

Laurent Lavolé
presents



20th BUSAN
International Film Festival

Céline Sallette Anne Benoit

LOOKING FOR HER

A film by Ounie Lecomte

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JE VOUS SOUHAITE D'ÊTRE FOLLEMENT AIMÉE

A film by Ounie Lecomte

France - 2015 - 104min - 1.85



FILMS DISTRIBUTION

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SYNOPSIS

Elisa is a physical therapist. With her young son, Noé, she moves to Dunkirk, the city where she was born and given up for adoption, 30 years earlier.

Elisa is determined to pursue the impossible task of finding her biological mother in order to understand her past and their story.

A twist of fate is going to upend her expectations.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

After completing my first film, which was openly inspired by my personal experience with abandonment in Korea, and as I wondered what making a film in France meant to me, I grappled with the question of personal identity in adoption. A question which remained unresolved, much like the reconciliation in *A Brand New Life*.

Through this account of anonymous childbirth and its consequences, I have attempted to explore these questions following a very specific work process, starting with documentary research, seeking material that would flesh out the fiction. Looking for her is thus the continuance of *A* whole new life, as well as an endeavor to make up for its lack of resolution.

RECONCILIATION WITH ONE'S BIOLOGICAL PARENTS WHEN BORN ANONYMOUSLY. THE ISSUES AT STAKE IN THE NARRATIVE FALL UNDER THREE MAIN THEMES: DENIAL, IDENTITY AND RECOGNITION.

The question of her identity and true background is what sets Élisabeth off on this quest, seemingly made impossible by her mother's unequivocal denial of Élisabeth's existence. The possibility of being reunited with her mother is first a matter of recognition, for above all it means the recognition of Élisabeth's existence.

The remote likelihood of an "incognito reunion" – a hypothetical possibility which I believe, consciously or not, haunts every abandoned child, biological parent and even adoptive parents – thus became the screenplay's premise: Annette and Élisabeth, mother and daughter, are placed in each other's presence without being aware of the bond connecting them.

It is a premise which, with the definite irony of fate – placing the mother "in the hands" of her daughter – makes recognition the story's dramatic focal point.

RECOGNITION AND PHYSICAL THERAPY

Two comments that were made upon reading the previous version of the screenplay made it clear that we hadn't fully explored the premise of recognition through the physical intimacy that would necessarily be involved with the physical therapy sessions.

Was it possible for Annette and Élisabeth to recognize each other merely through physical contact? How? Through which tangible signs? Have their bodies kept the memory of their original bond? And if so, what path would it take to unearth this memory? How can the way out of denial be found?

Thus at the rewriting stage, we made the physical therapy sessions the "backbone" of the recognition process, the path that leads from the "unconscious" to consciousness. The sessions are markers for each stage leading to this awareness, like knots that need to be untangled, one after another, to reveal their connection as it had once been between them, but also as it could be thirty years later.

Yet the physical therapy sessions aren't the only place where the recognition process unfolds. There are steps that Annette and Élisabeth take

towards each other, on their own, together, and through others. There is also Noé's perspective. Having inherited the features of the Arab man who was Éliisa's father, his identity also plays a role in this journey towards recognition. In addition, with his appearance that seems so familiar to Annette (although she cannot quite identify it) he provokes in her an attraction that upsets the course of events.

The film's French title, I hope you will be loved madly, are the last words that André Breton writes to his daughter in Mad Love. The poetry slam which closes the film uses the very words from this letter, evoking the idea of an idealized recognition.

IMPRESSIONISM AND REALISM: PRIVATE BODY AND SOCIAL BODY

The unusual encounter between Éliisa and Annette reveals an indescribably intimate territory as well as sensations and emotions around healing rituals that are part of a multifaceted pattern (return, repetition, reminiscence) that punctuates the film.

The idea of impressionism may seem overdone to some. The source of inspiration was Monet's working process. He painted the same places at different moments of the day – sometimes at intervals of several years – from viewpoints that were practically identical.

In the course of the physical therapy sessions, the visits to the places where she was abandoned (former maternity ward, children's home) and throughout the entire city where Annette and Éliisa's story took place - and where it is being written again - I wanted to use the same idea of repetition of viewpoints (frames) and paths (rhythm and movement) to suffuse the images and sound with the characters' emotions. Through the use of color, lighting, and contrasts, I tried to capture their nuances and variations in order to create an explicit tension that reflects the emotional tension.

Yet, what is being played out in private for these two women takes place within a very ordinary social framework. While scouting possible locations in Dunkirk, I realized that I wanted the scenery to be more than the story's contextual backdrop; I wanted the film to be a precise and realistic reflection of the city. That was already an intention at the writing stage, but this was confirmed at the sight of these places teeming with economic and social history, laden with so many symbols (the sea, bridges, canals...heavy industry, urban restoration and town planning, the association of communities into a greater urban agglomeration, immigration, etc.).

MUSIC AND ONE ABSENT CHARACTER, THE FATHER

Éliisa's quest would not be exactly the same without this absent father who is only mentioned at the end, by his first name. I wondered for a long-time how to portray this missing figure. He is of course partially there in Noé's facial features.

Instead of a mental image or a fantasized representation of the father, I thought about sound, about music as a voice that hums a familiar tune. It's the same pattern of return, of reminiscence that inspired me. I thought about Ibrahim Maalouf's music, of the singular sound of his trumpet that is like a whispering voice. Jazz music with Arab influences, naturally, but also peppered with melancholy accents that would mark a difference with the "ordinary" scenery, architecture, the North Sea, and the industrial zones.

A discrepancy between genres and styles which I believe brings a romantic flair to this world.

OUNIE LECOMTE

Born in Seoul, Ounie Lecomte left Korea for France at the age of 9 when a French family adopted her. After studying fashion design, she worked on a number of films, as an actress with Olivier Assayas (*Paris Awakens ((Paris s'éveille))*) or as a costume designer, notably for Sophie Fillières.

While working as a fashion editor, she enrolled in the Fémis Screenwriting Workshop to write her debut feature, *A Brand New Life (Yeohaengja)*, loosely based on her own story, about a girl

abandoned by her father in a Catholic orphanage. The film premiered at the Cannes Film Festival – Official Selection – Out of Competition in 2009 and won numerous awards, including Best Asian Film at the Tokyo Int'l Film Festival, Asia Pacific Screen Awards-Best Children's Feature Film, the Palm Springs Int'l Film Festival-New Voices/New Visions Award and Berlin Int'l Film Festival-Generation-Kplus, Special Mention.

Looking for Her is her second feature.

CÉLINE SALLETTE (*Élisa*)

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 *Saint Amour*, by Benoît Delépine & Gustave Kervern
- Tsunami*, by Jacques Deschamps
- 2015 *Looking for her*, by Ounie Lecomte
- 2014 *Vie Sauvage*, by Cédric Kahn
- Geronimo*, by Tony Gatlif
- 2013 *A Castle in Italy (Un château en Italie)*, by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi
- 2012 *Capital*, by Costa-Gavras
- Rust and Bone (De rouille et d'os)*, by Jacques Audiard
- 2011 *House of Tolerance (L'Apollonide)*, by Bertrand Bonello
- 2010 *A Burning Hot Summer (Un été brulant)*, by Philippe Garrel
- Here After*, by Clint Eastwood

CAROLINE CHAMPETIER

(Director of Photography)

RECENT FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 *Agnus Dei (Les Innocentes)*, by Anne Fontaine
Looking for Rohmer, by Wang Chao
- 2015 *A 14 ans*, by Hélène Zimmer
La rançon de la gloire, by Xavier Beauvois
- 2013 *The Last of the Unjust (Le dernier des injustes)* by Claude Lanzmann
Hannah Arendt, by Margarethe Von Trotta
- 2012 *Holy Motors*, by Leos Carax
Silver Prize Winner, Camerimage Cinematography Competition 2012
César Award Nominee, Best Cinematography
- 2010 *Of Gods and Men (Des hommes et des dieux)*, by Xavier Beauvois
César Award Winner, Best Cinematography
European Film Award nominee, Best Cinematography

IBRAHIM MAALOUF *(Music)*

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2014 *Yves Saint Laurent*, by Jalil Lespert
César Award nominee, Best Music
- 2014 *Smart Ass (La crème de la crème)*, by Kim Chapiron

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- 2014 *Au pays d'Alice*
- 2013 *Illusions* - 'Victoire de la musique' (French Grammys), Best World Music
- 2012 *Wind* - Jazz artist of the year, 'Victoire du Jazz'

CAST

Elisa..... *Céline Sallette*
Annette..... *Anne Benoît*
Renée..... *Françoise Lebrun*
Noé..... *Elyes Aguis*
Alex..... *Louis-Do de Lencquesaing*

CREW

Director..... *Ounie Lecomte*
Producer..... *Laurent Lavolé, Gloria Films*
Screenwriters..... *Ounie Lecomte*
..... *Agnès de Sacy*
Original Music..... *Ibrahim Maalouf*
Director of Photography
& Artistic Director..... *Caroline Champetier*
Production Design..... *Sébastien Danos*
Costumes..... *Elfie Carlier*
Film Editing..... *Tina Baz*
Sound..... *Olivier Touche*
..... *Olivier Goinard*
Production Manager..... *Karim Canama*
French Distribution..... *Diaphana*
International Sales..... *Films Distribution*