



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2025 OFFICIAL SELECTION
OUT OF COMPETITION

78th Cannes International Film Festival – Out of Competition

THE RICHEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

A film by
Thierry KLIFA

A **Récifilms** production
In co production with **Versus Production**



Runtime : 121 minutes
Image Format: 2.39 | Sound Format: 5.1 | Language: French

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

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CREW

Director: Thierry KLIFA

Screenwriters: Thierry KLIFA, Cédric ANGER, and Jacques FIESCHI

Original Music: Alex BEAUPAIN

Director of Photography: Hichame ALOUIÉ

Editor: Chantal HYMANS

Costume Designers: Jürgen DOERING, Laure VILLEMÉR

Production Designer: Eve MARTIN

Casting Director: Sarah TEPER

Sound: Fabrice OSINSKI, Olivier MORTIER, Thomas GAUDER

Line Producer: Laurent PERROT

Post-Production Supervisor: Aurélien ADJEDJ

Produced by: Mathias RUBIN (Récifilms) France

Co-produced by: Jacques-Henri BRONCKART and Tatjana KOZAR
(Versus) Belgium

CAST

Isabelle Huppert (Marianne Farrère)

Laurent Lafitte (Pierre-Alain Fantin)

Marina Foïs (Frédérique Spielman)

Raphaël Personnaz (Jérôme Bonjean)

André Marcon (Guy Farrère)

Mathieu Demy (Jean-Marc Spielman)

Joseph Olivennes (Raphaël d'Alloz)

Micha Lescot (De Veray)

Paul Beaurepaire (Charles Spielman)

SYNOPSIS

The richest woman in the world: her beauty, her intelligence, her power.

A photographer: his ambition, his audacity, his madness.

A love at first sight that sweeps them away.

A mistrustful heiress fighting to be loved

A watchful butler who knows more than he lets on.

Family secrets. Astronomical donations.

A war where anything goes.

INTERVIEW WITH THIERRY KLIFA

Your film is loosely inspired by the so-called “Bettencourt affair.” How did this story first catch your attention?

I started following the case as soon as it hit the headlines. But beyond the media frenzy, I quickly felt compelled to understand what was unfolding, on both a personal and a broader, universal level. I read, I researched, trying to get beyond the media coverage and uncover what was really at stake. What I found was a complex, deeply human story. A moving family saga, full of secrets and buried history, set against a backdrop that is still largely unexplored in France: that of powerful industrial families, some of whose influence was built in the shadows—particularly through collaboration during the war.

That’s when I realized I could draw on this material to create something new. Not to retell a sensational news story, but to craft a fictional and universal narrative. That’s when I knew I wanted to turn it into a film.

The film is often quite funny, particularly thanks to the character of Pierre-Alain Fantin, played by Laurent Lafitte. Why did you choose comedy as the tone to tell this story?

Together with Cédric Anger, and later Jacques Fieschi, we chose comedy as a way to approach this deeply human material with a certain distance. The goal wasn’t to invite pity for the emotional struggles of the ultra-wealthy, but rather to show how money can magnify the tensions in human relationships. To me, this isn’t a story to judge, but one to watch unfold. It raises questions, it can be unsettling at times—and that’s exactly what makes it compelling.

One of the film's central themes is the family's past involvement in collaboration and antisemitism. Was it important for you to address that?

It was essential because that was one of the things that initially drew me to the real-life story. I didn't approach it as a message to deliver, but rather as an undercurrent that runs through the narrative, giving it tension and depth. If the film has a political dimension, it's almost in spite of itself, it emerges naturally from the weight of historical truth.

I never wanted that aspect to overshadow the comedy or the fictional drama, but I felt it was important not to look away from it. What I depict is a kind of casual, everyday antisemitism—woven into the way some of these characters were shaped, by their world and their era.

How did you approach writing and directing actors when dealing with characters who are often quite unsympathetic?

I never tried to make these characters likable, or to force any emotional attachment. What mattered was staying as close as possible to their inner truth. They are both monstrous and deeply childlike. If emotion does emerge, it's through their vulnerabilities, their solitude. I was determined to avoid pathos. These are larger-than-life characters, marked by their era, singular, sometimes excessive and that's precisely what makes them so fascinating. You can't be afraid of their darker sides.

And once they were embodied on screen, the actors didn't try to soften them or make them lovable at all costs. They played them without judgment, without trying to redeem them—and that's exactly what gave the story its full power.

How did Isabelle Huppert, Laurent Lafitte, Marina Foïs and Raphaël Personnaz make these roles their own?

Isabelle Huppert plays Marianne Farrère, a woman of many layers—by turns seductive, fragile, hard, and powerful.

Marina Foïs takes on the role of her daughter and heir, Frédérique, a withdrawn figure, a silent observer of an intimate drama. Her character suffers without ever expressing it outright, and it's that opacity Marina manages to make deeply moving.

Laurent Lafitte, as the photographer Pierre-Alain Fantin, brings a controlled exuberance to the role. He never slips into caricature, which is remarkable given the nature of the character.

Raphaël Personnaz plays the butler—a seemingly secondary figure who gradually becomes central. He's a man crushed by the system he serves, caught between loyalty, class dynamics, and a machinery that's far beyond his control.

What emotion does your direction aim to capture through the intimacy of the close-up?

In this film, everyone is watching, scrutinizing one another. There's a certain directness, even a confrontation, in their interactions, and the close-up allows that intensity to come through. It creates a kind of intimacy, a complicity with the viewer: since these characters exist in a world of their own, almost sealed off, the camera tries to pierce that world from within.

How do you approach the presence of money, whether overt or suggested?

The French upper bourgeoisie is a social class rarely depicted in cinema—its narrative, its codes, its insular world. Together with Hichame Alaouié, our cinematographer, we set one rule: nothing should feel ostentatious or flashy. On the contrary, everything had to be conveyed with a sense of restraint, almost neutrality. The setting is a beautiful house, with a stunning garden and elegant objects, but nothing is presented as a display of wealth. That kind of luxury fascinated me: the kind that doesn't show off but is felt everywhere. I worked with Eve Martin on production design, and her contribution was crucial to this vision.

Wealth is also expressed through clothing. How did you approach the costume design?

Together with Jurgen Doering and Laure Villemer, we placed great importance on the costumes, because they communicate so much without a single word. Isabelle Huppert's character, for example, wears 70 different outfits throughout the film — never the same look twice. I wanted the sense of luxury to be both visible and invisible: something you perceive, something you feel, like a secret — but never something overt. These are characters who do everything not to draw attention to themselves — and that's precisely where their power lies. The costume becomes both armor and a coded language.

The film features a surprising musical interlude. What inspired that?

That scene came about quite naturally. When Pierre-Alain Fantin takes Marianne to that nightclub, it's as if he's opening a door to another world — one she doesn't know, one she never would have entered on her own. He's trying to show her everything she could be, everything that remains out of her reach. The song, performed by Anne Brochet herself and written and composed by Alex Beaupain, becomes a suspended moment, almost outside the narrative. It says a great deal about Marianne's fragility.

You made a bold visual choice by inserting black screens throughout the film. What was your intention?

It was a stylistic decision I made quite early on. The film is a polyphonic narrative and the black screens help structure that multiplicity. I chose to retain the media-saturated dimension of the original story, inevitably distorted through the lens of public opinion. These black screens bring us back to the public dimension of the affair, but above all, they allow each character's perspective to emerge independently from the dialogues.

BIOGRAPHY – THIERRY KLIFA

Thierry Klifa began his career as a journalist for the French film magazine *Studio*. In 2001, he stepped behind the camera with the short film *Émilie est partie*. He went on to direct several feature films, including *Une vie à t'attendre* (2004), *Le Héros de la famille* (2006), *Les Yeux de sa mère* (2011), *Tout nous sépare* (2017), and *Les rois de la piste* (2024). He also directed the documentary *André Téchiné, cinéaste insoumis* in 2019.

Alongside his film work, Klifa has directed several stage productions, collaborating notably with Fanny Ardant on plays such as *L'Année de la pensée magique* (2011) and *Croque-monsieur* (2016).

The Richest Woman in the World is presented as an official selection out of competition at the Cannes Film Festival 2025.