

ISABELLE HUPPERT

GASPARD ULLIEL

ASTRID BERGÈS-FRISBEY

# THE SEA WALL

A FILM BY RITHY PANH

BASED ON THE NOVEL "UN BARRAGE CONTRE LE PACIFIQUE"  
BY MARGUERITE DURAS

CATHERINE DUSSART  
presents

# THE SEA WALL

A FILM BY RITHY PANH

starring  
**ISABELLE HUPPERT**  
**GASPARD ULLIEL**  
**ASTRID BERGES-FRISBEY**

France / 1h55 / 35mm / 1.85 / Dolby Digital / color


WORLD SALES



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**Indochina 1931**, Ream, Prey Nup. A small family strives against destitution. The mother realizes that the departure of her two grown children - Joseph 20 and Suzanne 16 - is ineluctable. Deceived by the colonial administration, she invested all of her savings in worthless, regularly flooded farmland. Driven to fight against the corrupted bureaucrats who conned her, she puts into place a crazy scheme: building a dam against the sea with the help of the villagers...



## DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Beyond the perfection of the plot, the characters, the setting and the historic context, *The SEA WALL* is for me a deeply moving novel...

*The SEA WALL* is above all a universal story of absurd hope, hope set in man’s heart, indestructible, hope against all odds, hope that gives life, hope that feeds, hope that stops you getting insane when reality becomes unbearable... That’s this approach I want to deal with, when reality becomes unbearable...

Behind the psychology of the characters, there are topics I’m very fond of: love as salvation, the impossibility of living it or even talk about it... And above all, the colonial world, since this novel is a demystification of this mirage and reveals a two-tier society where the well-off, the minority, mix with a countless number of victims, all these ordinary colonists subjected to the arbitrary power of a venal and inhuman administration, and the locals whose children die due to a lack of medical care and food.

The story of the Mother tells of deluded expectations, of naïve faith in the future, and of the irrational trust one has in destiny, against the implacable logic of the law of the fittest... It is perfectly symbolized by Suzanne’s endless wait on the side of a track that she knows goes nowhere...

In some other place, in some other times, in days gone by, the character of the Mother could have been a revolutionary, haranguing the crowds from the barricades... She lives her dream with such intensity that it becomes contagious. Curiously, despite the difference of time and cultures, she could have been the mother in my film *Rice People*.

The mother doesn’t accept the triumphant injustice of the system...

The Mother, being a hopeless dreamer, has become an outsider. She will never ever belong to the world of rich colonials. Because of her rebellion, she is considered a fool. But she is actually the one who is right. Her children know it and the peasants of the plain, plunged into dire poverty, know it too. They respect her dignity and will-power. She shows them the way as she refuses to be a victim or to meekly accept all “the bloody mess of the world”. But when children become adults, like the peasants who can no longer stand their suffering, they also know that even if the cause is fair, the power struggle is unequal. That’s the difference between them and “Mother”. It will lead them to a different choice of weapon later on.

*“I thought of you, of her, and I told myself of you and of her : that’s over. I will never be a child anymore even if she dies, I told myself, even if she dies, I’ll go away” .*

*The SEA WALL* is also the story of a transition, from childhood’s imaginary and all-encompassing world to the “principle of reality” peculiar to adulthood. Painful heartbreak, progressive detachment from the Mother, from passion, from the Mother’s oppressive dream and the discovery of freedom in “real life” through the city, money, power, and sex.

I like the nostalgia for this the tragic and wild excesses of childhood, that each and every adult mourns.

Finally, in *The SEA WALL*, beyond time and cultural differences, I feel a particular and mysterious connection with my job as a film director ... And in Marguerite Duras’s eye, a very typical oriental compassion, beyond the usual judgements and simplifications, an almost “inner” outlook about my country and people, an eye that doesn’t judge, an eye that says “We are alike”.

Rithy Panh

## RITHY PANH

### Early life, escape from Cambodia

Rithy Panh was born in Phnom Penh. His father was a school teacher and inspector of primary schools.

His family and other residents were expelled from the Cambodian capital in 1975 by the Khmer Rouge. Rithy’s family suffered under the regime, and after he saw his parents, siblings and other relatives die of overwork or malnutrition, Rithy escaped to Thailand in 1979, where he lived for a time in a refugee camp at Mairut.

Eventually, he made his way to Paris, France. It was while he was attending vocational school to learn carpentry that he was handed a video camera during a party that he become interested in film-making. He went on to graduate from the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (Institute for the Advanced Cinematographic Studies). He returned to Cambodia in 1990, while still using Paris as a home base.

### Career as director

His first documentary feature film, *SITE 2*, about a family of Cambodian refugees in a camp on the Thai-Cambodian border in the 1980s, was awarded "Grand Prix du Documentaire" at the Festival of Amiens.

His 1994 film, *RICE PEOPLE*, about a rural family struggling with life in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. It was in competition at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival, and was submitted to the 67th Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film, the first time a Cambodian film had been submitted for an Oscar.

The 2000 documentary, *THE LAND OF THE WANDERING SOULS*, also told of a family’s struggle, as well as showing a Cambodia entering the modern age, chronicling the hardships of workers digging a cross-country trench for Cambodia’s first optical fiber cable.

His 2003 documentary, *S-21: THE KHMER ROUGE KILLING MACHINE*, about the Khmer Rouge’s Tuol Sleng prison, reunited former prisoners, including the artist Vann Nath, and their former captors, for a chilling, confrontational review of Cambodia’s violent history.

More post-Khmer Rouge events are documented in the 2005 drama, *THE BURNT THEATRE*, which focuses on a theater troupe that inhabits the burned-out remains of Phnom Pehn’s Suramarith Theatre, which caught fire in 1994 but has never been rebuilt.

His 2007 documentary, *PAPER CANNOT WRAP UP EMBERS*, delves into the lives of prostitutes in Phnom Penh.

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 2008 UN BARRAGE CONTRE LE PACIFIQUE (THE SEA WALL)
- 2007 PAPER CANNOT WRAP UP EMBERS
- 2005 THE BURNT THEATRE
- 2003 THE PEOPLE OF ANGKOR
- 2003 S-21: THE KHMER ROUGE KILLING MACHINE
- 2001 QUE LA BARQUE SE BRISE, QUE LA JONQUE S'ENTROUVRE  
("LET THE BOAT BREAK ITS BACK, LET THE JUNK BREAK OPEN") (FRENCH TELEVISION)
- 2000 THE LAND OF THE WANDERING SOULS
- 1998 ONE EVENING AFTER THE WAR
- 1996 BOPHANA: A CAMBODIAN TRAGEDY
- 1994 RICE PEOPLE (NEAK SRE)
- 1991 CAMBODIA: BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE
- 1990 CINEMA DE NOTRE TEMPS: SOULEYMANE Cisse (FRENCH TELEVISION)
- 1989 SITE 2





## ISABELLE HUPPERT

Isabelle Huppert spent her childhood in Ville d'Avray with her father, CEO of a company that made safes, a mother who taught English and three sisters and a brother. Her mother enrolled her at the Versailles conservatory, where she won her first acting prize for *UN CAPRICE* by Musset. After a degree in Russian, she attended classes at the Dramatic Arts Conservatory where she was taught by Jean-Laurent Cochet and Antoine Vitez.

Isabelle Huppert, who made her cinema debut in *FAUSTINE ET LE BEL ÉTÉ* by Nina Companeez, soon found supporting roles in some of the major films of the 1970's (*LES VALSEUSES* in 1974, *LE JUGE ET L'ASSASSIN*, *DUPONT LA JOIE*). In 1976, she played Pomme, the profoundly sad apprentice hairdresser in *LA DENTELLIÈRE* by Goretta, a delicate film that revealed her to the general public. Two years later, at the age of 25, she received the Best Actress award at the Cannes Film Festival for her role as a parricide in *VIOLETTE NOZIÈRE* by Claude Chabrol.

From then on, Isabelle Huppert worked with the most demanding of French directors, in particular Godard (*SAUVE QUI PEUT LA VIE* in 1980, then *PASSION*) and Pialat (*LOULOU*, 1980), which earned this discreet actress a reputation as an intellectual. Yet she proved to be comfortable in a full range of styles, from ambiguity (*EAUX PROFONDES*) to fantasy (*LA FEMME DE MON POTE*). Leaving for Hollywood to work on *HEAVEN'S GATE*, Michael Cimino's cursed western, she acquired a name for herself internationally and was soon directed by Wajda, Ferreri and Losey. Meanwhile, the successes of *COUP DE FOUDRE* by Tavernier and *Coup de foudre* by Diane Kurys ensured her popularity in France.

Isabelle Huppert continued her fruitful collaboration with Chabrol who seemed to have found in this subtle actress an ideal interpreter. She played *MADAME BOVARY* for him as well as a backstreet abortionist (*UNE AFFAIRE DE FEMMES*), a criminal post office worker (*LA CÉRÉMONIE*) — both of which earned her prizes in Venice in 1988 and 1995 — a perverse boss (*MERCI POUR LE CHOCOLAT*), and an obstinate judge (*L'IVRESSE DU POUVOIR*). In the 1990's, Huppert explored the line between sanity and madness in roles directed by Schroeter and Mazuy (*SAINT-CYR*), as well as her forays into comedy (*8 FEMMES*, *LES SOEURS FÂCHÉES*). Award winner at Cannes for her performance as a frustrated Pianist for Haneke, she worked with the best of French auteurs (Doillon, Jacquot, Assayas), and a few iconoclastic Americans (Hartley, Russell). In 2005, at the screening in Venice of *GABRIELLE*, she received a Special Lion for her career as a whole.







# SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2008 UN BARRAGE CONTRE LE PACIFIQUE  
(THE SEA WALL)  
2007 NUE PROPRIETE  
2006 ROBERT WILSON VIDEO PORTRAIT  
L'IVRESSE DU POUVOIR  
2005 LES SŒURS FACHEES  
GABRIELLE  
2004 MA MERE  
I HEART HUCKABEES  
2002 8 FEMMES  
LA VIE PROMISE  
DEUX  
LE TEMPS DU LOUP  
2001 LA PIANISTE  
2000 LES DESTINEES SENTIMENTALES  
LA COMEDIE DE L'INNOCENCE  
SAINT-CYR  
1999 PAS DE SCANDALE  
MERCİ POUR LE CHOCOLAT  
1997 LES PALMES DE M. SCHULTZ  
L'ECOLE DE LA CHAIR  
1996 RIEN NE VA PLUS  
LE AFFINITA ELETTIVE

1995 LA CEREMONIE  
1994 LA SEPARATION  
AMATEUR  
1991 MADAME BOVARY  
1990 LA VENGEANCE D'UNE FEMME  
1988 UNE AFFAIRE DE FEMMES  
1984 COUP DE FOUDRE  
1982 PASSION  
1981 COUP DE TORCHON  
1980 LOULOU  
HEAVEN'S GATE  
LA DAME AUX CAMELIAS  
1979 SAUVE QUI PEUT (LA VIE)  
1977 LA DENTELLIERE  
LES INDIENS SONT ENCORE LOIN  
VIOLETTE NOZIERE  
1976 THE JUDGE AND THE ASSASSIN  
DOCTEUR FRANÇOISE GAILLAND  
1974 LES VALSEUSES  
1972 FAUSTINE ET LE BEL ETE  
CESAR ET ROSALIE







## GASPARD ULLIEL

2009 LA LOI DU PLUS FORT  
VINTNER'S LUCK  
LE PREMIER CERCLE  
2008 UN BARRAGE CONTRE LE PACIFIQUE  
(THE SEA WALL)  
LA TROISIEME PARTIE DU MONDE  
2007 HANNIBAL RISING  
JACQUOU LE CROQUANT  
2006 PARIS, JE T'AIME  
2005 LA MAISON DE NINA  
2004 LE DERNIER JOUR  
UN LONG DIMANCHE DE FIANÇAILLES  
2003 LES EGARES  
2002 EMBRASSEZ QUI VOUS VOUDREZ



## ASTRID BERGES-FRISBEY

2008 UN BARRAGE CONTRE LE PACIFIQUE  
(THE SEA WALL)  
ELLES ET MOI (TV)  
2007 DIVINE EMILIE (TV)  
SUR LE FIL (TV)



## C A S T

ISABELLE HUPPERT	The Mother
GASPARD ULLIEL	Joseph
ASTRID BERGES-FRISBEY	Suzanne
RANDAL DOUC	Mr. Jo

## C R E D I T S

Direction	Rithy PANH
Screenplay	Michel FESSLER and Rithy PANH
Production manager	Pierre WALLON
Director of Photography	Pierre MILON
Art Director	Yan ARLAUD
1st Asst. Director	Pascal GUÉRIN
Costume designer	Edith VESPERINI
Editor	Marie-Christine ROUGERIE
Music	Marc MARDER
Executive Producer	Catherine DUSSART

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