
Special effects supervisor Krao  
Production manager Philippe Hagège  
Coproducers Jani Thiltges  
Diana Elbaum  
Conchita Airoidi  
Produced by Patrick Sobelman

A French-Luxembourg-Belgian-Italian coproduction  
EX NIHILO - WILD BUNCH - SAMSA FILM - ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP - STUDIOURANIA - ATELIERS DE BAERE Sébastien Delloye  
RTBF (Belgian television) Arlette Zylberberg

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World Sales : WILD BUNCH

Photos : © Steve Braun



A photograph of two women with long dark hair, both wearing black sleeveless dresses. They are standing in a brightly lit, hazy environment. The woman on the left is looking down and slightly to her right. The woman on the right is looking back over her left shoulder towards the first woman. The background is a soft, golden glow with some faint, larger text visible in the distance.

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