

THE ART OF LOVE

In a few simple, and not so simple, examples...

Synopsis

At the moment—the precise instant—we fall in love, a particular music plays within us. For every one of us, the music is different and can strike up when we least expect...

Three Questions for the Actors

- Who are you in the movie and who do you love?
- What, for you, is the Art of Love?
- What have movies taught you about love?

An Interview with Emmanuel Mouret

*How did *The Art of Love* begin?*

I jot down ideas that occur to me in notebooks. Sometimes, they're basic situations. Other times, they're story ideas. To write the screenplay of *The Art of Love*, I fell back on those notebooks, from the most recent to others that go back ten years or more, as was the case for the story of *Amélie* (Judith Godrèche), the young woman who wants to help other people at all costs and encounters some unexpected reactions. So, I took strands of various stories on a single theme: love and desire—a theme that's always interested me.

Why weave the stories together rather than choose a single one?

I wanted the movie to be very intense, rattling along with stories criss-crossing and flowing into each other. Some of them could have evolved into a stand-alone 90' feature, but I wanted to structure the film around crucial moments, a little like a collection of short stories.

The Art of Love picks out a paradox that's very dear to you: the young couple testing their feelings by venturing into adultery; the middle-aged wife who tells her husband she wants to give in to her pent-up desires...

In *The Art of Love*, the various situations explore issues of desire and examine a particular moral dilemma. My characters claim to be free and want to satisfy their desires with complete openness. That amuses and fascinates me. Above all, it allows me to question contemporary mores and, unobtrusively, raise moral issues without ever moralizing.

It's a very roundabout way of getting to say "I love you"!

Some people prefer to take the scenic route than the highway. In movies, you often have two characters who are attracted to each other and jump into bed in the next scene. Looking around me, I notice that it's more complicated than that. To assuage your desire, you also have to assuage your conscience. It's true for everybody, even people that are constantly having affairs. My characters are confronted with moral obstacles and issues that they have to get straight in their own minds and with others. The process of aligning your conscience with your desires, which are by nature unstable, interests me. Moreover, it is a guarantee of a fiction and suspense. When I watch a movie, I want to be impatient to find out what happens next. I apply that to my own movies.

Title cards punctuate the movie with a series of observations: Don't turn down what you're offered; Desire is fickle; Without danger, pleasure is less intense..

*I thought it would be fun to play around with these pieces of advice that might enrich the audience's interpretation of the various situations the characters are confronted with. The title, *The Art of Love*, is of course borrowed from Ovid, who is the go-to guy for anyone writing a manual on love. The characters here, however, don't follow a particular playbook, they are the playthings of their own desires.*

There is no love without music, according to the first title card.

The first story, that of the composer seeking the music of love, is a kind of prologue. In this segment, the music isn't incidental to the story, it's the subject, the heart of the matter. It immerses the audience in the tone of the movie. A playful, colorful, romantic, and occasionally serious, tone.

*Humor and light-heartedness run through *The Art of Love*.*

I take my subject very seriously, but I hope I never take myself seriously. Blending whimsy and a sort of seriousness is vital for me. Humor indicates a sense of perspective, reserve. Schubert said that when he composed a sad piece, he couldn't help throwing in an upbeat note and vice-versa. I modestly adopt the same approach. It's a question of character. I'm not an uncompromising fellow, I waver.

Why the narrator and voiceover?

They keep the story moving forward, while making shortcuts and pulling together the various strands of the story. Film theory tells you not to say what your character is thinking but suggest it, but I get a thrill out of not doing what I'm told. I think the more you say, the richer, more complex and, paradoxically, more enigmatic things become. I prefer the mystery to nestle in the brightest of lights rather

than a hazy glow. It took me some time to find the narrator. A voice can be harder to find than an actor. Philippe Torreton's clear and assertive tone was exactly what I was looking for.

What was your esthetic approach to the movie?

Laurent Desmet, my director of photography since *Change of Address*, and I try to go a little bit further with every film. On *The Art of Love*, we were looking for rhythm, contrast, variety and fluidity. We did a lot of sequence shots, not to set ourselves a challenge but to find an appropriate and lively way of filming characters and situations that are long on dialogue. We wanted to avoid systematically doing shot/reverse shot. The actors had to be in perpetual motion, and the dynamism of the blocking reflects the idea of movement and constantly changing perspectives. We also did a lot of work on the sound, especially anything that is off camera. An *I love you* is interesting and beautiful when spoken by a character the audience can't see.

You film interiors and Paris, but on occasion you also take your characters and their inner turmoil out to the forest.

Living in Marseille, I fell in love at first sight with the Val d'Oise forest on the outskirts of Paris, which enabled us to expand the city and offered an extra contrast at the heart of the film. Paris, old and modern buildings, ruins, forests. *The Art of Love* takes us through a range of backdrops, periods and trends.

You're an actor-friendly director and it really shows in this movie. Let's start with the "old-timers" in your universe, Judith Godrèche and Frédérique Bel.

I wanted to team up with them again even if, in casting, there are always elements of chance, timing and availability. I loved working with them again, as well as with Ariane Ascaride, who was in

Change of Address, and Elodie Navarre, with whom I had a project in the past that never got off the ground.

And the "newcomers": Stanislas Merhar, François Cluzet, Laurent Stocker, Pascale Arbillot, Gaspard Ulliel, Julie Depardieu... What an array of talent!

I was delighted to make their acquaintance. I'm still stunned by how lucky I was. I'd dreamed of working with François Cluzet for years. His enthusiasm was overwhelming. Julie Depardieu was my first choice for Isabelle. Her likability is so obvious that she was a perfect fit for the character of the old friend that Amélie bumps into and convinces to agree to her plan. For me, the contrast with Judith Godrèche works just perfectly. For the rest of the cast, things fell into place wonderfully—everybody I thought of for a part is in the movie! The only character we auditioned for in the traditional sense was William. We were thinking of hiring a young unknown actor. We got the surprise of our lives when Gaspard Ulliel turned up to the audition. And he was the best person for the part.

You have often been described as the heir to the French tradition of literary cinema...

I'm not entirely sure I know what the "French tradition of literary cinema" is. Perhaps it means a certain inclination for irony and a certain way of handling questions of feeling, desire and morality, as if we were in a laboratory where only romantic experiments can be carried out! That's what one finds in 18th century French literature, for example. Personally, I would say that I make story-driven, romantic films, but far removed from any "literary" label. It's a contradiction in terms: by their very nature, films aren't literary.