

BELLEMoon PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

Ayiti mon amour

(HAÏTI MY LOVE)

A FILM BY GUETTY FELIN

OFFICIAL SELECTION

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2016



WITH JOAKIM COHEN ANISIA UZEYMAN JAURÈS ANDRIS PASCALE FAUBLAS JAMES NOËL JUDITH JEUDY SIMBI DUPLAN



Writer and Director: **Guetty Felin**
Cinematographer: **Hervé Cohen**
Editors: **Stephane Vernet Augustion**
and **Isabelle Devinck**
Sound: **Yeelen Cohen**
and **Sapha Samedy Junior**
Second Camera: **Jazmin Jones**
Executive Producer: **Mira Nair**
Producers: **Guetty Felin, Hervé Cohen**
and **Jessica Anthony**

Length: 86 minutes

Year: 2016

Languages: Creole, French, English and Japanese
with English Subtitles

Production: BelleMoon Productions,
in association with 2004Images-Haiti and Granit Films.

Ayiti mon amour

A Magic neo-realist tale

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY GUETTY FELIN

Haiti, five years after the earthquake....

In a coastal town forgotten by the rest of the world, the sea is gaining ground and although the memories of the great disaster still haunts the villagers, life must go on... Shot in the mist and sunlight, *Ayiti Mon Amour* is the story of old wounds that need healing in order to begin anew. The film presents three stories that intertwine, collide and co-exist. There's a coming of age story of an awkward teenage boy (ORPHÉE). Orphée who is currently grieving the loss of his father, is in between ages, in between cultures and in between worlds; fantasy and reality. He has a great fascination for Mangas and is currently teaching himself Japanese. It seems that no one really understands him except for Jaurès the fisherman, his only friend. One day after a freak encounter with an underwater sea creature he develops special electrifying powers, but with power comes certain responsibilities...

The world seems to be changing much too rapidly for JAURÈS the old fisherman. These days Jaurès is obsessed with the environmental degradation, the rising temperature of the sea and the drought that is starving his cows. But what pre-occupies Jaurès the most is his beloved wife ODESSA who is bedridden and homesick. Jaurès is determined to do everything to make her well again even if it means putting his own life in peril...

Lastly, there's the beautiful mysterious AMA, part muse, part wandering soul but also the main character of a novel by an uninspired WRITER. After 5 years of waiting for him to finish his masterpiece, she decides to leave him and his story, to find her own life.



The cast



JOAKIM COHEN (ORPHÉE)

Joakim is Haitian American and French with a cultural identity similar to the character he incarnates. He is currently a sophomore at Bates College in Maine studying music and biology. Playing Orphée is his debut role in a feature length film.

ANISIA UZEYMAN (AMA)

She is a Rwandan-born Belgian theater and film actress. Her film credits include: Nid de Guepe, Her last cinema role was in TEY By Alain Gomis, which premiered in competition at the 62nd Berlinale in 2012. Anisia currently lives and works in LA with husband American songwriter/poet/actor Saul Williams.



JAURÈS ANDRIS and JUDITH JEUDY (JAURÈS & ODESSA)

Jaurès and Judith are both non-professional actors. In fact Jaurès is a real fisherman and Jaurès is his real name. Both Jaurès and Judith are inhabitants of Tèsè, Jacmel one of the neighboring hamlets where parts of the film was shot.

PASCALE FAUBLAS (MAMAN)

Pascale Faublas is a Haitian-born well-known artist and artisan. Playing Orphée's mom is her first screen appearance. The beach bungalow where they live in the film is her real home.



JAMES NOËL (THE WRITER)

With over 12 published books of poetry, James Noël is Haiti's most prolific poet and writer of his generation today. Prior to his role in Ayiti Mon Amour (AQ) he starred in *Stones in the Sun* by Patricia Benoit.

SIMBI DUPLAN (SIMBI)

Simbi is an 18 year old High School senior who lives in Washington DC. She has grown up partly in Haiti in America and Europe. This is her first screen appearance role.



Guetty's bio/filmo

I am a Haitian-American filmmaker who has shared her life between America, Haiti and France. My sensibility, vision and cinematic language have been highly influenced and shaped by my life experience in all three countries. I fell in love with cinema at a very early age at the drive-ins in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The "electric shadows" on that glowing screen were a stark contrast to our realities and yet they deeply connected us to the outside world. Cinema, for me, became my own little sanctuary, my personal way of filling those chasms that were wedged by an insidious political system. I began seeing my parents and the adults around me like characters in a film that I was incessantly crafting. Today, after several decades, a few documentaries, some fiction shorts, three narrative screenplays, and a couple of beautiful babies later, cinema is an organic part of who I am. Cinema is how I engage the world around me, how I denounce social and political injustice, how I explore haunting themes such as memory, exile, foreignness, and the unending search for home, while interconnecting our common global humanities.



FILMOGRAPHY

Uptown, Hal Singer Keep The Music Going, Telling Our Stories, Thérèse, Obama, Closer to the Dream, Broken Stones, Ayiti Mon Amour

Co-director of a series of videos and portraits of Haitian artists for the unprecedented exhibiton
at The Grand Palais in Paris, *Haïti deux Siècles de Création Artistique*.

IN THE WORKS

Three feature narratives in development: *A Rooster On The Fire Escape, The Last Mission, Once Upon Three Times*.





8 questions for Guetty Felin

RECORDED FROM VARIOUS Q&A'S

In your film, so many themes collide and intertwine but death seems to be a prevailing one can you talk a little about that?

The film was born out of grief and mourning. I wrote the first treatment on the heels of the devastating earthquake while I was grieving the lives of my compatriots who perished in that tragedy. At the same time I did not want it to be just about grief and loss. The film took longer than I had anticipated to come to fruition but the impetus for it remained the same. But I think it is more about lost souls, alive and dead who are looking for the meaning of life and home, it plays out in all three stories and all the characters.

Why is water so important in your film?

The sea is a main character in the film because it represents the cycle of life and our (Haitians) relationship to water and the sea in particular for cleansing and renewal. It also represents the original birthplace of mankind; that is if you believe that we are descendants of water mammals. To go back to souls looking for home, the film starts underwater, because there's a Voudou belief that when a person dies their soul goes underwater and stay there for a year and a day, then the family must perform a certain ritual that will help the soul to emerge and return on land to find a final resting place, in caves, trees or the homes of the ancestors. In creole those homes are called demanbre. There are two demanbres in the film one in the beginning right before meeting Jaurès the fisherman and one at the very end. They are often dilapidated and left that way, to keep the living from inhabiting them. Anyway, I also often wondered about the souls that never made it to land, the ones that got trapped, so I wanted to create a sort of ritual through the film that allowed them to come home at least symbolically. All the souls even the ones lost in the middle passage.

You obviously succeeded in mixing all these genres it must not have been easy can you talk about making that choice, what was most challenging for you?

The very first drafts of the film were much more ambitious and the stories were more classic in form. But when Haiti lost its momentum and the world had moved on to other tragedies it was hard to finance the film. So I decided to go rogue. I decided to cut my cloth as my executive producer and mentor Mira Nair often says. The first question I asked myself was: what kind of film can I make given all the constraints I had; budget, infrastructure, lack of electricity, limited time? And how do I use these obstacles to my benefit? Was the second question I asked myself. Once I had chosen the location that pretty much dictated the style and rhythm of the film. We are in a coastal town things move at a different pace. From that moment on



the film pretty much dictated itself to me as I was making it. I knew I was going to play with these different genres but was not sure how they would play out next to each other. So I allowed myself a long time in the edit room to try many things. I had scripted two out of the three stories, with minimal dialogues since I was working with non-professional actors and the third one, the one with the writer and his muse (played by Anisia Uzeyman the only real professional experienced actor) was looser in form and the most challenging because it was the most hybrid. I wrote the scenes but no dialogues. There's not much dialogue between them anyway. In the scene in the warehouse with the writer where she's trying to figure out her identity, I gave her the questions and told him to improvise with the answers. Since he is a lexophile, a lover of words, I knew he would do very well. So my bet paid off there as well. My challenge really was how do I let the audience know that she is not real without doing some corny cheesy thing like make her transparent. At first I had written that only small children and animals would see her but then when we got to the big commemorative march it was hard to keep people from looking at her, so that artifact went out the door. We knew there would be a march but we had no idea of how we would choreograph the scene everything was done on the spot in real time. I decided with each scene she was becoming more and more of a real person. First we see her as a timid little girl playing hide and seek, then she investigates who she is, then she becomes her own person and leaves him, becoming more and more concrete in her existence...

So many beautiful encounters and wonderful things that were not written ended up integrating the narrative quite

seamlessly. Editing the film in Haiti also influenced the story and structure, it also allowed me to shoot some additional scenes. There were things that were happening constantly, like the student protest for example, that was not in the script but I felt it needed to be part of the film, which led to this kind of homage scene to the youth and the important role that education plays in Haitian life. That's what I mean by the film dictating itself to me. I worked in a very organic way. While I was editing the film there were all those stories on the news about the bodies of refugees on the shores of Mediterranean Sea and somehow they found their way very symbolically into the narrative as well.

Can you tell us about the making of the film, I understand it's a family affair...

Yes it is. But also a community affair. It really does take a village. I could not have done the film without the help of members of my larger film community friends and some perfect strangers who donated to the Indiegogo campaign and my family who put up with all my caprices. Working with ones family is not often easy but when your family believe and supports your vision it makes it much simpler and also gratifying. My husband (Hervé Cohen) is the DP, my oldest son Yeelen who is a cinema major in college was my assistant and also did sound on the first shoot, his girlfriend (Jazmin Jones) did 2nd camera, my youngest son (Joakim Cohen) plays Orphée and also helped me develop the character, the woman who plays the muse is one of my best friends (Anisia Uzeyman) she's the only non-Haitian in the film. James Noël who plays the writer is the most prolific poet of his generation in Haiti today. The mom (Pascale Faublas) is my friend and a visual artist, the house is her real home. Jaurès the fisherman (Jaurès Andris) I've known him for the last 13 years and Odessa (Judith Jeudy) is the wife of another fisherman from the village. I have to admit it was not an easy film to make given all the issues we were having with basic infrastructures at times it was quite frustrating. Also, I was shooting by day and begging by night because I began filming while the Indiegogo campaign was still going on. But I have forgotten all the difficulties. I was on this high the whole entire time. There was this wonder-



ful feeling of doing a film on my own terms that nourished me all throughout the process. I learned so much about my own strength and tenacity but I also learned to listen more to my heart.

We don't often see many films by Haitian filmmakers, is it hard to make films in Haiti?

Film in Haiti is not as important or as popular as soccer, especially today. We no longer have movie theaters especially in Port-au-Prince, the last ones that remained were destroyed by the earthquake. But prior to that Haiti suffered the same global phenomenon of the disappearance of movie houses. We have some filmmakers but non are as internationally acclaimed as Raoul Peck, who does not really live in Haiti. Furthermore, there aren't too many of us making narratives, more documentaries. The few narratives that are being made are for local consumption very télé novelas-like. We don't have any government support, there isn't any in America either but at least there are grants, foundations, financiers, investors... All of my past films have been co-produced by the French because I lived in France and that's where my filmmaking career began. We have one granting institution FOKAL that sponsors the arts in general but when it comes to films it only supports documentaries. I did manage to get some funding from them to bring in my editor from France to work with the young local editor because it was a kind a mentorship and they are big on that. Also, if you think there's disparity in Hollywood and the international filmmaking arena, it's of course quite abys-



mal in Haiti. When making the film it dawned on me that my film was the first feature-length narrative entirely shot in Haiti by a Haitian-born female director. I think we will be seeing a new generation of filmmakers coming out of Haiti within the next five years because of the film school in Jacmel. I am currently mentoring some young budding women filmmakers locally, they are very timid and lack self-confidence and need a little nudging. They have amazing stories. I am hoping to produce some of their films and bring them to an international audience.

In watching your film I thought of Last year in Marienbad, were you at all inspired by this film?

Thank you for the compliment, I love Alain Resnais. But, no, I was not inspired by that film when making *Ayti Mon Amour*. It is the Haitian people that inspire me. More particularly how they find strength from adversity and hope from vestiges of disaster always with grace and beauty. Just a few weeks after the earthquake my compatriots had returned to normalcy and I remember feeling quite perplexed by it. I thought they needed more time to heal from this unfathomable tragedy. I was deeply inspired by the way they were

mitigating and negotiating this disaster with humor, confusion, hope and poetry and that's in essence what I tried to capture in the film.

Aren't you afraid that people are going to think that your film is too beautiful too poetic to be the real Haiti and therefore be a bit hostile to it?

I don't know what the real Haiti is and I don't think any Haitian person knows either. What is the real America? The real Iran? I think Haiti is multiple like these places. This is not a film about Haiti it is a film about the experience of being in Haiti and it takes you beyond Haiti too. My film is not poverty porn and the form is atypical, it probably will not be a box office hit. But I think it will find its audience because at the same time, I think the audience is ready to see Haiti differently. I trust that. I think I will face some challenges because I am a female filmmaker with an audacious hybrid film and this might disrupt some folks, male and female. There's a great deal of hypocrisy and biases in the way industry, critics, festival programmers, sales agents, distributors, view films directed by women. Men can tell whatever story they like and play with genres and make films

that are contemplative and sometimes slightly experimental and be heralded and considered geniuses. As women and also people of color, we have to make films about suffering, poverty, issue-driven films. We can't be artists. We have to be social workers. It's either one or the other. Take Apitchatong, the Thai filmmaker, whom I kind of call my brother in cinema, because the way he plays with form and genres truly resonates with me, the mystical aspect of his work also speaks to me. That scene in *Uncle Boonmee* where the woman falls in love with the fish is directly from one of our folk tales called *Tezen*. Abbas Kiarostami for example, my cosmic father in cinema is a master at making films that slightly destabilizes the audience and plays with expectations. He believes in not explaining everything to the audience so they can create part of the film in their minds. Both of these filmmakers were often criticized by their compatriots for not "keeping it real" and yet they are the darlings of film critics, festivals, art house cinema distributors, sales agents, producers, you name it.. Of course the road will be laden with roadblocks, because I am a woman and I am black and I am making films in a developing country. I think I will constantly be put in a position to justify my film, my approach every time, but I am well poised to do so every time. I truly believe in my film and I think the sincerity with which I made it can be felt. It does not matter whether it's real or not. But I did have a Haitian viewer say to me that my film is simply "true" and that meant the world to me.

Does the character of Ama, the muse represent Haiti?

That's what I told myself and that's how I wrote it in my notes and what I told the actress who played her. For me, she represented Haiti who is tired of others writing her story and decides to be the author of her own destiny. But then I realized when I was done with the film each one of the characters represented Haiti, in particular they all represented my unique, awkward, frustrating, loving relationship with my native land. I like to say that the film is a kind of declaration of love to this fragile broken, unknown country that's incessantly seeking to be in conversation with the outside world on her own terms. The more the film is shown the bigger the conversation will become.





Recent Haiti Related Work

BROKEN STONES (DES PIERRES BRISÉES)

A feature length documentary written and directed by Guetty Felin



In her latest documentary, award winning Haitian-born director Guetty Felin turns her lenses towards the oldest neighborhood of Port-au-Prince and the most devastated by the earthquake of January 12 2010. She films the lives of people moving through the maze of the ruins and vestige of what was once the imposing cathedral Notre Dame de l'Assumption which has become, for the time, an amphitheater and surreal witness of the living conditions of Haitians in the area. This poetic cinematic fresco mixes children's games, songs and prayers of the congregation, a handicap hero, a group of vociferous women who come to the cathedral square to get away from the harshness of life, writers and poets and a mellifluous flow of other characters lend their voices to the chorus turning the cathedral into a kind of Greek forum where folks express their grief but also their aspirations for the country of their dreams.

BROKEN STONES Trailer



AWARDS

Winner Best Documentary Belize International Film Festival 2012

Grand Prize for Best Documentary at FEMI in Guadeloupe 2013

Selected at:

Caribbean Tales Toronto Film Showcase and Incubator

Festival du film Insulaire de l'Île de Groix 2012

Caribbean Corner, London 2012

Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival 2012

Festival International du Film d'Afrique et des Îles 2012





AYITI MON AMOUR Trailer



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For High Res photos of the Cast, Crew and film scenes
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