

LES FILMS DU FLEUVE, ARCHIPEL 35 and THE REUNION
present

young mothers

A FILM BY
JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2025 OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION



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SYNOPSIS

Jessica, Perla, Julie, Ariane and Naima are housed in a shelter for young mothers. Five teenagers hoping for a better life for themselves and their babies.



■ WORKING NOTES

December 22nd 2023

When we went to visit what is called a “maternal support home” near Liège, it was as part of a research for the writing of a screenplay with one single character: a young woman whose one aspect of life was being a mother of a baby with whom she was trying to connect. What first attracted us when we discovered this maternal home - after spending a few hours there to learn about how it functioned, exchanged a few words with the young single mothers (most of them minors), the caseworkers and the psychologist - was the communal life of this place, the meals, the baths given to the babies, the discussions around themes related to motherhood, violence, addictions... It was a short reportage made by a trainee on these moments of communal life that inspired us to come back to this place and stay longer this time in order to approach the personal lives of these young mothers. Because if there are many moments of communal life, there are also and above all the solitary lives of teenagers struggling with their anxieties, hopes and sometimes illusions about their new condition as mothers - most often single mothers - about the family from which they come, to which they will or will not return, about the father who is often absent or non-existent, about their future with the child or without the child who will be entrusted to a foster family, about their educational and professional future too and their ability to live independently. Following this stay in the maternal support home, we decided our film will have not just one lead character but four, and a fifth, with a shorter story.

Our concern in bringing five stories into one film was to avoid falling into construction effects and conceive individual stories with the sole purpose of a global story which, for example, would be the story of one place, in this case the maternal home. We constructed each story according to each teenage mother and her child, trying to be as close as possible to the driving force of each one, letting ourselves be guided by the internal necessity of each trajectory, inside and outside the maternal home, in order to make a film that, while being a group portrait, is first and foremost five portraits of teenage mothers, each living their life made up of social situations and personal emotional relationships. Bringing attention to the individuality of each character, of each young single mother of a very young child, doesn't mean that nothing connects them. What connects them, early motherhood linked to social determining of poverty and certain emotional deficiencies that tend to be the repetition of the same behaviours from generation to generation, is what they try to free themselves from, and it is precisely in this attempt that they appear singular, alive, unique and that they cease in a way to be characters and become people.

April 5th 2024

With our small video camera we looked for shots in the sets we anticipated. By constructing a long sequence shot in Nathalie's (Ariane's mother) apartment, we once again observed that the sequence shot is our alexandrine, the constraint to find our film, its rhythm.

April 12th 2024

We are in the casting process, looking for the young women who will be Jessica, Perla, Julie, Ariane and Naïma. Among 300 candidates, we selected one hundred and fifty.

July 8th 2024

What separates these young mothers from their own mothers? What separates them in the materiality of the shot? Of the frame? At some point? The whole sequence? In the rhythm of the sequence? What can also link them? To be found in the sets and also, probably, in the variations of the rhythm.

July 23rd 2024

In long dialogue scenes, try long silences. Silences to approach the interior of the characters.

July 28th 2024

We have the intuition that the sequences in the maternal home have to be shot inside the maternal home that inspired us. Let's not go anywhere else or build a set. Shoot in this house and add no other elements of décor and lighting.

August 6th 2024

The rehearsals allow us to find shots and above all be surprised by the spontaneity of the acting of the five young women chosen during casting. It's up to us, at the time of filming, to allow this spontaneity to exist. Let's not freeze anything with our indications.

August 17th 2024

How to film Jessica's first meeting with her mother? Both of them together all the time? The two then Jessica by herself, then slight movement towards the mother then again the two?

August 26th 2024

Shooting has begun. To be free and simple. Let the wind through. Easy to say, hard to do. Film the young women in a way that they are people who resist being shot. The babies should also appear as little people, not baby pictures.

October 9th 2024

We have just finished shooting. There was beautiful energy on set. No doubt that the fact that we rehearsed a lot allowed us to film so quickly. Also because we shot without cinema light.

January 8th 2025

We are finishing the editing. We are happy to have made the film the way we did. It seems to us that these five young mothers led us to the most fundamental emotions.

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne





PERLA

Lucie LARUELLE

Born in 2007 in Agaro (Ethiopia).
Loves football and fashion, has already appeared in several films as extra.
Young Mothers is her first proper role in a film.

JESSICA

Babette VERBEEK

Born in 2006 in Brussels (Belgium).
She is a dancer, singer, a dubbing and slam artist.
She has acted in several plays, including at the Théâtre Royal du Parc in Brussels between 2014 and 2016,
Festen (2018) directed by Alain Leempoel and *Hofstade* by Ilyas Mettiouti from 2023 to 2025.
Young Mothers is her first experience in film.



ARIANE

Janaina HALLOY FOKAN

Born in 2008 in Louvain la Neuve (Belgium).
She is a dancer, a singer and plays the piano.
She started her film career in *Inexorable* (2020) by Fabrice du Welz,
followed by *Christmas Carole* (2023) by Jeanne Gottesdiener.
She also starred in the Belgian series *Attraction* by India Siera (2022)



JULIE

Elsa HOUBEN

Born in 2003 in Liège (Belgium).

She has acted in several clips and short films, has worked for television in several TV movies and series, including *Clem* seasons 9 to 12, *OVNI(s)*, *Les Invisibles...*

She has starred in several feature films, among others *Gaspard at the Wedding* by Anthony Cordier, *Love at Second Sight* by Hugo Gélin, *Dark Heart of the Forest* by Serge Mirzabekiantz...



NAÏMA

Samia HILMI

Born in 2005 in Brussels (Belgium).

She has been working in theatre since the age of eight, is also a dancer, plays the piano and the drums.

She is currently working on several theatre projects.

Young Mothers is her first experience in film.



Samia, Janaina, Babette, Lucie of the set of *Young Mothers*.



FILMOGRAPHY

JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE

Jean-Pierre Dardenne was born in Engis (Belgium) in April 1951 and Luc Dardenne was born in Awirs (Belgium) in March 1954.

They have directed many documentaries.

In 1975, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne created Dérives, the production company that has produced up to this day over eighty documentaries, of which theirs.

In 1994, they created Les Films du Fleuve production company.

SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

1987 - *Falsch*

with Bruno Cremer

1992 - *I'm Thinking of You*

with Fabienne Babe, Robin Renucci

1996 - *The Promise*

with Jérémie Renier, Olivier Gourmet, Assita Ouédraogo

1999 - *Rosetta*

with Émilie Dequenne, Fabrizio Rongione, Anne Yernaux, Olivier Gourmet

Palme d'Or and Best Actress Award to Emilie Dequenne

Cannes Film Festival 1999

2002 - *The Son*

with Olivier Gourmet, Morgan Marinne, Isabella Soupart

Best Actor Award to Olivier Gourmet - Cannes Film Festival 2002

2005 - *The Child*

with Jérémie Renier, Déborah François, Jérémie Segard

Palme d'Or - Cannes Film Festival 2005

2008 - *Lorna's Silence*

with Arta Dobroshi, Jérémie Renier, Fabrizio Rongione

Best Screenplay Award - Cannes Film Festival 2008

Lux Prize - European Parliament 2008

2011 - *The Kid with a Bike*

with Cécile de France, Thomas Doret, Jérémie Renier

Grand Prix - Cannes Film Festival 2011

2014 - *Two Days, One Night*

with Marion Cotillard, Fabrizio Rongione

European Film Award for Best Actress to Marion Cotillard 2015

Oscar Nomination Best Actress to Marion Cotillard 2015

2016 - *The Unknown Girl*

with Adèle Haenel, Olivier Bonnaud

2019 - *Young Ahmed*

with Idir Ben Addi, Olivier Bonnaud, Myriem Akheddiou

Best Directors Award - Cannes Film Festival 2019

2022 - *Tori and Lokita*

with Pablo Schils, Joely Mbundu, Alban Ukaj, Tijmen Govaerts

75th Anniversary Prize - Cannes Film Festival 2022

2025 - *Young Mothers*

Official Competition - Cannes Film Festival 2025





CAST

Jessica	Babette Verbeek
Julie	Elsa Houben
Ariane	Janaina Halloy Fokan
Perla	Lucie Laruelle
Naima	Samia Hilmi

Dylan	Jef Jacobs
Robin	Gunter Duret

Nathalie, Ariane's mother	Christelle Cornil
Morgane, Jessica's mother	India Hair
Angèle, Perla's sister	Joely Mbundu

Isabelle, psychologist	Claire Bodson
Asun, nurse	Eva Zingaro
Yasmine, caseworker	Adrienne D'Anna
Lucie, caseworker	Mathilde Legrand
Silvia, caseworker	Hélène Cattelain
Betty, director	Selma Alaoui

CREW

Screenwriters and directors	Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne
First assistant director	Caroline Tambour
Cinematographer	Benoit Dervaux (SBC)
First assistant camera	Amaury Duquenne
Chief editor	Marie-Hélène Dozo
Sound engineer	Jean-Pierre Duret
Sound editor	Valène Leroy
Production sound mixer	Thomas Gauder
Production designer	Igor Gabriel
Costume designer	Dorothée Guiraud
Make-up	Natali Tabareau-Vieuille
Gaffer	Tanguy Delhez
Grip	Basile Duquenne
General manager	Samuel Palm
Colour grader	Christophe Bousquet
Foley artist	Éric Grattepain
Production manager	Philippe Toussaint
Production manager and	
Post-production France	Cédric Ettouati
Set photographer	Christine Plenus
Producers	Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne Delphine Tomson Denis Freyd
Coproducers	Michiel Dhont et Lukas Dhont
Associate producers	Valérie Berlemont Philippe Logie Tanguy Dekeyser

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In association with **Goodfellas, Diaphana Distribution, Cinéart**