
HÉLICOTRONC AND LES FILMS DU POISSON
PRESENT
SAMUEL KIRCHER
QUINZAINE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2025
FAYÇAL ANAFLOUS
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A FILM BY VALÉRY CARNOY

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WILD FOXES

A FILM BY **VALÉRY CARNOY**

WITH

ANNA HECKEL JEF JACOBS HASSANE ALILI SALAHDINE EL GHARCHI
JEAN-BAPTISTE DURAND RAPHAËL THIERY YOANN BLANC

Running Time: 90'
2025 – Belgium/France – 1.5 – 5.1

Press materials can be downloaded here

the party
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SYNOPSIS

At a sports boarding school, talented young boxer Camille narrowly survives a fatal accident, saved by his best friend Matteo.

After a swift recovery, an inexplicable pain gradually takes hold of him, threatening his dreams of greatness and his relationship with the team. In the ring and in a man's world, there's no room for weakness.

INTERVIEW WITH VALÉRY CARNOY

After two successful short films (*MA PLANÈTE*, 2019, and *TITAN*, 2021), what led you to make your first feature film?

The first real support I got came before ***TITAN*** was even made. When I decided to partner with my producer, Julie Esparbes—back when all I had under my belt was my graduation film from INSAS called ***MA PLANÈTE***—we had a serious discussion about our direction straight away. Julie is all about the long game. She told me she wasn't interested in just making another short film—she wanted to make one that would be a stepping stone to a feature. From the get-go, she had this vision of going further, of taking whatever time we needed. We started brainstorming themes we were both passionate about. ***MA PLANÈTE*** already touched on themes of masculinity and the body, which also really interested Julie. We quickly gravitated towards exploring fragile masculinity and bodies that don't necessarily conform to the ideal standard—bodies you rarely see in movies. Obese, skeletal, raw, muscular—I find them all interesting. So, we started from there, and I wrote ***TITAN*** while simultaneously developing a feature film about adolescence. In ***TITAN***, the teenagers inflict wounds on themselves and view them with near fascination. With ***WILD FOXES***, it's different: the injury, which results from an accident, traumatizes the character and forces him to confront his vulnerability—the same character who had spent his entire adolescence transforming his body into a weapon. Both projects were conceptualized together and evolved with a natural interplay between them.

In *WILD FOXES*, we can see your distinctive approach to character development. How do you conceptualize and craft your characters?

I tend to envision my characters in situations they'll have to navigate or experience. I don't really care for characters who fit into neat archetypes: heroes, losers, etc. In teen films, archetypes are very prevalent because we're still in a phase of life dictated by very common, almost classic adjectives or character traits.

When I was developing Camille's character, played by Samuel Kircher, I wanted to give him plenty of specific details, including flaws. Obviously, he needed strengths, too, but it was crucial that he not have only positive traits. The first flaw that came to mind was the smell of his feet. I found it very interesting that he would have smelly feet—this good-looking, super charismatic kid, a natural leader but one who doesn't say much. I had a genuine desire to create paradoxes: he's popular, he can fight well, he's well-liked, but also quiet and withdrawn. He isn't particularly funny—if anything, he might be the most serious character in the story.

What was your approach to writing the screenplay?

Since I'd decided not to work with experienced actors, I couldn't adapt the writing based on a given performer's personal traits. So, instead, I focused on building a strong script foundation first, then held open casting calls, then actually completed the final writing phase after meeting the young adolescents. I spent about four to five months getting to know these characters—especially the lead—and we had more than twenty rehearsals. When I observed systemic relationships within the group, how they interacted with each other, I was able to pinpoint certain character traits that I then corrected. For example, I noticed that Samuel Kircher is an actor who works through mimicry: he'd quickly pick up on others' speech patterns and expressions and use them himself. And at that point, I thought: that's not right. I wanted to preserve his uniqueness, because he's really quite different. He's the only one who didn't have a boxing background, coming instead from a family of actors, which gave him a completely different intellectual perspective and knowledge base. So, the development happened through our interactions, through the group dynamics I observed, while maintaining the core elements of the writing. To be clear, the idea was to establish a group right away in which everyone was on equal footing and constantly together. Everyone watched what was happening, have their opinion, and—this was crucial for me—I kept saying: *"Guys, I need your input. I need to know when you disagree with me, when something doesn't feel realistic for you, when you feel ridiculous, and I need your ideas so you can feel good about yourselves without falling into clichés."* We created all of that together, and I extensively rewrote scenes based on our rehearsals.

Did you leave room for improvisation during the shoot—especially when it came to group dialogue scenes?

No, unfortunately. I had to cut quite a few sequences to create a version that fit within the budget, which wasn't huge, and we sometimes had to shoot up to four scenes a day. So, we had no time for improvisation. If it did happen, it was during the rehearsals, which gave me a chance to revisit the script. But once we were on set, we stuck strictly to the script.

How and when did boxing become part of the story?

I played soccer at a sports academy. But it's a sport with large teams, and we thought that doesn't translate well to film. I wanted a sport that really brings people together, and I thought back to my boarding school days: the boxers were this tightknit group with a unique relationship to their bodies and sense of self-discipline. There were a lot of stereotypes and preconceptions about them. Boxing is also such a multicultural sport—it's not predominantly white, it's very eclectic. For my film, I really wanted a cast of actors that reflected that diversity. What appeals to me about sports academies is that they blur social determinism; everyone follows the same rules of the boarding school and their sport, without their socio-cultural backgrounds taking center stage. That's especially true of boxing.

It's a sport that frequently appears in movies.

Yes, it's extremely cinematic, if only for its dominant colors: blue and red. Since I'm fascinated by bodies and the transitions they undergo, I was drawn to filming these young people who aren't quite adults, but no longer children—and so with these kind of hybrid bodies. In boxing, you're often shirtless, you train a lot, sweat, lift weights, and trade blows. As a filmmaker, this gives me the opportunity to capture bodies in constant interaction and perpetual contact. There was one film that served as our North Star: Takeshi Kitano's ***KIDS RETURN***—it really guided us on every level.

The boxing scenes are well structured, shot, and edited—they really capture the energy of the ring. How did you and your cinematographer, Arnaud Guez, approach these scenes, especially since this wasn't a genre you'd already worked with in your short films?

To achieve a certain realism, I knew I needed actual boxers or actors with serious training. That was the case for Samuel, who'd never boxed before and therefore trained for over five months, nearly five times a week, before we started shooting. I made sure to surround him with guys who knew how to box to create a believable arena with carefully rehearsed choreographed fights. Once the cinematographer and I had sufficiently solid material, we could lean in to a more documentary-style aesthetic. We kept the camera moving, using wider lenses that follow the boxer's movements. And since these are teenagers with childlike faces while they fight, we wanted to get really close to them, even if it meant the fights would look a bit *"messy"*. What mattered most was capturing their eyes, really feeling their youth. I should mention that boxing doesn't take over the whole story! It needed to remain almost anecdotal. That's why I didn't create this whole competition system in the storyline. In the film, we jump right to the finals, where the interschool tournaments stop after two rounds. The idea was that boxing shouldn't take over—it's simply the reality, the context in which these young people evolve. The real story is about them, this class, this group.

What inspired the title *WILD FOXES*?

The title is totally out there! (laughs) Since it's a story about teenagers, a friendship that falls apart, and a rather subtle narrative, I wanted something exceptional to emerge, something unique and specific. For me, that was these foxes. I wanted them to be present throughout, to captivate and connect my characters, Matteo (Fayçal Anaflous) and Camille, who feed them. It also draws from my own experience growing up in Brussels, where I was very accustomed to encountering foxes. They're animals that live very close to humans in our city and have become part of its identity. I find their animal nature fascinating, and I really wanted my boxers to become one with them—to interact with them occasionally, or at least draw inspiration from them. Since the fox is such a unique element in the film, it was important for me that it appeared in the title.

The fox symbolism is remarkably understated in the film—most viewers might not catch it right away.

In my short films, I kept symbolism to a minimum for efficiency's sake. Making the jump to a feature film finally gave me the room to explore something less grounded in reality—that was the plan from day one. I wanted to tell a concrete, socially relevant story, but I wanted to weave a poetic element into it through the animal. But that poetry is still raw, not overly symbolic, and carries a certain edge to it. I find it tedious when symbolism becomes too obvious, almost didactic and representational. For me, the idea was that the fox symbolizes this friendship that's falling apart. That may be complicated or difficult to pick up on, but that's intentional—the whole point is that it shouldn't jump out at you. I wanted the moments when the animal appears, is in danger, or killed, to line up with those when the friendship between Camille and Matteo becomes problematic. An association that's there, but not overly apparent. The idea isn't for this to be conscious, but rather to influence the viewer's subconscious, enabling them to make the connection without realizing it.

So, the fox hunt also represents the end of their friendship and a farewell to youth?

Exactly! The foxes are burned, and they were the connection between Matteo and Camille. They're killed, burned, and nearly get massacred themselves. There's irony there: it's the hunter who kills the fox, but also prevents two humans from destroying each other. This unique relationship continuously establishes the connection and symbolism. The brutality of burning the animal also takes up back to the adult world. These two have reached the end of adolescence. School is nearly finished, they're about to start new lives, and their friendship won't survive the transition to adulthood.

In this super masculine world, Yasmine stands out as an exceptional character. Her journey is surprising though, since she disappears after that amazing trump scene?

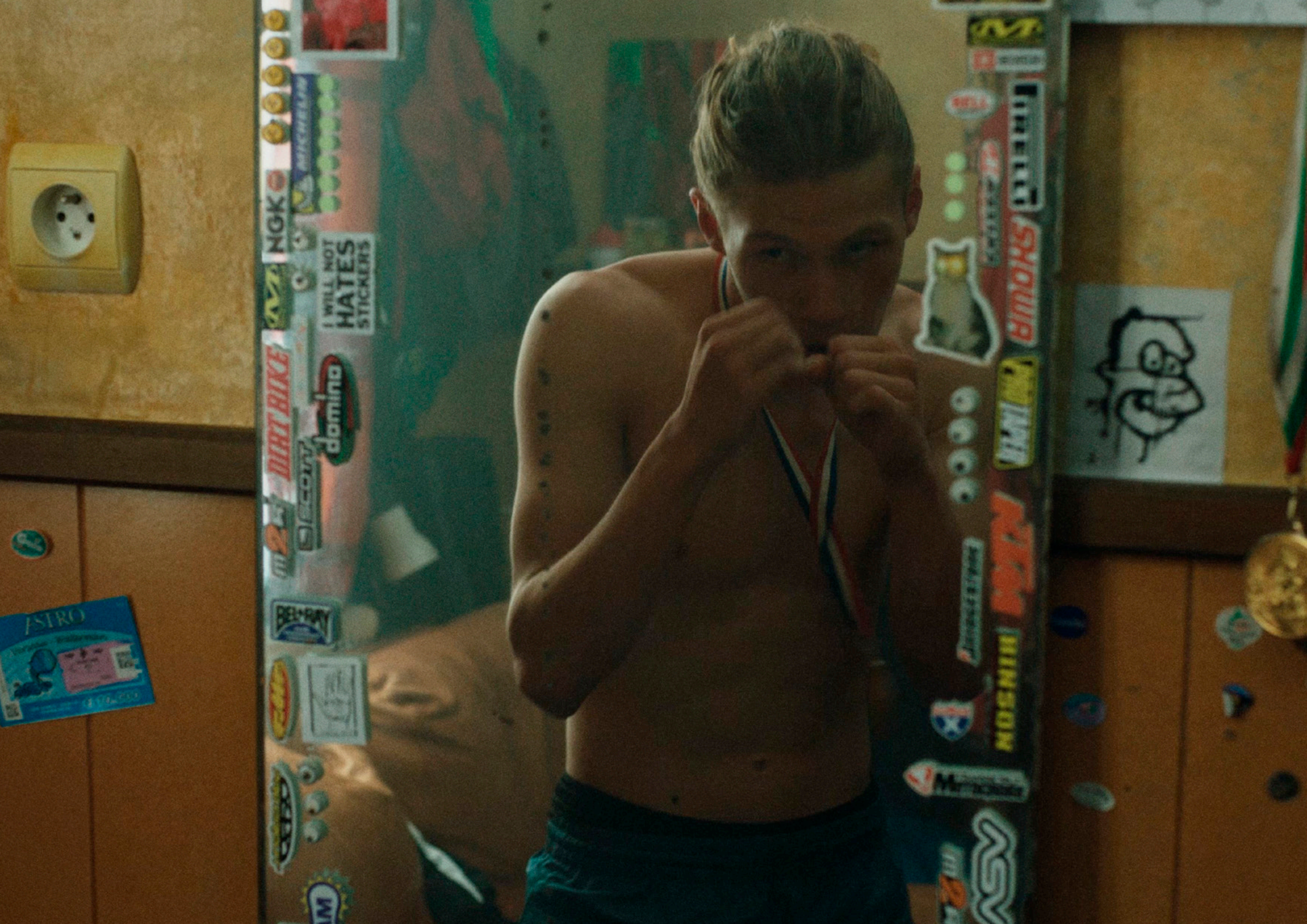
We're definitely in a male-dominated narrative with mostly male characters, so having a female character was very important to me. I wanted to create a female figure who fits into this athletic environment while challenging traditional codes of femininity. Yasmine fights them, stands up to them, and breaks free from stereotypes. In the story, she serves as a guide, since this is also a coming-of-age film. And in traditional coming-of-age narratives like Herman Hesse's *Siddartha and Demian*—which significantly influenced—what do you typically find? A character who wanders through life, encountering people who profoundly impact and transform their existence. Yasmine has exactly that role: she isn't the girl Camille falls madly in love with—

the trope we've seen all too often in cinema. We're not dealing with romantic attachment—this isn't a love story, but rather the story of a friendship being destroyed. For Camille to break free from this all-consuming friendship, re-examine it, and deconstruct it, he needed to meet someone who would deeply affect him. Yasmine isn't necessarily meant to represent sensitivity itself, but she embodies sensitivity through her music—and it's this music that moves him and triggers his curiosity because it feels different to him. She's also more mature than the others, and these more mature, experienced characters always make great guides. She enables Camille's initiation, his emancipation, which is why she needed to exit the story at a certain point to bring us back to the central storyline: this wavering friendship between Matteo and Camille. And it's because of his encounter with Yasmine that Camille will be able to see this friendship in a completely new light.

Camille's real injury and imagined pain are central to the film. Rather than explaining the medical cause, you show them more like a form of physical and social trauma. Why?
I found Camille's psychosomatic pain compelling. It's something we see a lot today, like burnout, which is closely related—for Camille, his body is essentially saying, *"That's enough, I'm in pain"*. In a narrative, I like leaving some mystery, making the viewer wonder: is he just pretending or is this real pain for him? That's part of their empathy. A compassionate viewer will think: *"This kid isn't faking it; why would he?"* and suffer along with him. A more hardened viewer might think he's just making it up because he's scared. It comes back to these two contrasting perspectives—a very masculine one about power, and another, more empathetic one: *"I'm with you, I believe you."* What's going on inside his mind? As the story unfolds, we come to realize he's genuinely suffering. And the worst part is that he knows the origin of his pain is in his head. But he still must push through to the end, dealing with this pain… Exploring this pain—is it real or not?—creates interesting narrative questions, curiosity, and above all, perhaps most important element in filmmaking: suspense.

Would you agree that Camille is just as afraid of succeeding as he is of failing?
That's not really something I considered. From my perspective, he's not afraid of either. What's going on with him is something else entirely: it's about the choice he made earlier—to embrace competition, learn to fight, pursue power. I don't think he's hung up on questions about success or failure. What's really eating at him is his fear that he may have made the wrong choice. In life, especially when we're young, we sometimes head down paths we later regret. To me, Camille is an incredibly sensitive kid who's discovered this sensitivity. When he leaves, he leaves his Team France jacket behind, doesn't bother collecting his medal, doesn't even show up to the ceremony… This victory doesn't seem to give him any reassurance at all. The beautiful thing is that his friend Matteo understands this. The film was never meant to be a sports story where winning is the endgame.

*Interview with **Muyan Wang**, April 2025*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I WILL NOT HATES STICKERS
DIRT BIKE
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ASTRO

VALÉRY CARNOY

BIOGRAPHY

Valéry Carnoy is a young Belgian director trained at INSAS. His graduation film, ***MY PLANET*** (2018) was awarded all around the world including Best Film Award in Pöff. In 2021, his second short film ***TITAN***, also was selected in a hundred international festivals (Clermont-Ferrand, Molodist, Oberhausen, Interfilm Berlin, Busan, Palm Springs...) and rewarded more than thirty times.

WILD FOXES is his 1st feature film.

Photo : © Julie Glassberg

CAST LIST

Camille	**SAMUEL KIRCHER**
Matteo	**FAYÇAL ANAFLOUS**
LPF	**JEF JACOBS**
Yas	**ANNA HECKEL**
Bogdan	**JEAN-BAPTISTE DURAND**
Nasserdine	**HASSANE ALILI**
Coreb	**SALAHDINE EL GARCHI**

CREW LIST

Director	VALÉRY CARNOY
Writer	VALÉRY CARNOY
Assistant Director	VALÉRIE HOUDART
Cinematography	ARNAUD GUEZ
Sound	CHARLIE CABOCEL, FRANÇOIS AUBINET THIBAUD RIE MATHIEU COX
Editing	SUZANA PEDRO
Music	PIERRE DESPRATS
Costumes	JESSICA HARKAY
Set Design	YASMINA CHAVANNE
Production company	HÉLICOTRONC
Producers	JULIE ESPARBES INÈS DAÏEN DASI
Coproducter	LES FILMS DU POISSON
Production Director	SÉBASTIEN LEPINAY
Partners	CENTRE DU CINÉMA ET DE L'AUDIOVISUEL DE LA FÉDÉRATION WALLONIE-BRUXELLES CNC, CANAL+ CINÉ+, RTBF VOO & BETV, PROXIMUS SCREEN BRUSSELS, WALLIMAGE RÉGION GRAND EST, SHELTER PROD TAXSHELTER.BE, ING
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