

Official Selection

tiff

Toronto International
Film Festival 2018

A movie poster for the film 'Duelles'. The scene is set in a kitchen with light green cabinets. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a black and white geometric patterned short-sleeved top and a bright pink skirt with a matching belt, looks off to the side with a serious expression. In the background, another woman with dark hair and a headband, wearing a dark blue patterned dress, stands with her hands clasped, looking towards the camera. The kitchen counter is cluttered with various items like a coffee maker, a toaster, and a clock. The title 'DUELLES' is written in large, bold, red capital letters at the bottom of the image.

DUELLES

A FILM BY OLIVIER MASSET-DEPASSE

DUELLES

(MOTHERS' INSTINCT)

A FILM BY **OLIVIER MASSET-DEPASSE**

Starring

Veerle Baetens
Anne Coesens

Runtime: 97min – Belgium, France – 2018 – 1:85 – Dolby 5.1

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FRENCH DISTRIBUTOR: HAUT ET COURT (First semester 2019)
BELGIAN DISTRIBUTOR: O'BROTHER DISTRIBUTION (First semester 2019)

SCREENING SCHEDULE

TIFF SPECIAL PRESENTATION

FRI. 7, 8:30 AM @ SCOTIABANK 11 (P&I)

FRI. 7, 8:45 PM @ SCOTIABANK 1 (PUBLIC)

SAT. 9, 9:30 PM @ SCOTIABANK 4 (PUBLIC)

TUE. 11, 11:30 AM @ SCOTIABANK 8 (P&I)

SAT. 15, 11:45 AM @ SCOTIABANK 3 (PUBLIC)



SYNOPSIS

Brussels, early 60's. Alice and Céline live in twin bourgeois houses. They are best friends as are their children, Theo and Maxime, who have grown up like brothers. Both families spend all their time together.

This perfect harmony is broken when Maxime, Céline's son, tragically falls to his death from his bedroom window. This accident happens very quickly and Alice, witness of the scene, can't save him.

Blinded by the pain, Céline blames Alice for not saving her son. Céline's behavior becomes more and more suspicious... Alice fears her friend is seeking revenge on her son Theo...



INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER MASSET-DEPASSE

What is the origin of this dark story?

It's the adaptation of a novel, *Derrière la Haine* (Behind the Hatred), by the Belgian writer Barbara Abel, a friend of mine. The moment I closed the book I knew I had to make a film of it. This story has all the ingredients I was searching for my next project: a profoundly humanistic subject treated as a genre movie, a human tragedy seen from the angle of a scary psychological thriller.

Although all the main narrative ideas in *Duelles* are from the novel, we can call it a free adaptation. To start with, I changed the period and set the intrigue in the Sixties, whereas in the book the action takes place today. I also altered a lot of details, to make it a real cinematographic object.

Why did you choose to change the period?

I didn't want a contemporary story that might pull the film towards a downbeat, technology-fuelled cop picture. Barbara Abel's novel has a genuine Hitchcock touch. After making a feature and a TV film that were both firmly rooted in gritty social reality, I needed to take off into a different sort of cinema, new worlds that would regenerate me. I envisaged a dark

tale based on Barbara's novel, a terrifying psychological thriller with all the flamboyant beauty of the Sixties. I wanted to juggle with the aesthetic counterpoint.

As I see it, changing the period gives the spectator more distance on the darkness of the story.

The Hitchcock touch, a David Lynch touch too at times, come across strongly.

I never intended to make a film imitating a specific cinematographic approach, thus falling into the trap of parody. I wanted to attempt an «exercise in style» that would draw from these major references, and see what would come out of it today with my contemporary «little Belgian film maker's» vision. Before and during the shoot, I watched movies by Douglas Sirk, Hitchcock and Lynch, nonstop. These great directors are an inspiration, they don't crush you with their brilliance, they invite you to try for yourself. So with my crew, we did try...

Although you're Belgian, your film has an Anglo-American identity.

My «identity» is cinema. I love all kinds of movies. But what triggered off my desire to

make films, right from the start, were the New Hollywood directors: writer-directors committed to making films that are accessible.

I'm not an innovator, like many of my colleagues today I'm just aiming for the fusion of what the Americans and British have perfected: storytelling through images; and what we Europeans excel in: portraits and naturalism. My ambition is to unite the two. Ever since I began directing, I've tried to make «psychological action movies». So the time had come for me to confront a psychological thriller, head on.

A psychological thriller in an enclosed space...

All my feature films explore tension in enclosed spaces. The enclosed space is automatically symbolic. It introduces a «meta-psychological» dimension in the sense that everything we see on the screen could equally well be going on in the mind (or minds) of our character(s). So we're immediately in a more psychic dimension. In all my films up till now, I've always played with tone-on-tone: (treating a dark subject with a dark form). With *Duelles*, I was determined to experiment with a contrasting aesthetic counterpoint. This is why I totally revised my way of film-making: I wanted to treat this enclosed space in a sensual, aerial way, privileging long, moving shots and more direction of the actors' movements. This called for a «multi-faceted» directorial approach: closer to the characters' psychology and at the same time introducing glamor with sensitivity and beauty. So this enclosed space needed breadth and scale. We had to see the «wonderful world of the Sixties» crack, and then sink into darkness.

You said you wanted to set the «social element» aside, but the social landscape is still very present in the background of *Duelles*.

Yes, but the «social landscape» exists to nourish the fiction.

That's the only reason for it. I wanted to set the story in an average middle-class environment, well-heeled but boring and idle. It's vital for the spectator to enter a world that seems «perfect». But the heart of the film is something else: it's about building up a suspense that makes the spectator penetrate the mind of each character progressively. This meant sustaining the ambiguities, mixing the right paths with false leads, etc.

So you needed two actresses who would be completely involved in the project.

The film is about a confrontation between two women, two mothers, two best friends. Alice is hyper-active mentally, whereas Céline has abnormally strong will power. So I needed two actors with terrific depth. As a Belgian film-maker, I'm extremely proud to have had the opportunity to work with two of my country's best actors: Veerle Baetens and Anne Coesens. They threw themselves body and soul into their parts and I'm delighted with the result. I couldn't have found better actors. They both incarnate to perfection the characters I'd imagined. The same goes for the part of Théo, the child they fight over. Jules Lefèbvre had never acted before and he turned out to have tremendous force. This is equally true for Mehdi Nebbou and Arieh Worthalter who play Simon and Damien, the two husbands.

Your film explores openly the characters' psychology; we virtually participate in this.

I worked with each actor separately beforehand: these sessions of dramatic character development were based on classical methods that you could say were Stanislavski inspired. Then the actors met - their characters met - and we started readings, rehearsals and so on. So when we arrived on the set it had all been prepared. Everything was in place for me to set up accidents, provoke the unexpected and see how that impacted.

I don't want the actors to react: I want the characters they're playing to take over. And for this to happen, the psychology of each part had to be worked on beforehand. I don't believe in genius: I believe in work.

There's something intensely feminine about this film.

Duelles is a film for and about women. As all my feature films are. And I hope they're a bit feminist too as I am myself, very much. Do my films succeed in being really «feminine»? I hope so. My favourite compliment, naturally, is when a female spectator comes up to tell me she had the impression the film was made by a woman. I've always found it easier to talk about myself through female characters: maybe it offers me an easier way to express my own feminine side. There's my masculine side too, that tries to pierce the mystery of the being he finds the most fascinating of all. When you create in writing the character of a woman, you have to slip under her skin and search for the woman within you, and thus discover what links us intrinsically.

Another lead «character» is the house: it can't have been simple to choose it.

For the story we needed a «twin» house: in other words two houses that look like one. *Duelles* is also a story about «neighbours in mirror projection». Alice and Céline started off as neighbours before they became best friends. Then they each had a son within a few months of each other. We treat the two families as «mirror projections» throughout. The ambivalence of this house must strike the spectator. It's a house that appears pleasant and beautiful but also provokes anxiety and uneasiness. It took us months to find it: this twin house is the main stage for the story so it was crucial to find a rare, unusual place. We struck lucky and our production company

handled the affair brilliantly. It's an extremely agreeable place to be in with flowering gardens and tall protective trees, but the daunting building with its white walls makes us think of the hotel in *The Shining*. The slightly asymmetric architectural features aren't immediately visible and this creates an inexplicable feeling of unease when we eventually notice them. We needed a sense of overall perfection that soon had us suspecting there was some weird stuff going on behind the smooth facade...

The film score is very developed, very «Anglo-American» too.

Music is my second great passion, after film. The music in a film has a «meta-psychological» function, it has to enrich the whole by telling the audience what can't be said or conveyed by the story, the direction or the actors. It's like a portal into a «fourth dimension»: our deepest, most intimate inner self. Because of the style of this project and the references, I wanted a full original score. We even recreated the songs from that era that were played on the radio or on a record player. I wanted the film to have a totally homogenous identity.

My composer Frédéric Vercheval and I tried to work on wide-scale orchestral music with real themes that spring from the psyches of Alice and Céline. I wanted music that would reflect the psychological and emotional states of the two heroines. We drew from Bernard Herrmann's throbbing and anguish, Howard Shore's mystery and tension, Philippe Glass's hypnotic repetition and poignant melody. We added numerical sounds to the classical orchestra to obtain specific sounds from the characters' inner selves. It's important that the spectator can enter a familiar, reassuring world that he already knows, and then glide into music that's more modern and unsettling, more «David Lynchian».



FILMOGRAPHY & BIOGRAPHY

OLIVIER MASSET-DEPASSE

From his first shorts, *Chambre Froide (Cold Room)*, 2000, and *Dans l'ombre (In the shadows)*, 2004, Olivier Masset-Depasse has filmed determined women characters who are ready to do anything to reach their goals. Olivier was awarded about sixty prizes for these two films in festivals around the world.

His first feature, *CAGES*, 2006, is about a destructive and passionate love affair, it was shown in international festivals including Toronto and Rome, and was received enthusiastically by audiences in Belgium.

His second feature, *ILLEGAL*, a socially aware, psychological thriller, was very successful with audiences and critics. It was selected for numerous festivals and won many awards: *Prix SACD* (Cannes Film Festival, 42nd Directors' Fortnight); *Valois d'Or* (Angoulême Festival du Film Francophone, France); *Best Feature Film* (Der Neue Heimatfilm, Austria); *Bayard d'Or* for best actress to Anne Coesens (Namur Festival du Film Francophone, Belgium); *Best director and special mention for Anne Coesens* (Festival du Film de Varsovie, Pologne); *Best Francophone Film TV5 Monde*; *FIPRESCI prize for best actress for Anne Coesens* (Palm Springs Festival); *Magritte Best Actress Award for Anne Coesens* and *Magritte Best Supporting Actress award for Christelle Cornil*.

It was selected as the Belgian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 83rd Academy Awards; nominated as best foreign film in the French Césars, 2011; shortlisted for the PRIX LUX 2010.

In 2015, Canal + chose Olivier to direct one of the network's original creations, *SANCTUAIRE*, that won the FIPA d'Or for best screenplay and for best actress in Biarritz that same year. At present he's preparing *LARGO WINCH: Le prix de l'argent (The Price of Money)* produced by Versus production and Pan Européenne.

CAST

Veerle BAETENS	Alice (<i>The Broken Circle Breakdown, The Ardennes</i>)
Anne COESENS	Céline (<i>Illégal, The Break TV Series</i>)
Mehdi NEBBOU	Simon (<i>Munich, Body of lies, Josephine Single & Fabulous</i>)
Arieh WORTHALTER	Damien (<i>Eternity, Razzia, Promise at Dawn</i>)
Jules LEFEBVRE	Théo
Luan ADAM	Maxime

PRODUCERS

VERSUS PRODUCTION

Versus production was founded by Jacques-Henri and Olivier Bronckart in 1999. The company is a major player in the Belgian film business and a solid partner for international co-productions. Versus production mainly produces fiction feature films.

With the desire to identify, support and accompany film-makers who propose powerful personal worlds (Bouli Lanners, Olivier Masset-Depasse, Joachim Lafosse, Stefan Liberski, Guillaume Baloji & Stéphane Malandrin), Versus upholds talented film-makers who represent the cinema of today and of the future.

HAUT & COURT

Haut et Court is an independent production and distribution company, founded by Carole Scotta in 1992, with the aim to discover and accompany emerging talents, both French and from overseas. Starting with these talents (Laurent Cantet, Emmanuelle Bercot, Gilles Marchand, Bertrand Bonello among others) and for the last twenty years, the company has made their reputation for visionary eclecticism and unlimited curiosity.



CREW

Director **Olivier Masset-Depasse**

Screenplay **Olivier Masset-Depasse** and **Giordano Gederlini**
with the collaboration of **François Verjans**, based on the novel **Derrière la haine** by Barbara Abel,
published by **Éditions Fleuve Noir**

Adaptation & Dialogues **Olivier Masset-Depasse** and **Giordano Gederlini**

Production **Versus production** (Jacques-Henri Bronckart), Belgium
Coproduction **Haut et Court** (Carole Scotta, Simon Arnal, Caroline Benjo, Barbara Letellier), France
Savage Film (Bart Van Langendonck), Belgium

Cinematographer **Hichame Alaoui**

Sound engineer **Olivier Struye**

Editor **Damien Keyeux**

Set designer **Anna Falguères**

Costumes **Thierry Delettre**

Composer **Frédéric Vercheval**

1st Assistant Director **Louna Morard**

Sound Editor **Marc Bastien**

Mixer **Thomas Gauder**

Line producer Gwennaëlle **Libert**

CREDITS

Produced by **Versus production**

Haut & Court

Savage Film

Voo et Be tv

RTBF (Télévision belge)

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