

Curiosa Films
presents

Vincent Lindon

Galatea Bellugi

THE APPARITION

A film by Xavier Giannoli

2h17 – France – Scope – 5.1

photos here

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international distribution

Memento Films International

tél. : 01 53 34 90 20

sales@memento-films.com

festival@memento-films.com

SYNOPSIS

Jacques is a journalist at a large regional newspaper in France. His reputation as an impartial and talented investigator attracts the attention of the Vatican who recruits him for a special task; taking part of a committee to investigate the veracity of a saintly apparition in a small French village – a true canonical investigation.

Upon his arrival, he meets the young and sensitive Anna who claims to have personally witnessed the apparition of the Virgin Mary. A profound devout, she's garnered an impressive following in the village and is torn between her faith and the many solicitations she receives.

Confronted with opposing views from clergy members and sceptics in the group, Jacques gradually uncovers the hidden motivations and pressures at work and sees his beliefs system profoundly shaken.

INTERVIEW WITH XAVIER GIANNOLI

How did this film come about?

For a long time, I'd wanted to know where I stood on religion and faith... I think that this questioning runs through several of my films, starting with *A l'Origine* ("In the Beginning") which dealt with the issue of promises and lies, of a highway which led nowhere and which everyone wanted to believe in. I needed to focus on the most intimate part of these topics and one day, I read an article about mysterious "canonical investigations".

I knew that the Church sometimes held investigative commissions on allegedly supernatural events such as miraculous healings or apparitions. These canonical investigative commissions aren't necessarily made up of religious people. There are doctors or historians who are asked by a bishop to gather eye-witness accounts and precise events so as to determine where it is an imposture... or not. The point of view of a thorough documentary investigation into the supposed proof of the existence of God corresponded to the essential doubt I felt in my life. This doubt has become a force of life and cinema.

You needed to investigate...

And I wanted to do so without bias or dogmatism, from the point of view of an ordinary person, not a philosopher or a theologian (which I'm not) but of a filmmaker with a desire for human truth. That's how I had the idea of this journalist character who goes to investigate a seemingly unbelievable occurrence: an apparition of the Virgin Mary today in France. Not being holier-than-thou or a cynical atheist, just a free man who wants to sort out what is true and what isn't. And I liked to discover that this investigation was going to get away from me and go in other directions.

Was it today's atmosphere which stirred up your interest in this issue?

I needed to re-appropriate these issues far from the clichés of the media's portrayal, debates on the clash of civilizations, the return of religion and the fundamentalist extremism or the Church and its scandals. For to me, it's first and foremost a personal, secret quest...

Everyone deals with it as they can or by remaining confused like me. We won't find the meaning of life with algorithms, smartphones, economic promises or political illusions. I wanted my character's journey to end in the desert, an original desert, in destitution and modesty. He tried to unlock a mystery and in the end, seems to refuse to do so, maybe because he has discovered the beauty of this questioning. The way Vincent gets down on one knee to lay down the burned little icon on the monastery steps, the way people would abandon children, is probably one of the most beautiful gestures I've ever filmed. Vincent has a humility and a dignity which touch me, as if he recognized the existence of a great mystery whilst remaining on the threshold.

So, it's first and foremost a human story which interested you...

I read a fascinating book entitled "Faussaires de Dieu" (Joachim Bouflet, published by Presses de la Renaissance), an investigation on these impostors who are prepared to do anything to make people believe they've seen a sign from God. So, when I decided to venture into this subject, I certainly didn't want to make people believe in apparitions – far from it... But I also wanted to believe in this young woman's profound sincerity, despite the legitimate doubt one may have on the truth of what she claims to have seen. I find this self-sacrifice moving and poetic and I have deep respect for that. The historian Yves Chiron has written books on this subject which have helped me a lot. While I was writing, I also had discussions with priests. One day, I asked one of them: "When you die, will you be less afraid, because you believe in eternal life?" There was a pause, then he replied: "As I close my eyes, first I'll tell myself: *I hope I wasn't wrong...*" That deeply moved me. Then, I remembered the very beautiful "I don't know" which ends Emmanuel Carrère's *Le Royaume*. Because I don't know either. So, I keep looking and I need cinema for that... or I need this subject to look for something of cinema. I don't know.

How did this investigation start?

First, I found a list of apparitions "authenticated" by the Vatican. Bernadette Soubirou is quite well-known, but there are dozens of others before and after her. The last canonically authenticated supernatural apparition was in the 1980s in San Nicolas, Argentina. And mention should be made of Garabandal, Medjugorje or Fatima who were subjected to more or less serious contradictory investigations, with a large range of judgments and positions... I found the photo of a young visionary with an electroencephalogram cap on her head and her hands joined in prayer while her brain's electric waves were analyzed to test whether she was telling the truth. There was a strange poetry in that photo, as if technology were capable of probing the mysteries of the soul. I was mainly drawn to the factual dimension of the investigation.

Were you able to get inside the world of canonical investigations?

I wanted to start with a field investigation. So, I set off to meet people who participated in canonical investigations. My first surprise was to meet men and women who weren't cranks prepared to believe any old thing. On the contrary, they hunt down the impostures and forgers, and get doctors and historians involved in their research. But the problem is that they are sworn to secrecy... I nevertheless managed to forge links with some of them and I even gained access to real interviews of "visionaries" who claimed to have had an apparition. It was absolutely fascinating, because it was very simple and concrete, basically quite similar to a journalist's or police investigation.

Once the investigation is over, the commission gives its conclusions to a bishop, the only person who can ask the Vatican to recognize a supernatural event. It's a long, rigorous, closely monitored process, with a protocol to determine the rectitude of the investigations so as to eliminate hoaxes. And one should not imagine that the Church hopes for and encourages the authentication of apparitions. On the contrary, I think they are a hindrance to them... Faith doesn't need proof or it's no longer faith.

We sense in the film's narrative and directing style a concern for realism and rigor...

To be able to write a film, I have to start by saying to myself "*No-one will believe it...*" And it's this fundamental doubt which leads me to carry out longer and longer investigations and use all the resources of cinema to give "reality" to the account. On the shoot, I often thought about sceptics... and I hoped that my thorough investigation would make them follow my character and lose themselves in her. I kept returning to the investigation. The reality-based investigation... which ends up opening onto another dimension.

I had a discussion with my director of photography Eric Gautier before the shoot: you have to start by filming the appearances of reality to attempt to attain a state of grace, film the weight of bodies to reveal the soul.

It's also why I needed to have contact with something of the chaos of the modern world to finish my film. I wanted to explore the intimate side of the topic but also in a wider context. I went to film in the biggest refugee camp in the Middle East on the Syrian border. This historic tragedy makes us question what we are, our values, our history, and what we are prepared to do to extend a helping hand to them. When Anna looks at the sky and loses herself, Mériem looks at the earth and finds herself. She too believes in self-sacrifice to those who are suffering, but is now far from the Church's dogma. It's the respect for the sacred in life, beyond any religious issues.

It's the first time you've worked with Vincent Lindon.

I wrote this role for Vincent Lindon who I'd wanted to work with for a long time. We knew one another well and I wanted to film him in a new way. It was quite a job to get him to agree to let me film his gaze or rather to leave enough time for his gaze to reveal a more secret interiority. Vincent is continually in movement, at ease speaking and very quickly right in the middle of events. Like all the great actors, he is first and foremost a body, a life force which touches objects and questions the physical presence of the people in front of him and the settings he goes through. I knew I would use this force to play a role and that it would

make Jacques's investigation more real in a world which revolves around spirituality. So, Jacques starts by being a foreign body in Anna's world... and he comes across her gaze. At the end of the film, we see that Jacques's gaze has changed, he now sees something else of the world and the people in it. The journalist who has spent his life looking for tangible proof has found his limit. He has come across a world in which proof counts for nothing and the invisible world keeps its secrets.

What can you tell us about Anna?

I believe in the profound sincerity of her faith and I'm touched by her isolation in prayer. She has sacrificed her life to the message she says she received. She has become a prisoner of those who want to spread her word and her image. Her encounter with Jacques will disrupt her silence. This journalist comes into her life of secrets like a principle of truth. And first and foremost, I'm touched by her infinite solitude... She needed to be listened to, to be set free. By restoring her to herself, Jacques will take her to the ends of her mystery. There's a complex bond between them which concerns solitude and the need for love, mystique and illusion, sacrifice and tenderness.

How did you come across Galatea Bellugi who plays Anna?

As with each film, I spent a lot of time watching screen tests, because I rewrite the film once I've found the actors. I saw hundreds of faces... and then Galatea's, who I didn't know. It was quite simply obvious. I watched the screen tests in which Anna relates her apparition and it was absolutely impossible to imagine she was acting. Her gaze, her gestures, the texture of her voice all gave gripping reality to what is an incredible account. There was something like madness in the way she seemed to calmly believe what she was saying. I was then told that she'd acted in a few films, but she didn't really know if she wanted to become an actress although she has unique presence. Every day I spent with her on the shoot was a moment of grace. She had a very interesting relationship with Vincent, as if they had both understood that they had everything to gain from keeping their distance. She is both familiar and enigmatic, everything a director dreams of. A gift from heaven.

There are many secondary roles...

The priest who protects Anna, Patrick d'Assunção, is an actor I've wanted to work with for a long time. He brought incredible humanity and complexity to the character of Anna's protector whom we begin to think of as a manipulator and who ends up being a victim of his faith and his love for her. Just like Anatole Taubman who plays Anton Meyer, the kind of crank who is dangerous because he is sincere and that you often come across when apparitions occur. Both embody different ways of living one's faith, for better or for worse. Both feel lost.

There are also the members of the commission (Elina Löwensohn, Gérard Dessalles, Claude Lévêque, Bruno Georis), a group of experts for whom the supernatural is routine, with its traps and impostures. We had a lot of fun bringing to life these little moments in which they

argue about concrete questions while they're investigating an incredible mystery. These scenes give a feeling of truth which helps the possibility of an apparition take root in the reality of the investigation.

Lastly, there is the enigma of Mériem...

You used the music of Arvö Part throughout the film.

I wrote it while listening to Arvö Part. For those who aren't familiar with him, he's a contemporary Lithuanian composer. I was introduced to his work by my sound engineer, François Musy, with whom I've worked since my first short film. What can I say about such a genius? As I said, I wanted to base the film in contemporary reality and the sounds of today: the noise of the feather-blowing machines, of airplanes and cars, the vibrations of neon lights in the ceilings. The film isn't set in the silence of a church in a little pastoral village – far from it. So, Part's music acts like a spiritual counterpoint to this realism which doesn't predispose you to accept the possibility of the supernatural. His music leaves room for silence, doubt, profound humanity and the poetry of doubt. But there is also a theme by Georges Delerue I'm very keen on. It's very important for me that cinema is a spectacle, the spectacle of our lives as we search for ourselves. And this search reminded me of the theme you hear at the end of the film called *Stellaire*. He composed it in the late 80s for a TV documentary series astrophysics. It showed how men have always tried to solve the mysteries of the heavens. I remember that top scientists who had spent their lives studying the universe ended up questioning the existence of God.

XAVIER GIANNOLI

FEATURE-LENGTH FILMS

- 2015 **MARGUERITE**
Venice Film Festival 2015 – In Competition.
4 César Awards 2016 for Best Actress, Best Sound, Best Costume design, Best Production design.
- 2012 **SUPERSTAR**
Venice Film Festival 2012 – In Competition.
- 2009 **IN THE BEGINNING (À L'ORIGINE)**
10 César nominations 2010 including Best Director, Best Film, Best Original Screenplay.
Cannes Film Festival 2009 – In Competition.
- 2006 **THE SINGER (QUAND J'ÉTAIS CHANTEUR)**
6 César nominations 2007 including Best Film, Best Original Screenplay.
Cannes Film Festival 2006 – In Competition.
- 2005 **UNE AVENTURE**
- 2003 **EAGER BODIES (LES CORPS IMPATIENTS)**
César nominations for Best Female Newcomer (Laura Smet) and Best Male Newcomer (Nicolas Duvauchelle).

SHORT FILMS

- 1998 **L'INTERVIEW**
Wiiner Palme d'or for Best Short Film.
Winner César for Best Short Film.
- 1996 **DIALOGUE AU SOMMET**
César nomination for Best Short Film.
- 1995 **J'AIME BEAUCOUP CE QUE VOUS FAITES**
- 1994 **TERRE SAINTE**
- 1993 **LE CONDAMNÉ**

VINCENT LINDON

Films (selection):

THE APPARITION by Xavier GIANNOLI / **RODIN** by Jacques DOILLON / **THE MEASURE OF A MAN** by Stéphane BRIZÉ / **THE WHITE KNIGHTS** by Joachim LAFOSSE / **DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID** by Benoît JACQUOT / **MEA CULPA** by Fred CAVAYÉ / **BASTARDS** by Claire DENIS / **AUGUSTINE** de Alice WINOCOUR / **A FEW HOURS OF SPRING** by Stéphane BRIZÉ / **PATER** by Alain CAVALIER / **ALL OUR DESIRES** by Philippe LIORET / **THE MOON CHILD** by Delphine GLEIZE / **MADemoiselle CHAMBON** by Stéphane BRIZÉ / **WELCOME** by Philippe LIORET / **ANYTHING FOR HER** by Fred CAVAYE / **COULD BE THIS LOVE ?** by Pierre JOLIVET / **THOSE WHO REMAIN** by Anne LE NY / **CHARLIE SAYS** by Nicole GARCIA / **THE MUSTACHE** by Emmanuel CARRERE / **THE PLANCE** by Cédric KAHN / **JUST TRUST** by Etienne CHATILIEZ / **THE COST OF LIVING** by Philippe LE GUAY / **DAY OFF** by Pascal THOMAS / **CHAOS** by Coline SERREAU / **FRIDAY NIGHT** by Claire DENIS / **KEEP IT QUIET** by Benoît JACQUOT / **THE SCHOOL OF FLESH** by Benoît JACQUOT / **MY LITTLE BUSINESS** by Pierre JOLIVET / **SEVENTH HEAVEN** by Benoît JACQUOT / **PAPARAZZI** by Alain BERBERIAN / **FRED** by Pierre JOLIVET / **VITE STROZZATE** by Ricky TOGNAZZI / **THE GREEN BEAUTIFUL** by Coline SERREAU / **THE VICTIMS** by Patrick GRANDPERRET / **LA CRISE** by Coline SERREAU / **TOUT ÇA POUR ÇA** by Claude LELOUCH / **LA BELLE HISTOIRE** by Claude LELOUCH / **GASPARD ET ROBINSON** by Tony GATLIF / **THEY WERE DAYS... AND MOONS** by Claude LELOUCH / **C'EST LA VIE** by Diane KURYS / **L'ÉTUDIANTE** by Claude PINOTEAU / **A FEW DAYS WITH ME** by Claude SAUTET / **A MAN IN LOVE** by Diane KURYS / **BETTY BLUE** by Jean-Jacques BEINEIX

CAST

Vincent Lindon

Galatea Bellugi

Patrick d'Assumção

Anatole Taubman

Elina Löwensohn

Claude Lévêque

Gérard Dessalles

Bruno Georis

Alicia Hava

Candice Bouchet

Jacques

Anna

Father Borrodine

Anton

De Villeneuve Doctor

Father Gallois

Stéphane Mornay

Father Ezéradot

Mériem

Valérie

CREW

Director	Xavier Giannoli
Screenplay	Xavier Giannoli
In collaboration with	Jacques Fieschi Marcia Romano
Cinematographer	Eric Gautier A.F.C
Editor	Cyril Nakache
Sound mixer	François Musy Renaud Musy
Production designer	Riton Dupire-Clément – ADC
Costume designer	Isabelle Pannetier
1st Assistant Director	Nicolas Cambois
Production coordinator	Johanna Colboc A.F.R
Casting	Coralie Amedeo Michaël Laguens
Post-production supervisor	Susana Antunes
Production manager	Philippe Hagège
Produced by	Olivier Delbosc
Associate producer	Emilien Bignon
Co-produced by	France 3 Cinéma Gabriel Inc. Proximus La Cinéfacture Memento Films Production
In association with	Memento Films Distribution Memento Films International
In association with	Cofinova 14 La Banque Postale Image 10 Cinémage 12 Manon 7
With the participation of	Canal+ France Télévisions Ciné+
With the participation of	Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image Animée
With the help of	La Région Ile-de-France
International sales	Memento Films International
French Distribution	Memento Films Distribution