



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SPECIAL SCREENING
2022 OFFICIAL SELECTION

FEMINIST RIPOSTE

a film by **MARIE PERENNÈS and SIMON DEPARDON**

Claudine Nougaret
presents



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Original Music
Uèle Lamore

OFFICIAL SCREENING
Sunday 22 May - 16h30
Buñuel Theater

PRESS SCREENING
Monday 23 May - 13h30
Agnès Varda Theater

Image: Scope – Sound: 5.1 – Running time: 87'

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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SYNOPSIS

The film explores the new wave of French feminism as it battles against femicide and the erosion of women's rights. In black letters on white posters, the names of murdered women are plastered on the walls of every town and city in France. Employing a simple and striking graphic style, the practice has spread widely thanks to social media – some 200 groups in France, but also worldwide: Berlin, London, New York, Madrid, and as far afield as Mexico, Montreal and Tunis.

INTERVIEW WITH MARIE PERENNÈS AND SIMON DEPARDON



How did the project to make a film with these young feminists who take over the walls of cities to denounce sexist violence and femicides come about?

Marie Perennès: The desire to make this film was born from personal engagement and above all from a great interest in the subject. Like many others, we discovered a collage against femicide on our street. It moved us greatly and just days later I was doing my first collage session with the Parisian collective.

Immediately we wanted to listen to what these activists had to say and give them a voice – a voice we found to be often caricatured by the media. We wanted to keep a physical trace of this action, which is by nature ephemeral, since it is made with glue, black paint on A4 sheets that disappear with bad weather or are torn down by unhappy passers-by or city authorities.

Simon Depardon: We wanted to know who was hiding behind these messages and to meet them. We wanted to spend special moments with several collectives in France and show how they operate, their discussions, their anger and above all their hopes. From there, we set up a system that we adapted to each collective and each city, in Paris but also in other parts of France: Lyon, Compiègne, Amiens, Marseille, etc.

You chose to film several collectives rather than to stick to one place and one group. Why?

S.D.: We were extremely keen to film France and the plurality of this movement, going against the misconception that rural areas and small towns are abandoned to the far right. It's clear to see that the young are fighting, are concerned with gender equality, environmentalism... After some location scouting, we soon realised that we should also film in medium-sized cities and villages, not only large cities.

How did you go about meeting these activists and then get them to agree to be filmed?

M.P.: It all started with the collage in our street, I posted it on Instagram identifying the Parisian collective. They invited me to a street collage session. I went and from that I started to establish contact with several Parisian poster activists, then with other collectives in France. When we arrived in each city or town, we met them and one thing led to another, we managed to establish trust. Later when we edited, we had to choose the characters for our film for each city.

Who are these activists?

M.P.: They, men and women, call themselves *col-leur.euses* (billposters). This is the inclusive term since they are women, but also gender minorities, trans or non-binary people. I would say that the people we met are mostly quite young, between 18 and 25 years old.

S.D.: They are very politicised, with a natural and quite impressive discourse, but I don't feel that there's a typical profile, the movement is very inclusive, and everyone is accepted, from students to senior executives. Their operation is quite horizontal, there are no leaders, and everyone can propose actions, collages, slogans. The mode of action doesn't stop at collages, they often intervene in support of victims by organising White Marches (tribute marches), demonstrations, and so on.

You followed them on their nocturnal excursions. How are they organised?

M.P.: We spent several days in each city to prepare with them the sequences that could be filmed. From that we accompanied them to a collage session in the evening or very early in the morning. The idea was to follow them like little mice.



S.D.: It was very important to us to not add to the urgency of the collage action that of the camera. Often, when the media focus on the sessions, it's always with a held hand camera. We chose to take our time, to observe in order to hear them better. Static shots with multiple cameras allowed us to show this reclaiming of public spaces, especially at night. As a result of our participation, we understood how to give a cinematographic aspect to these moments, and I believe the result is there.

You also film their conversations, their debates. More often than not they seem to forget your presence...

M.P.: It all came from the trust we developed during the scouting. It was essential that they felt comfortable and safe. To be able to film their daily lives as closely as possible, we had a very small crew, sometimes only the two of us. I tried, with their agreement, to steer the subject, to provoke conversations, without our presence ever being too intrusive. I think that it's thanks to all this that they agreed to share their personal and daily lives.

S.D.: We really wanted the viewers to form their own opinions about these activists without imposing too frontal or moralising a position. We looked for the right distance, not to get too close so as to disturb the situation, while managing to get as close to the scene as possible. And we quickly realised that some situations were so incisive that you completely forget about this plan. There were moments of truth that arose, like the testimony of a young *colleuse* who has suffered great psycholo-

gical and physical violence from her ex-boyfriend, that the camera recorded at length while everyone was in tears...

M.P.: We recorded many strong and moving confessions, including those of Charlotte in Le Havre and Elise in Brest... It is the harsh reality of the society in which we live: more than one in two women in France has experienced sexual violence. We filmed these conversations over a long period of time. And after all this time, things are bound to come out.

S.D.: When this kind of moment arises in a documentary it's crucial to have a precise technical device, since the power of the words can overwhelm you. We are ready but never fully prepared for this kind of moment. Moreover, we all took this head-on and today these sequences still upset us.

FEMINIST RIPOSTE is a film about activism, without being explicitly militant. How did you craft this distance from your subject?

M.P.: Yes, there is always the right distance to find in dealing with any subject but to give you an honest answer, I'd say that today, making a film about feminism in France is implicitly militant. The world of cinema, like the rest of French society, is eminently patriarchal and even if you might think that making a film about feminist activism in the 21st century is easy, well, it just isn't... If we and our producer, Claudine Nougaret, weren't committed to this fight against violence against

women, I think wouldn't have been able to make this film.

S.D.: 80% of films are directed by men and I think that whatever one says about feminism, it's still not a mainstream subject. We know some ideas are not yet unanimous in society and so we wanted to give the viewer the opportunity to forge their own opinion on the subject. That's why we wanted to avoid straight-to-camera interviews for example. We preferred an immersive-style documentary to best reproduce this militant discourse.

Beyond her role as producer, to what extent has the viewpoint Claudine Nougaret, director and sound engineer, fed your work and this notion of commitment?

M.P.: Claudine Nougaret was the first to believe in this project and said "This film is necessary, we have to leave a trace of this movement on film or later no one will believe us."

I sincerely think that no other producer would have had the tenacity to bring the film into existence, if it wasn't for the fact that Claudine is herself committed to the cause, having participated in the feminist struggle during the 70s and 80s. Therefore she was one of the first sound engineers in France who campaigned for parity in the film industry. All this evidently fed our discussions. More than anyone, with her sharp feminist gaze, Claudine had a fierce desire to leave a testimony of this young movement.

The shots are all immaculately controlled. As you said, there's little handheld camera. Was that your approach from the start?

S.D.: *Palmeraie et Désert* has been Raymond Depardon and Claudine Nougaret's production company for more than thirty years, we could only follow in their approach of filming French men and women with the same technical quality as you would great Hollywood actors. We wanted to be both technically irreproachable and have a beautiful film on the subject, by avoiding the "quickly made, badly made documentary" aesthetics that plague the genre. Why should activism always be filmed in a slapdash manner?

M.P.: Exactly. You could almost draw a parallel between placing a camera on a tripod and the action of billposting. It offers the same challenges: occupy public space at night, do not run, do not be afraid to be accosted by men, show that you have a right to be there, while 100% of women have already been harassed in the street.

The meaning of these collages is also a reminder that the streets don't only belong to white cisgender men.

The dramaturgy of the film starts with a militant act and ends on a femicide. When did this structure take hold?

M.P.: It was set up over the course of our encounters. For example, when the Amiens collective





called us for this White March in tribute to Claire, a young woman killed by her ex-boyfriend. We both went and it was a turning point in the film: it became the apex of the narration.

S.D.: Later it was built during the edit. We had big boards in the room with all the topics of conversation that we had filmed. It was a huge task. Nassim Gordji-Tehrani, the editor, did an amazing job. Our rushes addressed many topics: the hijab, the media space, pornography, eco-feminism... We decided to concentrate on the reappropriation of public space, violence against women and femicide. We move smoothly from a sort of lightness and joy at being together to a healthy and significant anger.

Meeting Uèle Lamore, the composer, during the editing was decisive for the film; her commitment to our approach was instant. Her notion of film music is nourished by her unique electronic compositions. Her powerful yet discreet music supports the fluidity of the editing. In addition, we were very lucky to record the original score with the talented pianist Joseph Schiano di Lombo.

At one point the mother of one of the victims gives a speech on the march, her words are very powerful.

M.P.: She says she didn't get any help from the institutions after the death of her daughter. She reminds us there is no love in a crime, it's pure barbarism. Her daughter died of 26 stabs wounds, no one can call that a crime of passion, it's femicide.

S.D.: What's incredibly powerful is that she manages to situate her personal tragedy within a system, by saying that her daughter is the 56th victim of femicide that year. She succeeds in placing her private pain into a more global political struggle. It is not a personal tragedy but a systemic problem. What is quite disturbing is that the two men who killed Claire and Manon committed suicide. There is no longer a culprit, so there isn't even going to be a trial. There is something tragic and unstoppable about these crimes committed against all these women.

M.P.: This ties up with the remarks made by the Vice-President of the Senate, Laurence Rossignol, in the film. We understand that the murderers who have killed their wives, or ex-girlfriends, are not a category of criminals like the others. Because even knowing they'll go to prison, they can't help but act. They have this irrepressible urge to kill a woman, stronger than the fear of spending 15 to 20 years in prison. Here we touch on the essence of violence against women, on the idea of the possession of women's bodies and destinies.

Simon, how would you say that your parents' work has influenced you?

S.D.: First, there are these films: FRANCE and JOURNAL DE FRANCE for example, with this idea of traveling and listening to French people with a very clear, identified plan. But also, REPORTERS, or FAITS DIVERS, for the handheld camera sections, during demonstrations, direct cinema, really.

I thought about that in particular during a scene in the film where we come across anti-abortion demonstrators who stop to kneel and pray in front of the feminist march. There was a confrontation and we had to be able to catch this opposition.

And we talked a lot with both of them during the making of the film: which lens, format, microphone to use? They are passionate about cinematographic techniques.

How do you see the future of this movement? Does feminist activism have a bright future ahead?

M.P.: There are a lot of battles that have been fought so far and we are the heirs of all these feminist victories. These battles are regularly called into question, such as the right to abortion, threatened today by the Supreme Court in the US. And there are others to be won. We are very far from gender equality and the end of sexist violence. I think there are other struggles to win and the feminists we met showed us that they will not give up.

S.D.: It is also direct action that fills a void left by our representative democracy. The collages are a different tool of participation to the political debate and even if the movement disappears one day, feminist determination is not about to run out of steam.

By bringing these topics to the cinema, can you hope to move consciences, especially among the professionals who make, select and critic films?

M.P.: This film was made equally, a woman and a man as directors, and the crew was mostly female. This is already a step forward. It seems that this is the first time the word FEMINIST is in the title of a French film selected in the Cannes Film Festival – this also is a victory.

We hope that this film will help make a difference. We plan on meeting the public and organizations to exchange ideas and animate debates throughout France when the film is released in cinemas.

The voice of Marina Foïs at the beginning, is she your good fairy?

S.D.: Absolutely, Marina Foïs is this film's good fairy, she accepted immediately, and we are very grateful.



CAST & CREW

Directed by Marie Perennès and Simon Depardon
Produced by Claudine Nougaret
DP Simon Depardon
Editor Nassim Gordji Tehrani
Featuring the voice of Marina Foïs
Sound Editor / Mix Sébastien Noiré
Original Music Uèle Lamore

A **Palmeraie et Désert** and **France 2 cinéma** coproduction
With the participation of France Télévisions
With the support of la Région Île-de-France
French Distribution Wild Bunch
Internationale Sales Wild Bunch International

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