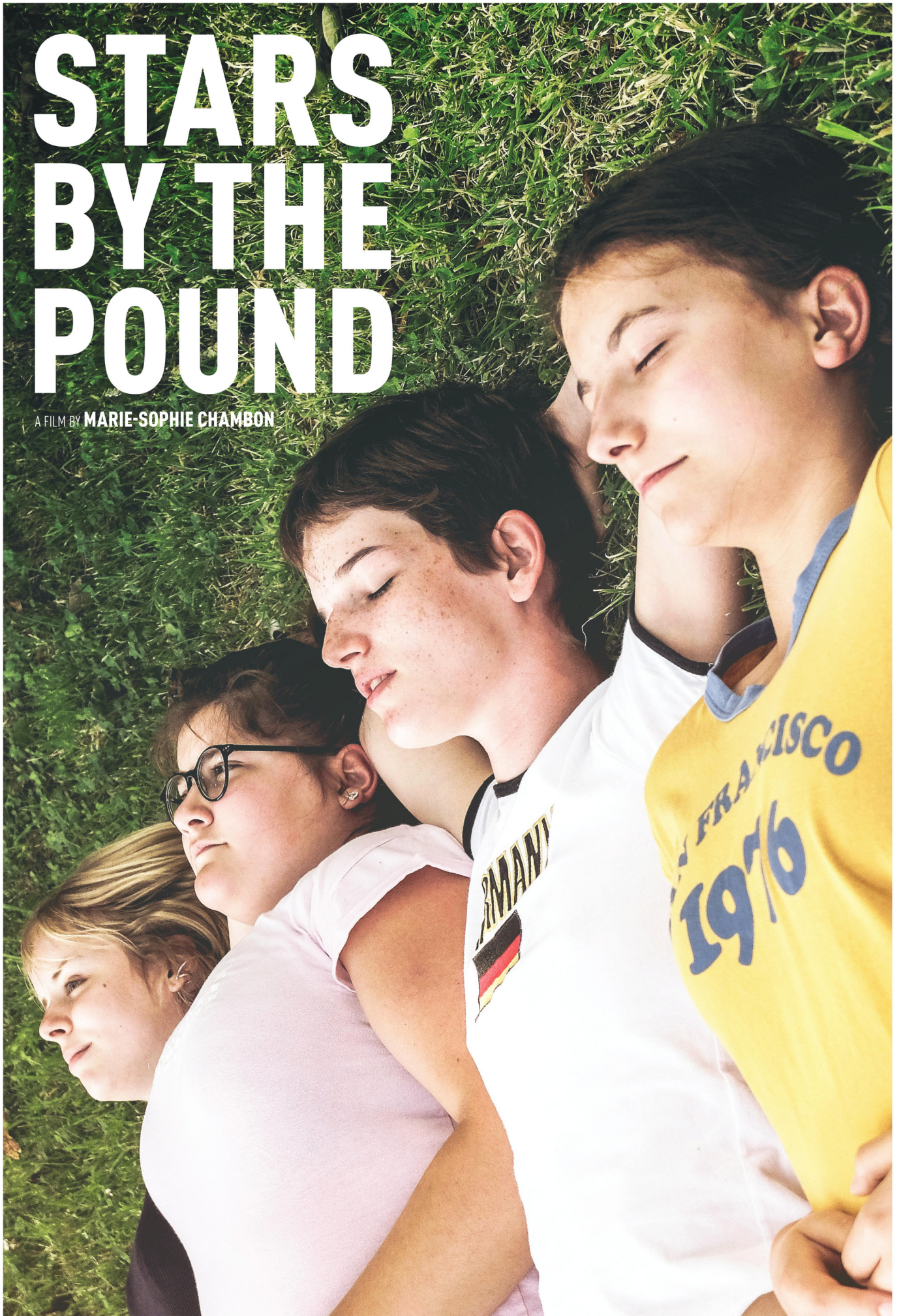


KORO FILMS PRESENTS

STARS BY THE POUND

A FILM BY MARIE-SOPHIE CHAMBON

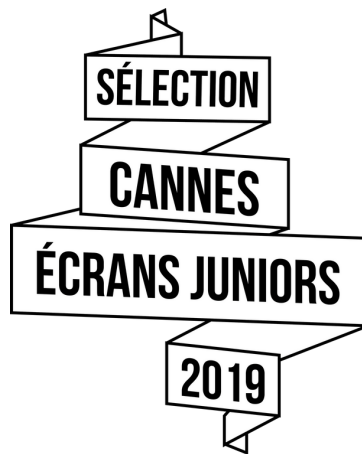


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presents

STARS BY THE POUND

A film by
MARIE-SOPHIE CHAMBON



2019 / 88' / Comedy / France

SYNOPSIS

Lois, 16, has only one dream: becoming an astronaut. However, although she's gifted in physics, she has a big problem: Lois weighs over 200 pounds – a family trait she's inescapably stuck with. Then, just when everything seems lost, Lois meets Amélie, Stannah, and Justine: three teenagers shattered, like her, by life's tough breaks; yet ready for anything in order to leave with her for outer space...



BIOGRAPHY

MARIE-SOPHIE CHAMBON

After studying at the script department of the French school of cinema, the FEMIS, Marie-Sophie loves to write stories about ordinary girls and women with extraordinary destiny. First as co-screenwriter, on the first feature film by Leyla Bouzid *As I open my eyes* in 2015, rewarded with thirty awards at festivals, including Venice, Toronto, Namur, St Jean de Luz ... Then, as a director, starting with 3 shorts films, and her first feature film, *Stars by the pound*, presented at Cannes Screen Junior, last May.

INTERVIEW

MARIE-SOPHIE CHAMBON

***Princess and Planned Obsolescence* were harbingers of your first feature film, *Stars by the Pound*. These short films work as preliminary sketches for your heroine, Loïs, a little girl, then teenager whose relationship with the world is made tenuous by the fact that she is overweight. Has this character been in your thoughts for a very long time?**

Since I began writing, I've always had the character of a plump girl in mind. There is no doubt that it comes from my own childhood experience as my mother, who was very sensitive about physical appearance, put my sister on a diet from a very young age. As a child, I witnessed first-hand this type of suffering. With time, I realized that a woman's overweight body symbolizes in itself everything that a woman isn't allowed to be in our society. Women are supposed to be symbols of desire, and their representation is primarily conceived through the prism of the male gaze. It's the reflection of a mass consumption society. A curvaceous woman, for me, is a figure embodying rebellion, a political figure.

The question of the relationship between this body type and the notion of space is posed straightaway in an opening shot of a hallway where two obese women have difficulty walking past each other.

The question of excess weight is linked to social class. Statistically, we know that there are more obese people in underprivileged sections of the population. So, I had in mind the image of two people stuck in a space that is too narrow for them, because they don't have the means to live in a more spacious apartment.



My movie doesn't talk about precariousness, but it is important to understand that Loïs comes from a modest background. This narrow hallway referred, in my mind, to the notion of a space, and this family, where the bodies can't live in harmony. This sequence raises the following question: how do these bodies manage in a world that isn't adapted for them?

This thick and solid body enables Loïs to have a very sharp understanding of what Earth's gravity represents.

Indeed, this character is acutely aware of the world she belongs to and her fragile place in it as a whole. In the first versions of the scenario, I had imagined that we were in space, and that space was cut up into value scales. Loïs explained that she was a minuscule part of the whole picture, starting with the earth all the way to the representation of the cosmic web, which is one of the most abstract visions we can have of the universe. I told myself that Loïs was aware of these dimensions and that it was painful for her to live on a planet where she is criticized for being half a dozen inches or so too large, while the universe is immense and its limits nearly unfathomable. She is touched by this absurdity. She's too fat for the earth, but what does it represent in relation to the sheer size of the universe? Everything for her is a form of relativity.

Does Loïs' name refer to the female character in *Superman*, a super hero who lives on earth and can fly in the sky?

I started writing this story when I was still a student studying screenwriting at the FEMIS. In the first versions, Loïs' dad was a fan of Superman. He was a military man who had one day met the actress who played Superman's companion on screen, Margot Kidder. My Loïs dreamed that this actress was her secret mother, for she attempted to convince herself that she wasn't her real mother's daughter. I gave up on this idea, but kept the first name in reference to Superman.

Handicap, in the broadest sense of the term, is at the heart of *Stars by the Pound*, through the depiction of four girls who are “a bit special,” to use the expression coined by one of them. This handicap creates a desire to escape from the world, which Superman does thanks to his ability to fly...

Yes, Superman can escape, that's what touches Loïs. It's an image that is very present in her mind: extricate herself from this world, fly... Stannah, stuck in her wheelchair, and Amélie, because of her anorexia, are both, like Loïs, in search of a physical weightlessness that would relieve them from the weight of their bodies. As for Justine, with her psychological problems, she also dreams of escape, in order to flee the world's harshness.



They have this shared dream and that is why they have this very strong meeting of the minds between them.

Your heroine doesn't just escape: she grows up. This is an idea that reframes it as a coming-of-age story.

That's true. Coming-of-age is a great expression in the English language that defines stories in which life lessons are learned. At the beginning of the film, Loïs feels all alone in the world. The film opens with her inner voice, as if we were inside her head. The film's journey leads this inner voice to answer someone: in the end, her letters are no longer addressed to the universe, but to other people. It's a way for me to reconnect her to real life, in the wake of this moment of grace when she takes off with her friends.

Dreaming, your heroine's physical and mental way of escaping opens the door to the supernatural, a genre seldom represented in French cinema.

I love cinema for this very reason: even when it's linked to reality, there is a form of grace operating that comes from the characters' imaginations. We don't know, from that point on if what is played out exists or not, but it doesn't matter, as cinema give us the possibility to represent that which we carry in the deepest part of ourselves.

What was your staging strategy when having to depict the cohabitation of these two worlds, earthly and aerial?

It was very important for me that the special effects be as close to reality as possible. It's the reason why I didn't want to use green screens to tackle space and the universe, but a black background on which we added stars to accentuate the extraordinary dimension of the film without it appearing too artificial. In the sequence where my actresses are on the hospital window ledge, we built a wall to have this big window that looks outside and allows you to experience the feeling of openness and freedom. In the cave sequence, we initially intended to add glow-worms, but the scenery was sufficiently beautiful in itself, with its natural rocks that evoked the universe.

My director of photography, Yann Maritaud, and I, preferred to film it just the way it was. In the same vein, when the heroines fly away, it's a real sky we see behind them. There were more fantasy sequences in my screenplay, but I preferred that they make their way into the film in different ways than with special effects.

Your scenery – Loïs' family's apartment, her high school, the swimming pool, the hospital, the cave, the CNES (National Center for Space Studies) – plays with the alternative ideas of confinement and openings, as well as with these three elements – sky, earth, water...

It's undoubtedly unconscious, but it's true. There's also the idea of the Martian ground, which came to me when we visited the CNES. It's where Loïs has a discussion with another participant in the contest. This place gives you the impression of being at once in the world and out of this world. That's also why I didn't want to hide the access road. I like the idea that Loïs' dream is so concrete. This is what she learns. The film asks this question: what should we do about our fantasies? This coming-of-age story allows Loïs to transform her dream into something real: the desire to visit space necessarily means she has to confront the world.

You also film a story of friendship between characters reminiscent of the Stooges-like French comic book series *Nickel-Plated Feet*. But with female characters. All four are both naïve and acutely conscious of how violent the world is ...

We often represent teenagers today as being very sexualized. Yet, although sexuality was a part of my questioning during adolescence, it was in no way a central part of my life. I often noticed this when I was a camp counselor for teenagers: the passage from adolescence to adulthood goes through something else. I didn't want my heroines to be focused on sexual questions. They lived through violent experiences and so they are at once mature and immature. Emotionally, they are at times a little childish, and at the same time, they are very much aware of the harshness of the world that surrounds them. I enjoyed working with this period of being between two life stages.



How did you work on positioning the film and setting its tone, between drama and comedy, realism and magic realism?

During the writing stage, I like to recount sad things with a light and funny tone. We then worked a great deal with my actresses, during a week of rehearsal with an acting coach, Aurélien Némorin, so that they could appropriate their lines and find the right tone. Much of the dialogue is theirs, in fact. I pushed them towards humor, even during serious moments. As for the magic realism you speak about, I can't help it. It insists on interfering with everything I write! But I wanted the directing to constantly swing between a concrete vision of the world and a fantasy world, which corresponds to the deal we all make with ourselves between our dreams and reality.

Where do your four actresses come from?

I wanted to mix experienced actresses with novices so that they could enrich each other and develop a symbiotic relationship. Kenza Barrah, our casting director, and I spent six months looking for Laure Duchêne, who plays Loïs. Kenza waited at the gate when school let out at middle schools and high schools in Paris, Brittany, and Normandy. It was finally at the Porte de Versailles book fair that she found Laure, who was coming to Paris for the first time.



Several parameters were needed for this role: we of course needed a girl of a certain size, but also a girl who liked science and could appear natural when she acted. Pauline Serieys started in cinema when she was little, in Valérie Lemerrier's *Palais Royal*. I had also spotted her in the OCS series *Grown Ups*, that I very much enjoyed. Angèle Metzger had played in Serge Bozon's *Mrs. Hyde*. I liked her voice. At first, I thought that Angèle was too gentle to play Amélie. I made her improvise a scene where there was a conflict with a nurse, and I saw that she could express anger with strength and conviction. As for Zoé de Tarlé, it took us some time to find her as well. Her role was of a strange, ethereal person; and Zoé, who had already played in a short film, seemed like a natural to me with the feeling she gives you of having just landed from another planet, which I found very beautiful.

Isabelle de Hertogh and Philippe Rebbot, in the role of Loïs' parents have opposite physiques, but are highly relatable as a pair...

The way I saw it, Loïs' parents were opposites, as much as Loïs and Amélie could be. They complete and attract each other, because they are different. I co-wrote *Stars by the Pound* with Anaïs Carpita, whom I met at the FEMIS, and who had co-written Edouard Deluc's *Welcome to Argentina*. I discovered Philippe Rebbot in that film.



I loved his strangeness, his funniness, and the fact that he isn't smooth: we can sense that he carries heavy emotional baggage inside. Philippe brought a great deal to the film. In the sequence where he proclaims his love to his wife, a big portion of the monologue is his. What is also beautiful about him is his generosity of spirit and poet's soul. As for Isabelle de Hertogh, I discovered her in the Belgian movie *Hasta la vista* by Geoffrey Enthoven. Her combined generosity and toughness made an impression on me. She carries within her a struggle that I find deeply touching.

How was the color palette chosen for the film?

I wanted Loïs to gradually go towards color in the clothing she wears. I had been struck by an interview I once saw with a young overweight girl, because she said she had “left black behind.” I like the idea of a moment when we show our bodies as they are and we accept to be looked at and seen as we are. I also wanted the film's colors to be at once lively and faded, which lends it a somewhat timeless character. My costume designer, Marta Rossi, and I worked on costumes from this perspective. For the sequences in the hospital, Frédérique Doublet and Frédéric Grandclère, my set designers, and I chose pastel colors, in faded blue, so that the outside colors would pop and be in stark contrast with them.



CAST

Loïs

Laure DUCHÊNE

Amélie

Angèle METZGER

Stannah

Pauline SERIEYS

Justine

Zoé DE TARLÉ

Jocelyne

Isabelle DE HERTOIGH

Jean-Luc

Philippe REBBOT

Laure DUCHÊNE

Laure was discovered during an open casting call. *Stars by the Pound* is her on-screen debut.

Angèle METZGER

A French actress born on April 7th, 1998 in Paris, her first role in cinema was with Isabelle Huppert in the comedy fantasy *Mrs. Hyde*. Then she appeared in Marie-Sophie Chambon's *Stars by the Pound* where she plays one of the leading roles. She followed up with several short films: *The name of the son* by Louis Delva, *Partagé.e*, by Julien Vallon, and *Anna Vernor II*, by Edouard Carretié. Angèle Metzger is also in Lisa Azuelos' latest film, *Sweetheart* where she plays alongside Sandrine Kiberlain.

Zoé DE TARLÉ

After having studied contemporary dance at the Rayonnement Régional de Paris Conservatory in Paris, she joined Marion Muzac's dance company. Zoé participated in the creation of the stage show, "*Ladies First, from Loïe Fuller to Joséphine Baker*", which was shot in France and Belgium. At the same time, she has appeared in several short films.

Pauline SERIEYS

Pauline started her career as an actress in Valérie Lemerrier's *Palais Royal*. She then appeared in several television films and feature films as she pursued her studies, including *Family for Rent* by Jean-Pierre Améris for which she won the 2016 French César award for Best Young Talent. She then won a major role in Vianney Lebasque's series *Grown ups*, which won awards two years in a row at the La Rochelle Festival for TV Fiction. The last season of *Grown ups* will be broadcast on the OCS channel in the fall. Pauline will next appear in Valérie Donzelli's *Notre Dame*.



CREW

Director

Marie-Sophie CHAMBON

Screenplay

Marie-Sophie CHAMBON

Anaïs CARPITA

1st Assistant

Camille SERVIGNAT

DOP

Yann MARITAUD

Sound

Ludovic ELIAS

Matthieu MICHAUX

Raphaël SEYDOUX

Set

Frédérique DOUBLET

Frédéric GRANDCLÈRE

Editor

Julie DUPRÉ

Executive Producers

Diane JASSEM & Céline

CHAPDANIEL (KORO FILMS)

Co-producers

Umedia

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Sound Format	5.1
Shooting Format	2K
Ratio	Scope
Running Time	88'
Language	French
Year of Production	2019
Country of Production	France

INTERNATIONAL SALES



28 avenue des Villas - 1060 Brussels - Belgium

28 rue Fourcroy - 75017 Paris - France

+ 33 6 14 34 37 55

info@beforfilms.com

www.beforfilms.com