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PRESENTS

LAETITIA DOSCH

MONTPARNASSE BIENVENÜE

A FILM BY LÉONOR SERRAILLE

Graphic design: *Be for Films*

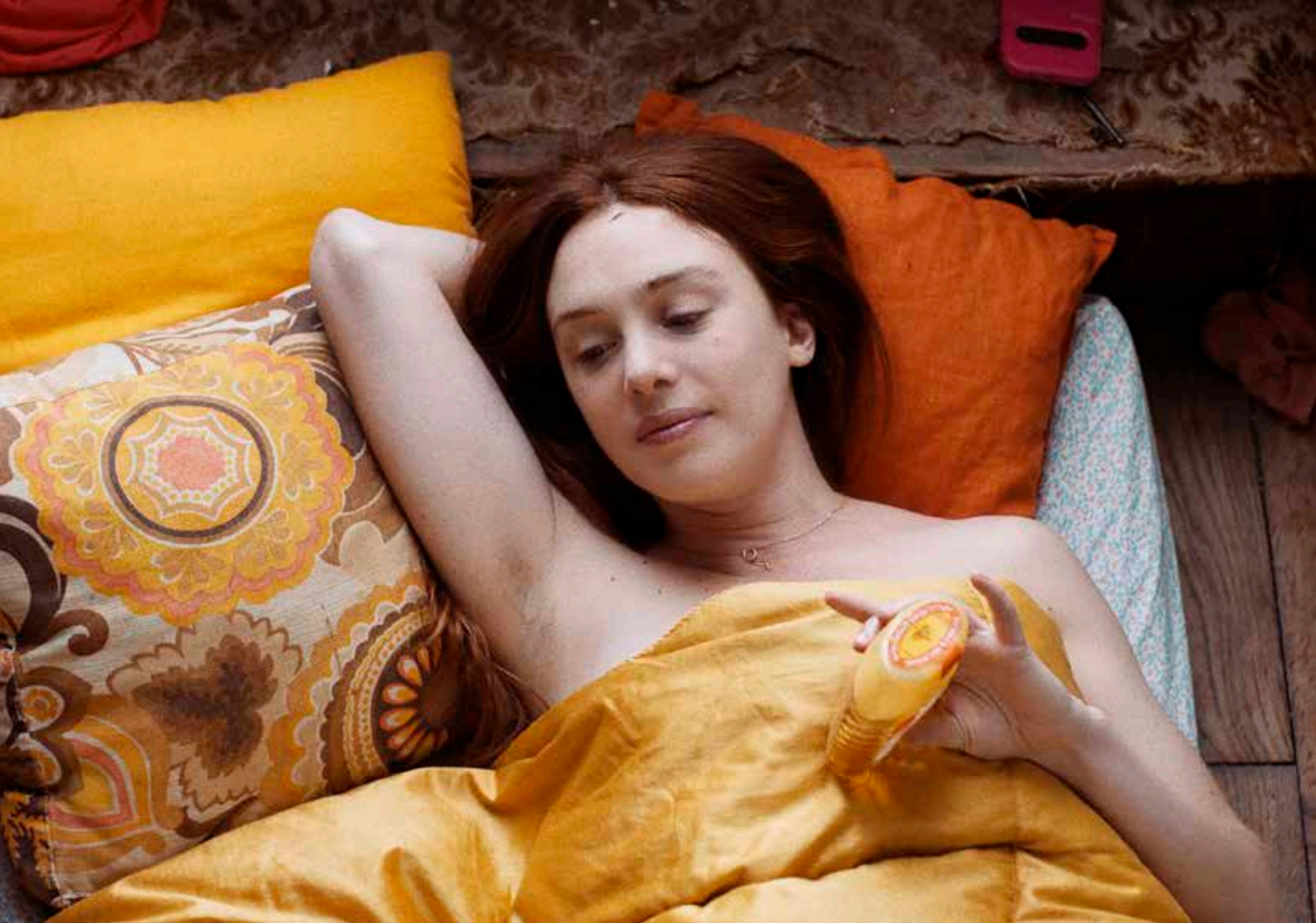
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MONTPARNASSE BIENVENÜE

JEUNE FEMME



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SYNOPSIS

Broke, with nothing but her cat to her name and doors closing in her face, Paula is back in Paris after a long absence. As she meets different people along the way, there is one thing she knows for sure: she's determined to make a new start and she'll do it with style and panache!



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

After having studied literature in Lyon, Paris and Barcelona, Léonor Serraille was accepted at La Femis (The French State Film School) in the screenplay writing program. After graduating, she directed the 16mm short film, "BODY", with Nathalie Richard, which was selected for the Brive, Créteil and Osnabrück Film Festivals. "JEUNE FEMME" ("MONTPARNASSE BIENVENUE"), her graduation screenplay, is her first feature film, with Laetitia Dosch in the title role.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This movie came to be because I wanted to sketch the portrait of a very particular female character confronted with the solitude of a big city, over the span of a winter. In everyday life, I'm often attracted to people with strong personalities and their many contradictions. They surprise and unsettle us, for even if they aren't easy-going, they are brimming with life and tenderness. I'm quite fond of people with these strong yet vulnerable personalities, who often end up betrayed by their qualities and ennobled by their apparent flaws. I wanted to tackle the subject of love like a thirst to be quenched, a well to be filled - an all or nothing. Between this "all or nothing" hover equal parts hope and a propensity for living on the edge, downfalls, and implosions.

As the character of Paula took shape, so did the screenplay of a portrait-like or character driven film. My ambition was to relate her chaotic journey in a resolutely contemporary Paris that is at times hostile and others welcoming, but above all making sure that she "makes it," no matter what. In other words, a strong woman who pulls us irresistibly along into the maelstrom of her life, but who emerges free.

My intent was to get inside Paula's life and the difficult circumstances she has been placed in, in order to be at the heart of her gradual metamorphosis, which marks her transition from a girl into a woman, and her evolution from her status as an object to that of a subject.

The film is designed to convey the inner construction of her personality. As though peeling off the layers of an onion, Paula's character starts taking shape and revealing itself through her various encounters with a string of different men and woman. This is where her exuberance for life, her numerous ways of interacting, adapting, brushing herself off and getting back on her feet again all come into play.

Paula has a child's endless energy and a tourist's innocence. Like a small animal, she's engaged in an endless quest for her comfort zone. She displays an array of talents that often fall short in most people who consider themselves grownups: fervor, humor, rebelliousness, freedom. This lust for life was what I really wanted to depict.

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

Jeune Femme [Young woman] which is **Montparnasse Bienvenue's** French title, could have been called **Young Women** as the entire crew is made up of women: cinematographer, sound engineer, editor, sound editor, production designer, music composer, producer...

For **Body**, my medium-length film, I had for the most part called upon fellow students from La Femis Film School, and as I appreciated their work and our collective energy, we continued working together. It wasn't a deliberate choice to have an all-women crew, but now that it's turned out that way I am very proud: it's important to have a growing number of women in key positions.

This fact enormously enriched the film shoot. For many of us it was our first feature film and we were all very enthusiastic and committed to a challenge that was almost beyond our reach. We worked with a great deal of freedom, including the staging. I tended to begin with sequence shots (a natural extension of my writing) but afterwards, with the editor, we sometimes ended up with an entirely other type of approach, very "cut" (like for the job interview): each step of the way I tried to make everyone feel free to propose and test new things. The shoot's very intense rhythm continuously forced us to find solutions and be reactive. Working as if in a constant storm this way was liberating. The film shoot was much like the main character: dynamic and exuberant. It was entirely possible for a production intern or the grip to end up playing a role at the last minute, and that created an unexpectedly exciting and delightful atmosphere.





This freedom can give the impression that some sequences were improvised.

And yet in reality it was quite the contrary. The screenplay was very dense and extremely detailed. It was originally 140 pages, and during the rewriting and editing stage, to avoid the pitfall of making a chronicle, we had to keep refocusing the story around Paula.

I enjoy the writing stage immensely. I studied literature and I first thought I was going to become a writer. It was only in skipping classes to assiduously go to the movies, and in particular seeing Naomi Kawase's *Shara* (2003) and Katsuhito Ishii's *The Taste of Tea*, that I realized there was something else besides literature... But writing dialogue is still a great pleasure for me. Staging a woman in the city wasn't enough; I needed to invent a personal lingo for this character, who is elusive at first, but brave. I also wanted to pay tribute to people who speak up when it's necessary. There was a little improvisation, but only when it was needed for certain scenes – I'm thinking about the sequences with Lila, the little girl, where the text is secondary and it is important to grasp the fragile connection between Paula and the child; or when a fight breaks out to "stir things up" between two characters. Of course, the actresses and the crew also made suggestions that caused me to constantly adapt my screenplay and rewrite the dialogue. For example, Laetitia Dosch invented the original hairstyle that Paula comes up with in the grocery store to hide the scar on her forehead! But otherwise my general impression was that Laetitia wanted to work from a precise text.

The film opens, however, on grunts and a physical blow rather than actual dialogue.

The audience's introduction to Paula is akin to a head-on collision, and it was a challenge to construct something endearing building on this onslaught. I thought about her trajectory as though it was the morphing of an animal into a person. She starts from a practically bestial lack of self-restraint, a logorrhea, to end up with a certain level of self-awareness and robustness.

During the editing process, we found a parallel between the first dark shot from behind, with her bitter ranting, and the very last shot. What was important was Paula's porosity, the way she soaks up the encounters she has with others. She changes like a chameleon, even if it means changing identities, like in the metro, when Yuki thinks she recognizes a childhood friend, or when she pretends to be a fine arts student to get work as a babysitter. Even when she assumes a false identity, she delves into things and moves forward. I wanted the audience to be an active participant in this transformation: this is why ellipses played a crucial role in every stage of crafting the film. The character surprises you, takes unexpected paths when reaching crossroad moments in her life, and sometimes her most exuberant behavior is the one that works best – I myself observed this in overdoing it for job interviews!

Did you have Laetitia Dosch in mind when you wrote MONTPARNASSE BIENVENÜE?

No, I didn't have a specific actress in mind. After I'd seen her in Justine Triet's *Age of Panic* (2013) and in a few spectacular videos on the internet, I wanted to meet her. She seemed to echo certain sides of Paula. But it was our real-life meeting, so her personality, that convinced me to alter the way I had written the character. When I "googled" her, I'd been struck by the contrast between ultra-glamorous photos of her and others that weren't at all, which had made me think of Anna Thomson in Amos Kollek's *Sue* (1997).

I was in fact looking for an actress who could play the character's entire emotional range, but who could also contradict what was written. Laetitia can't be pigeonholed, she is upfront, joyful, exuberant, but I also saw a sadness that corresponds to Paula's emotional pain, her broken side. Her whimsicality is a given, but the other extreme could emerge as well. The actress had to be capable of tapping into this darker side.

She reminded me of Patrick Dewaere and Gena Rowlands. She has the same ability to be transported from one state to another, from brute energy to a melancholy gentleness, and that touched





me. Laetitia is like a multi-stringed instrument. She can be a femme fatale, or on the contrary icy, adolescent, childish. The range of moods and emotions she can convey is staggering. In her one woman show called *Un Album*, she plays eighty different characters. Paula has a side to her that is a true "performer" in the artistic sense of the term, possibly because when you have nothing left to lose, the slightest action requires pushing your own limits, delivering another record performance.

Did this constantly evolving identity end up imposing a specific style on the film?

The expression of the character's multiple facets in particular called for work on the film grain. Until then, I had only worked with 16mm film; my cinematographer worked in pre-production with the colorist to find the right optical/grain balance in the digital camera because she knew I was worried about the switch from film to digital. She worked on tones, ranging from cold to warm, between which Paula tends to be torn. The image had to echo what she was experiencing, and the editing had to breathe along with her, become one with her, so that she could say or live very harsh things yet then glide through warm and sensual scenery, which act to offset and reflect her different faces. The result had to be as vibrant as she is, not express some concept or follow some set of rules. Indeed, Paula is the concept.

There is, however, a form of violence in the character's malleability: to get a job as a salesclerk at a "Panty Bar" in a shopping mall, she lets herself be entirely made over.

Yes, it's a double-edged sword: this fragmented city life is hurtful. Behavior and speech codes have to be adhered to, and though you wouldn't think it, working all day selling bras ends up rubbing off on you.

This is something I personally experienced. But this wasn't about making an autobiographical story. With Paula, I needed to live through that episode again, but with someone who could manhandle people, who could take pleasure in this straying. I'm also sensitive to the fact that, as women, the

city doesn't belong to us in the same way it belongs to men. There are very few women brave enough to go out in a city dressed exactly as they please, swaggering about freely. Paula is somewhat of a role model in that sense.

There are similarities between the constraints that weigh on Paula and all women, and the way in which she approaches Ousmane, the overqualified watchman at the shopping mall, who is a black man.

My boyfriend is black and he always has the impression that he is going to be asked for his identity papers, as if he's done something wrong. I wanted this issue to be in the film, but more in the background. There is even a hint of racism in Paula when she approaches Ousmane for the first time, criticizing his suit: she has nothing to her name, but she still thinks herself superior to him. He has to ask her for respect.

Paula's wanderings go through many different spaces, an array of socially contrasted scenery, from Joachim's posh apartment to the mother's suburban house, the maid's room, and Ousmane's apartment in the suburb of Aubervilliers.

There is also intermediary scenery, the metro, which is a place of chance – good and bad luck – where everything is possible, like the encounter with Yuki, and another with the young man in a tie, or when she just walks aimlessly and we hear the song by Gil Evans, *Las Vegas Tango*, which meant so much to me. I wrote the screenplay listening to this piece of jazz that goes from a depressed phase to one where the energy returns, before a highly intense finale. Getting the rights to the music for the film was a dream come true.

Her drifting through these different environments allowed for some satirical touches...

It was important for me that this depiction take place through encounters with well fleshed-out supporting characters that participate in the main character's construction. These portraits within a portrait are sometimes critical, but in a discreet way. For instance, the casting raised political issues for me: why should we have to choose a 50-year-old white actor to play the doctor? The film had to be an extension of real life, and in real life, in France, there are black doctors. That was the case for the doctor at the beginning. As for the gynecologist, I thought about asking Audrey Bonnet to play the role after having admired her fragility on stage. Marie Rémond, Erika Sainte and Léonie Simaga are themselves writers, directors and involved in creative processes. The exchanges we had greatly benefited from their perspectives.

The immense actress Nathalie Richard was my mentor at La Femis Film School. She had the main role in my medium-length film, *Body* and plays Paula's mother in the film. When I think about it, she played a similar role in my training. I hope that these "issues," these critical social aspects, are almost entirely encompassed in these women's interactions. The actresses, as well as their characters, refuse to be restricted to one type, like Paula who, at the beginning, criticizes the photo Joachim took of her, which launched him on the artistic scene.

When Paula lives at the hotel, she watches Douglas Sirk's IMITATION OF LIFE (1959). Was this film an inspiration to you?

There's a very powerful moment in the movie, between a mother and a daughter. The other mother, the blond one, may have money, men and professional glory, but she completely fails at her relationship with her daughter, and realizes it at the funeral of the black mother, whose death is

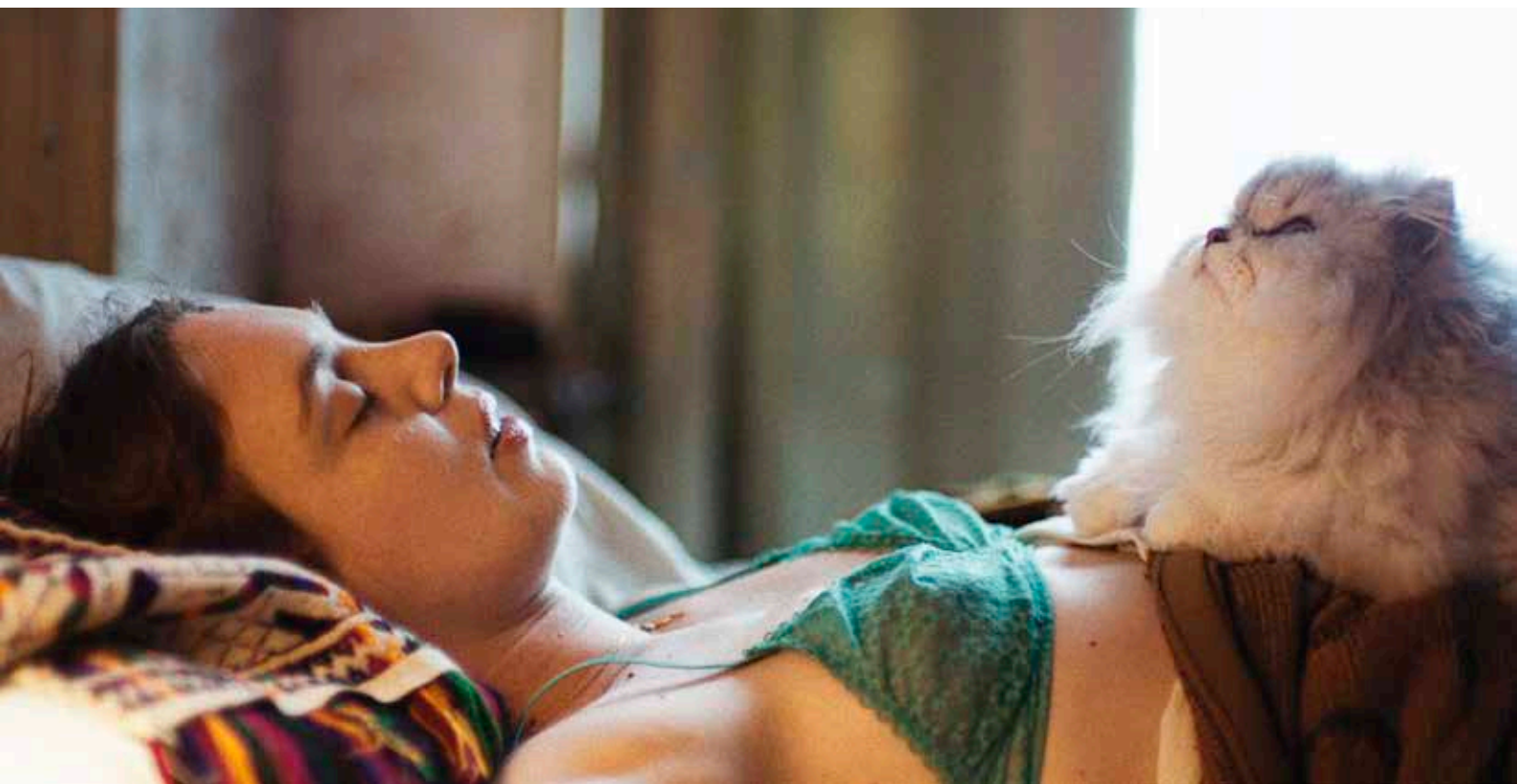
lamented by dozens of friends. When I wrote Paula's story, I wanted there to always be the looming possibility of being terribly wrong, of things going awry, of taking the wrong path and finally perhaps living a life she shouldn't have, an "imitation of life," as the title of Sirk's movie puts it. Like the black mother in the film, Paula, in the end, doesn't have much, but what she has is real, it's neither glorious, nor comfortable, but it's real.

In my mind, there are a handful of films that directly had an influence on *Montparnasse Bienvenue*. In addition to *Sue*, which also left an impression on my director of photography, other strong-character-driven films like Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1992) with David Thewlis, an excellent actor whose female equivalent I was hoping to find; *Wanda* (1970) by Barbara Loden, John Cassavetes' *A Woman Under the Influence* (1975), and *Claire Dolan* (1998) by Lodge Kerrigan. These female characters who are alone, but very dignified, represent points of reference for me, even points of reference for staging and acting. But my inspirations are also literary: I admire Anaïs Nin, Fitzgerald, Woolf, and Zola, his little shop assistant in *The Ladies' Delight*. And graphic novels such as Julia Wertz' *Whiskey & New York*, with its funny and desperate tone, that I asked Laetitia to read.

Why did you choose such a generic title, YOUNG WOMAN, for the original version of the film?

At the very beginning of the writing process, I had imagined Paula photographed by Joachim with a yellow hat, and the title of the photo was, *Young lady with yellow hat*, like for a painting.

Paula questions this frozen abstraction of herself; she can't stand it. When the psychiatrist says; "you're a liberated young woman," the expression sends her into a fit of anger. It's also a simple question that I kept asking myself during the writing process: what does it mean to be a young woman? We are often encouraged to fit into a certain mold, an identity, a definition. "Young woman" should be an expression free of preconceived notions, deliberately undefined. Paula, like the film, is trying to find her freedom, her own identity. But the international film title is *Montparnasse Bienvenue* [*Welcome to Montparnasse*], which pays homage to Paris' Montparnasse neighborhood, where Paula works, goes to dinner with Joachim, etc. This is where I lived when I first came to Paris at the age of 18, in a maid's room. That's the irony of the "welcome" because Paula isn't welcome anywhere, and yet she pushes open every door she can.



CAST

LAETITIA DOSCH PAULA

GRÉGOIRE MONSAINGEON JOACHIM

SOULEYMANE SEYE NDIAYE OUSMANE

LÉONIE SIMAGA YUKI

NATHALIE RICHARD PAULA'S MOTHER

ERIKA SAINTE LILA'S MOTHER

LILAS-ROSE GILBERTI-POISOT LILA

AUDREY BONNET THE DOCTOR

CREW

DIRECTOR LÉONOR SERRAILLE

SCREENPLAY LÉONOR SERRAILLE

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ÉMILIE NOBLET

SOUND ANNE DUPOUY

EDITOR CLÉMENCE CARRÉ

SET DESIGNER VALÉRIE VALÉRO

MUSIC JULIE ROUÉ

PRODUCER SANDRA DA FONSECA
(BLUE MONDAY PRODUCTIONS)

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS BERTRAND GORE & NATHALIE MESURET
(BLUE MONDAY PRODUCTIONS)

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Sound Format 5.1

Ratio 1.66

Running time 97'

Original Version French

Year of production 2017

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