

CHRISTINE GOZLAN PRESENTS



THE FIELD OF ENCHANTMENT

A FILM BY
CLAUDE NURIDSANY & MARIE PERENNOU



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
la Biennale di Venezia 2011

Out of Competition

FROM THE DIRECTORS OF
MICROCOSMOS

CHRISTINE GOZLAN PRESENTS

THE FIELD OF ENCHANTMENT

A FILM BY
CLAUDE NURIDSANY & MARIE PERENNOU

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SYNOPSIS

A deserted pond. Two lonely children fall under the spell of this wild place that, little by little, draws them closer to each other and gives them the strength to cope with life. Seen through their eyes, and through their imaginations, the pond becomes a secret kingdom, both marvellous and frightening, thronging with creatures born from dreams or nightmares. The children experience an initiation, brief and intense, from which they will emerge transformed.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

THE FIELD OF ENCHANTMENT is a natural fairy tale - a fiction dedicated to nature and childhood. The pond - this place the children have chosen as a sort of virgin paradise, a refuge far from the world of grownups - becomes a magic mirror through which they discover unknown beings that will return them anew to their own lives.

The animals and miniature landscapes explored on the banks of the pond will be seen through the children's eyes. Everything filmed will of course reflect events from the natural world, but transformed by framing, light, cinematography, sound...

Thus the animals will become real characters - fairies, ogres, dragons, dream beasts - sometimes comical, sometimes nightmarish.

Our aim is to reveal to the viewer, child and adult alike, that the greatest wonders, the most profound transfiguration, can be discovered in the heart of the ordinary. A nondescript pond in the countryside can, if we look carefully enough, become an ocean inhabited by extraordinary creatures.

We will use the most powerful filming equipment available (endoscopes, boroscopes, microscopes, high speed cameras, and motion-control optical technology developed specifically for the film) to enhance our view of the living world the surrounds us and convey a poetic, enchanted vision of nature.

Claude NURIDSANY & Marie PERENNOU

AN INTERVIEW WITH
CLAUDE NURIDSANY & MARIE PERENNOU,
WRITER - DIRECTORS.

Since MICROCOSMOS, your work has been celebrated worldwide, but we know very little about you. How and why did you start working together?

Marie: We met at the Cinémathèque when we were in our twenties. We shared a passion for cinema but realized early on that we also shared a passion for nature, art, music, photography and literature. We've been working together for about thirty years, beginning with photography and books.

Claude: We quickly started working on articles and photographs dedicated to nature. Convinced that communicating with nature is part of being human, we wanted to share our aesthetic passion. The issue for us wasn't to talk about particular species, even though that can be fascinating, but about animals almost as small divinities, so strange and so enigmatic. These creatures constituted a sort of mystery that intrigued us. Little by little we defined a sort of mythology, spontaneously built up from our examination of the relationship with nature, not only with animals but also plants, whose aesthetic quality is very powerful.

Marie: We started with photography, and first conceived books about insects, then a whole body of work about plants, buds, wild fruit, seen as small sculptures, natural works of art. It took us years to complete this, at the same time as other activities like magazine features. It wasn't easy to establish ourselves with this particular fragmentary vision but still, we were able to make a living from this profession which isn't one really. It was a matter of translating this deeply lived, deeply rooted need to link aesthetics and meaning.

Do you think you could have done this job without each other? What does each bring to the other?

Marie: There is a never-ending back and forth between what one brings to the other. We've followed our course together all our life, even though we are very different. We live and work together but both are free. We have built our vision of the world by talking a lot. I have the feeling I have found my niche, and I don't know what I would have become if I hadn't met Claude.

Claude: I could never have done on my own what we did together. Each of us is somehow responsible for the other's destiny. Right from the beginning we realized that to express our fascination for nature needed something very different from the traditional 'naturalist' approach.

Marie: We were not at all interested in showing animal life, of which we only know parts. We didn't want to make educational documentaries which are often misleading in relation to a reality that scientists and philosophers are only starting to clarify now. We wanted a much freer way of expressing ourselves, one that would be an invitation to reverie. We wanted to remain in the unfathomable mystery of the other, this creature, which is certainly much richer than we believe, and to respect its being.

You function in perfect symbiosis. Your films appear as the oeuvre of a single entity. How do you divide the work?

Claude: We don't split the work according to each other's particular skills; it's more a continuous exchange, building up to something complete. Neither of us has ever had to give up on something he or she was keen on. We are alike enough to recognize what is essential to the other, and find ourselves completely in the entirety that we construct together.

Marie: For my part, I see myself in all the work we've done, even if working together is very particular and not always simple. In our endeavour to reach a goal, we have some things in common, others less so, but complementary.

How would you define the essence of your work?

Claude: Very early on we realized that what really interested us most in nature was the relationship with the imaginary. Man brings his own interpretation to his perception of it, like when as children we play "Let's pretend". Since MICROCOSMOS we have filmed animals as true classical heroes. We suggest a vision to the spectator, hoping his imagination will grasp it so it will feel as if he is the only one to look at it in this way. Of course we have to light, frame and direct to invite the audience to look not at an ant dragging a blade of grass on a carpet of moss, but at a character in the virgin forest. By opening up a transposition of scale, we make the grass appear as a virgin forest. Beyond this call to the imagination and the exterior, the

relationship with nature that we suggest to the spectator is also introspective and brings him back to the depths of his being.

So THE FIELD OF ENCHANTMENT is a sort of culmination of your work...

Marie: Exactly. THE FIELD OF ENCHANTMENT unites two tendencies we've always had in us: the world of childhood and the feeling of nature.

Claude: In the FIELD OF ENCHANTMENT, nature helps the child to discover, define and refocus himself. Faced with an over-organized adult world, it allows him to find his roots again. Nature is reassuring because animals know how to live while children don't understand the rules of a highly elaborated adult world. We are not born in harmony with the human world. You have to understand its codes and accept them to be able to enter it.

Marie: Nature helps children to find their place in the world. Things are simpler there. By observing nature we learn rules. The child is in the position of the privileged observer. He cannot be a victim of the violence he witnesses. In a way he can believe himself a god, with the power to save or not to save the ant that is about to drown. The fact that he is an observer gives him a protective distance and a crucial knowledge.

How was this project born?

Claude: Once we've completed a film we don't rush into the next one. We even ask ourselves whether we will continue making them. We launch ourselves into a new project only if it becomes a necessity.

Marie: This project started, paradoxically, with a slight disengagement from animals. We weren't wildly enthusiastic about a film whose only subject would be nature and animals - a subject we had already explored. On the other hand, the thought of connecting that world to the world of childhood excited us.

Claude: The pond and childhood came at the same time. First because we have remained children, we are animals whose metamorphosis is imperfect. At the risk of sounding trite, we are lucky to have kept our sense of wonder.

Marie: We have remained children in the way we can be amazed at certain things, perhaps almost everything. This astonishment before the world gives a sort of freshness of gaze and a critical insight into the rules of the adult world.

What do you think we lose by becoming adult?

Marie: We have often noticed that adults are busy with more important things and no longer notice little things. Nonetheless, these little things are often essential and losing sight of them can take you away from what you really are... take you instead towards other, often futile, occupations. Claude and I feel that we have kept this perception of the small things that enrich our daily lives. For us they are a driving force, almost a reason for living.

Claude: Growing up doesn't explain everything. I remember very well having known children who were already little adults, with adult ambitions like owning a big car or that sort of nonsense. Fortunately it's very rare. Conversely, some adults retain this part of childhood, of wonder.

Is it also to allow them to find the way towards this aspect of childhood that you have made this film?

Claude: That's right, we hope that our films can help adults to reconnect with the intimate part of their childhood. We understand very well that, because of their activities, they may have forgotten the way a bit, but if you suggest the direction, many find it again right away. Like the scent of the Proust's madeleine, it takes very little to open the doors of the past and of childhood. Someone who hasn't watched an ant for forty years can suddenly experience the memory of hours spent looking at lines of ants at his grandmother's flooding back. We are very close to mental images. That is why we think that cinema, which appears to be an objective recording of what is happening, is anything but objective. These are mental images. Even with nature, even with animals, the frame, the choice of light according to the time of day, the work on sound and the direction, all strive towards a re-creation.

In view of your path in life, the little boy and the little girl in the film could remind us of you both. Which part of your own childhood did you draw on in their projection?

Marie: Of course there is a relation between these two children and the children we were. But I wasn't lucky enough to experience the wonder of a childhood love. Claude and I were already adults when we met. But one of our first walks together was by a pond and we discovered we both loved it. Up until then I'd never met anyone who wasn't bored by that sort of thing.

Claude: Rummaging through aquatic plants on the banks of a pond, smelling the sludge, side by side with someone I loved, seemed incredible to me because my whole childhood was spent in loneliness as regards my relationship to nature. It was a happy relationship but there was an emptiness because I was alone. The film is a bit like a fairy tale, an ideal story we have invented around the universal theme of childhood love. The characters of the little girl and the little boy are doubtless a mixture of us. There's some of us in each of the characters. Certain things about the girl are close to me, certain aspects of the boy close to Marie.

Each of the two offers a different approach to nature...

Claude: Even if it wasn't conceived like that, it's true that to some extent the film symbolises two approaches: one practically transfixed, nearly entirely contemplative, of the little boy confronted by perfection, and the approach of the little girl who uses the elements that nature offers to her to build things of her own invention. Their attitudes could easily have been distributed in the opposite way. You could think it's typical for a little girl to adorn her doll with poppies, whereas I always used to do that myself!

Marie: This film is a simple fairy tale, an ideal, even though the children will never see each other again afterwards. This dream of childhood love will feed them all their lives.

Do you write and then illustrate a precise screenplay or do you improvise with the help of a storyline?

Claude: Everything is written. As early as MICROCOSMOS, everything was written, scene by scene. Of course we sometimes modify a sequence to incorporate what the animals offer us - just as one would with an actor. But it's very rare.

So you chose the animals you film the same way you would chose actors?

Marie: It is a sort of casting. We know them all and what we can hope from each one according to its potential. What's difficult is to shoot enough to get what we hoped for, without being content with what they give us easily.

Claude: The emotional perception of the creatures we've chosen is essential. As with characters in fiction, some recall fairies, others dragons, toys or monsters. It's a bestiary close to childhood, linking the wonderful and the ugly. The film alternates both and that's how we conceived it, through a long process at the beginning. We proceed as we would in a musical composition, playing on contrasts of characters and emotions. We laugh, we question, we get scared. Human beings don't function through objectivity - apart from in the field of science. In an entertainment we tend to want a restitution based on feelings. We try to convey and help recall the feelings at the time of discovery or encounters with these creatures. This is the case, for example, in the very short sequence where tadpoles seem to be running in all directions like children in a playground. Each one of us associates these displays with something of our own.

Your work is guided by feeling and reverie. It's true for animals but it's also true for children...

Marie: In regard to animals, it is true that we reconstruct a natural phenomenon. Looking at something in particular often leads us to dream - a reverie that leads in turn to seeing something else. That's also what we want to invite our audience to do.

Claude: For the representation of children, our approach is emotional, psychological. As in a fairy tale, the children always wear the same clothes because in our memory they're always wearing the same pair of flannel shorts. It's our own personal archetype, one that everyone can make their own.

How long did it take to make this film and how did you do it?

Claude: It took four years, for the preparation, shooting and editing. The writing is a fascinating phase. The shooting is the most laborious. You have to be philosophical. Since we started making films we have come to realize that we

begin each sequence - having chosen the best time, and having just tracked down the animal - and have barely filmed the first shot when we start thinking it will never work. But we continue anyway. Sometimes we shoot for four days and realize that we have nothing we can use. Then all of a sudden, a miracle happens!

Marie: Eventually we go into a kind of trance, on the lookout for the right movement. When it happens we go through something very intense, and already feel impatient to share it! Everything matters enormously: the animals' behaviour, the set, the light, even the limpidity of the water. We are seeking moments of grace.

Claude: With experience we know immediately when a shot is right, when it captures a moment of grace, or humour, which will take it to a higher level. If you try and achieve this for each shot of a film you get something very different. It requires a huge amount of work and focus. You can be behind the camera for five hours, ready to shoot and nothing happens. So if you miss the exact second, it's a failure. Nothing is worse or more tiring than not shooting.

What is the ratio between what you shot and what we see in the film?

Marie: There are very few shots we did not use. We stick very closely to our shooting plan.

Claude: We can go back to these shooting plans, according to the season, the light, the arrival of an interesting new creature - a dragonfly that lands on a flexible leaf. Then we then drop everything else to concentrate on it. We only ever film with a purpose, never just to be shooting. It's very close to fiction - only our actors are absolutely untameable.

Do you encounter remarkable "actors"?

Claude: It's impressive how much each animal has its own individuality. They are real characters and not at all interchangeable. When we come across one with its own interesting way of doing things, we insist on trying to get as much as it can give us. Even animals as basic as diving beetle larvae, with their huge mandibles, hooked beneath the water, can be clearly distinguished from one another. It's very striking during their battles. So to find this and film it you have to have some kind of almost crazy obstinacy. First you think it's impossible but you have to persist.

This film is very particular in the way it connects the world of our scale to the less visible world of the pond. How were you able to overcome this technical challenge?

Claude: We shot over a period of three and a half years during spring and summer. We recreated a pond in a giant tank for newts and 'bottom-dwelling' creatures. To get murky waters, sludge, suspended particles capturing the light, all this requires time. We filmed in 35mm and used a whole array of cameras and remote controlled shooting devices, as well as endoscopic cameras, in order to obtain the shoots we were looking for.

Marie: We shot each day from 9.30 am to 7pm, with the help of an assistant. We couldn't have obtained images of such quality if we hadn't shot certain scenes in a tank. Yes, this film connects two worlds with two very different scales, but we have combined them in a number of more dreamlike visions, like when the little girl enters the poppy or when the two children stroll underwater in what we call the sequence of the mystery of the deep.

What about the specific scenes with the children?

Claude: We filmed separately, over eight weeks with a director of photography, as directing, supervising the image - and the children - it was just too much for us! So we found ourselves surrounded by a crew of twenty-five, which is unusual for our way of working. We asked the producers for a crew reduced to the absolute minimum, in particular to avoid disturbing the children - Simon Delagnes and Lindsey Henocque - who had never acted before. It was a challenge for them.

In your film, the pond appears as virgin territory. How did you maintain the fragile integrity of the site during the shoot?

Marie: Each detail, each element was significant to us. From the upright grass swaying in the wind to the child hurtling down the slope, we had to have the feeling that it was happening for the first time. We used cranes for example. We shot during three weeks with the children in the Larzac region, then three months in the fields by our house, near Rodez.

Claude: The logic of the production dictated that around the pond we began by filming the animals, keeping the big equipment for the end. To keep the pond in its

initial condition, we had to find solutions with the crew: for example the camera was in the water, as was the crew. The equipment was in a small craft that served as a control room. Only the children moved around the pond. On top of that there were aquatic buttercups, small, beautiful and magical flowers floating on the surface. We had to cut a path through - always the same one - so as to keep the environment intact. The whole crew played the game remarkably well.

How did you find this ideal pond?

Marie: The world of ponds has always fascinated us. We used IGN (Institut National de Géographie) maps and visited all of them in the surrounding area. We looked locally first but were ready to go further afield. However we didn't find the pond in the film ourselves. Pascal Arnaud, an environmental warden who has become a friend, found it on the Larzac. We fell in love with it! It's ideal because every species of frog and toad can be found there. The place contains everything, birds as well, an incredible richness that offered us both location and animals. We had to act quickly though because it dries up with the heat in summer.

Claude: This pond is really a dream pond. It gave us a few very beautiful moments of grace, even in the transparency of its waters, its weeds and its foliage.

What did you gain from shooting in your own region?

Claude: Beyond the beauty and the climate, we've been scouting the area for years; we know the right light at the right time. We knew its magical nature, the expansive meadows, the wild grass that we'd go and see each year for the simple pleasure of admiring it. All this came out when we wrote the project. We adopted this place so much that it would have seemed difficult to shoot anywhere else.

Marie: We have to know the region where we shoot because it's one of the characters. It's impossible just to land there unexpectedly. We had to get to know it throughout the seasons and the hours. We know and appreciate the different faces it has to offer.

You approach nature playfully. Where do these makeshift objects built by the children come from?

Marie: We start by remembering. One of our neighbours, ninety years old, had herself made dolls from poppies when she was a child. We loved to do this sort of things when we were younger - the Tom Tits experiments - so we had books showing us how to make toys ourselves using parts from nature.

Claude: We chose a few and tried to build them. I have childhood memories of objects built with bits and bobs found in nature. For years I thought that when I had the time I'd use acorns to make characters. To have the time to make small objects with natural elements is my idea of paradise! Of course I've never had the time! It's playful and truly beautiful at the same time. You can find a simple curved stick that can become a magnificent figurehead. Children have that sense: they know perfectly what to gather and how to transform it.

In a way we have experienced this sort of things in our work in cinema. We've sometimes had to search for a dead leaf for a whole day! Because a dead leaf is not insignificant, especially in close up. We finally found one that resembled a gondola. When we started to dig deeper into this, the choice became immense and couldn't be taken lightly. Children act this way. As Nietzsche said, you have to find the seriousness you invested in these games when you were a child. I love the idea that seriousness directs these games where children get involved with absolute commitment and focus.

The sound is also essential. How did you define it?

Claude: We follow the same principle - "Let's pretend" - trying to trigger a ricochet of the imagination. We use no direct sound at all. Everything is re-created. We proceed by layers, of nature and of the imagination, with which music is combined. From the beginning we were very lucky to have Jean Goudier, who helped us conceive the world of sound and with whom we worked on the gap between realistic sounds and metaphorical ones. He did a remarkable job.

Marie: It is still the phenomenon of childhood plunged into the imaginary. Jean suggested car horns, a little traffic jam for the scene with water spiders. For the very calm shot with walnut shells as little boats, Jean suggested the sound of an English navy whistle and the creaking of a ship's skeleton. A child looks at a walnut shell and is already aboard a galleon crossing the ocean.

Claude: The correct balance of these elements is crucial. You have to know where to stop, or else you go too far into the descriptive and there's no room left for the imagination. They're really elements whispered in the ear of the spectator, who taps into the sound without really noticing. From this sound he constructs some kind of mental scene.

You called once more on Bruno Coulais for the music...

Marie: This really was a film for him - he's a poet. We finished the shoot and before beginning the editing we showed him all the rushes. He started writing the music as we were editing the film.

Claude: He has a spontaneous connection with childhood; he taps into it directly and effortlessly. We were very fortunate to run into Bruno early on in our work. We've always been adamant that we needed a lot of time to work on sound and music, we've always been quite anxious about that, even before we started to make feature films. To find the right person and allow them a lot of time is crucial. The room for gestation, and sometime for adjustment, is a big asset. To prompt meetings of the different sound contributors at an early stage is also very important. It allows them to work together well. Jean and Bruno are both very modest and work without ego, in the interest of the film, happy to back up each other's work.

Bruno is careful that the music doesn't burst into the film. It often appears combined. Sound and music had to be created in perfect harmony. This music doesn't thrust itself into the film, that's very important to us. Bruno was able to make the music suggestive through an ethereal, almost translucent, orchestration.

The sound of each of our films is absolutely essential. It is perhaps what goes deepest into the register of the imaginary. For a director, sound has the advantage of being less analyzed by the audience than the image. Humans are passionately visual. This allows us to take some liberties with sound, it's how we mixed some sounds that had no direct connection with the image but that, once combined, influence the perception almost unconsciously and contribute to the birth of an emotion.

How did you choose Denis Podalydès for the voice over?

Marie: Claude wrote the text and we wondered for a very long time who could be the voice. We did some trials and made a model. Claude's voice has a good timbre but it wasn't enough, we needed a certain tone. It was a job for an actor. We quickly thought of Denis for the feeling he can convey without overemphasizing.

Claude: I couldn't distance myself enough to be able to work objectively. Only professional actors can do that. To work with Denis' voice put me at ease somehow. We chose him for his talent but also because his voice is somewhat distinctive. Even though it's a man's voice, it has a youthful quality to it. He says so himself. His timbre was the perfect link between the child that we see and the adult who is reminiscing.

What do you hope to bring to the audience with this film?

Claude: Above all, we hope to convey something intimate. Our work consists of not betraying this feeling of intimacy. We also bank on being able to share it. We don't choose this feeling - of nature, childhood, a solitude felt then shared - by chance. We would like all this to trigger in the imagination, the memory and experience of the audience, something both pleasurable and fragile.

Marie: We feel this world very deeply and hope others can find themselves in it. We want to bring pleasure, happiness, and also surprise: the surprise of discovering or rediscovering a path that leads to the depths of oneself.

CLAUDE NURIDSANY & MARIE PERENNOU

Both born in Paris, Claude Nuridsany and Marie Perennou have worked together since 1969.

In 1976 they were awarded the NIEPCE Prize for their photographic work, which has been the subject of numerous exhibitions both in France and worldwide.

They have authored many articles (texts and photographs) for prestigious French and international publications and written some dozen books. Having first directed short films for television, since 1993 they have devoted themselves to cinema.

FILMOGRAPHY (AS WRITER-DIRECTORS)

1996 - MICROCOSMOS

Cannes FF - Out of Competition

Locarno FF - Out of Competition

Toronto FF

San Sebastian FF

César Awards - Best Cinematography, Best Sound, Best Editing,
Best Music, Best Producer

2004 - GENESIS

San Sebastian FF

Palm Springs FF

CREW

Written and directed by **Claude Nuridsany & Marie Pérennou**

Original Music: **Bruno Coulais** (OCEANS, GENESIS, WINGED MIGRATION, MICROCOSMOS)

Editor: **Joële Van Effenterre**

Sound Designer: **Jean Goudier**

DPs: **Claude Nuridsany, Marie Pérennou, Laurent Desmet, Laurent Charbonnier**

Producer: **Christine Gozlan** (*Thelma Films*)

Executive Producer: **Catherine Bozorgan** (*Manchester Films*)

Coproducers: **Wild Bunch, Les Films de la Véranda**

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CAST

The Boy

Simon Delagnes

The Girl

Lindsey Henocque

Voice over

Denis Podalydès

wild bunch