

A woman with dark hair and red lipstick is looking out of a window. She is wearing a strapless, light blue dress. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the window, creating a soft glow on her face and dress. The background outside the window is blurred, showing some greenery. The word "Elles" is written in a cursive font at the bottom of the image.

Elles



Elles

A film by MALGOSKA SZUMOWSKA

Written by TINE BYRCKEL and MALGOSKA SZUMOWSKA

France, Poland, Germany / 96 min. / 2011 / HD / 2.35 / French, Polish

With JULIETTE BINOCHE, ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER, JOANNA KULIG

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SYNOPSIS

Anne (Juliette Binoche), a well-off, Paris-based mother of two and investigative journalist for ELLE, is writing an article about student prostitution. Her meetings with two fiercely independent young women, Alicja (Joanna Kulig) and Charlotte (Anaïs Demoustier), are profound and unsettling, moving her to question her most intimate convictions about money, family and sex.

INTERVIEW WITH MALGOSKA SZUMOWSKA AND TINE BYRCKEL (SCRIPTWRITER)

Tine Byrckel, how did you come to write *ELLES*, this film about student prostitution?

Tine Byrckel: The original idea came from the producer Marianne Slot who I've been working with for a long time. The media regularly talk about these young women who prostitute themselves to be able to complete their studies. This social phenomenon intrigued her. What did it mean to these young women? What did it say about society? Is prostitution a woman's ultimate liberation as she takes possession of her body, including the right to sell it? Or is it an intolerable submission? We wanted to ask this question without making any judgments, which cinema allows you to do better than any other medium.



How did you come to write the screenplay together?

Tine Byrckel: Marianne and I were looking for a director, male or female, to work on this project. We were familiar with Malgoska's work and had been completely captivated by a rough cut of her feature film "33 Scenes from Life". Malgoska first met Marianne.

Malgoska Szumowska: *I was up for it right away. It was the start of a close collaboration which lasted three years!*

Tine Byrckel: Malgoska is good at filming the universal in all its tiny details. That's how this film had to be made so as not to become moralizing, but rather bring into play each protagonist's responsibility and desire.

How did this four-handed writing process go?

Tine Byrckel: Before meeting Malgoska, I had worked on the structure, bringing together a female journalist and several girls. There was also a reference to Virginia Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway" in the construction of the screenplay, with the day in the life of a woman who is thinking of the dinner she has to prepare. Here too, a dinner is being prepared, but it is a business dinner. The questioning comes from the everyday gestures and dialogues rather than being expressed through great



parables. Then, with Malgoska in Warsaw, we established about a hundred scenes which I used to write the first versions of the screenplay.

Did you investigate prostitution to prepare for the writing of ELLES?

Tine Byrckel: We only conducted research in the field after writing the first versions of the screenplay. In France, we asked the excellent documentary maker H  l  ne de Cr  cy to go out and interview girls. She was so fascinated by their stories that she made a documentary "Escort", which was also produced by Marianne Slot.

Malgoska Szumowska: Before the start of the shoot, I wanted to meet some young female prostitutes. In Poland, I knew from reading the papers that many young female students are forced to sleep with the owners of the rooms they live in. The account of one young girl who was both beautiful and elegant made a great impression on me. From the start of the interview, she only talked about sex, what she did and what she liked to do...

Did you get answers you weren't expecting?

Malgoska Szumowska: To be honest, I must say I was shocked. Shocked by the fact that a girl as pretty and as intelligent derives pleasure from sleeping with men for money. And it wasn't only to meet vital needs such as food and accommodation, but it was also for pleasure and to have a more pleasant life. In fact, it went in a very different direction from the fantasized vision that people have of prostitution!

Tine Byrckel: We met young women who were far more proud and casual than we'd imagined. Worlds apart from the accounts which

are peddled by the media, attention-grabbing stories of young women who have been abused. We didn't want to talk about trafficking or pimps or drugs. We wanted to talk about young women who choose to prostitute themselves, with their avowed goal being to climb the social ladder. It's far more disturbing. There's the question of the object, woman as a sex object, but there's more to it than that. On the one hand, there are men who perhaps ask through sex for a semblance... of love. And on the other hand, women who ask for... objects! All these objects that women want, in keeping with the frantic consumerism of our society, are symbolized by women's magazines. The young women we met want it all and they want it right away. They are caught in a sort of material fever.



Malgoska Szumowska: Another surprise was meeting a girl who was barely 20 years old and who knew more about sex than many women in their late thirties. We started to realize that the film wouldn't just be about the social aspects, but that the subject matter would be much wider. We would talk about women's intimacy.

A strong point of the film is to draw a parallel between the work of the journalist, a woman who has a well-established position in society, and that of female students who prostitute themselves...

Malgoska Szumowska: Absolutely. We do all kinds of things for money. What the woman journalist does in her personal life is to accept a lot of compromises, things she doesn't like. In addition to her work, she spends the day preparing a meal for her husband's boss. She doesn't mention her frustrations and her opinions to him. As a director, I myself sometimes have to do certain things I find unpleasant. Why is sex so different? People sometimes make big compromises. Can we compare this to prostitution?

Tine Byrckel: The character of the journalist, who has difficulties keeping her distance, makes viewers realize their own voyeuristic pleasure. We can't - we hope - keep our politically correct conscience completely intact and say to ourselves "How terrible it is".

How did you get the idea of offering the journalist's role to Juliette Binoche?

Malgoska Szumowska: I thought of Juliette right away. Her acting in "Hidden" by Michael Haneke had impressed me so much that I couldn't imagine any other actress for ELLES. We sent her the script and as soon as we met, I knew it would work. The subject matter interested



her and we shared the same approach to things. Once she said yes, she was totally committed to the film. She trusted me and always supported me, even in my moments of doubt. It was an exceptional encounter. Juliette helped me to become the director of this film.

What about Ana  s Demoustier and Joanna Kulig?

Malgoska Szumowska: We were looking for young actresses who had the energy and liveliness I had at their age. I'd seen Ana  s in "Sois Sage" ("Be Good") by Juliette Garcias. I was convinced by her strength and her talent, and I still am. As for Joanna, I totally recognized myself in her. Passionate, talkative, and exuberant, she so wanted to act in ELLES that she lied to me when I asked her if she could speak French. When I realized it wasn't true, I thought she was very sassy. And in the end, in the film, she does speak French!

Did the work with the actresses influence the writing of the film?

Malgoska Szumowska: It was far more than an influence. In a way, I'd say they carry the film. After each day's shooting, depending on what had been done and said, I modified the scenes we were due to shoot the next day. The actresses inspired new ideas in me and I arrived each morning with changes stemming from their work. I'd say that ELLES is a feminine entity made up of all the women who worked closely together.

Once the shoot was over, was the editing a decisive stage?

Malgoska Szumowska: Editing is a crucial stage in my films, due to the way I work. I made a lot of documentaries before moving on to fiction, and I kept the habit of giving great importance to the editing in the creative process. What matters to me is the accuracy in the tiny emotions conveyed by often spontaneous gestures. What I'm trying to get across is, above all, the intimacy.

Would you call yourselves feminists?

Malgoska Szumowska: I consider myself a born feminist. I'm naturally a strong, independent woman who has always worked without wondering if it was a man's job or a woman's. But I'm not part of one of those Polish feminist movements simply because I am never part of any political movement. But I certainly agree with their claims. I don't want to be part of a group. It's probable that ELLES won't appeal to some men, because it shows them an idea of themselves they won't like. It's possible that men know that, through prostitution, they exploit women, but the idea that they themselves may be exploited by it never occurs to them. If it is a feminist film, it wasn't my initial intention as I'm not a militant feminist.

Tine Byrckel: I think that the "feminine" side to the world implies a notion of gratuitousness. "Giving without counting the cost"... But this notion no longer has its place in a world in which everything is priced, counted, and measured. What we should perhaps consider is that that femininity, which verges on the sacred, isn't up to women to uphold. And that's where I think that the image of the suffering female prostitute constitutes the last unconscious bastion against the all-calculating approach. A defense which is built around sex and love. If these girls don't suffer, the idea that they sell themselves is ultimately even more unbearable. It is seen as a threat that these young women know full well how to calculate. People sense that something changes dramatically then. There's a malaise to prostitution, a malaise which is literally played out on the prostitute's body, but which concerns us all. It's nothing new that social phenomena leave their mark on women's bodies. To me, attempting to ban prostitution is an illusion which mainly protects us from ourselves, without affecting the underlying problems. We feel threatened by the fact that "everything" is for sale. But it's not the problem of prostitutes - it's the problem of society as a whole. If we want to keep the sacred, let's do so! But by giving everyone free access to higher education. If we don't want to provide the resources, let's stop judging prostitution. Some people, due to their social position, don't need to prostitute themselves to get what they want. A certain bourgeois hypocrisy still thrives in feminists and in others.

Has this film changed you?

Malgoska Szumowska: Of all my films, it's the one which has transformed me the most, even though all my films have changed something in my life. ELLES led me to share the intimacy of women, to reflect on their solitude. In a way, this film made me become a woman!





MALGOSKA SZUMOWSKA / DIRECTOR

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

It's a fact that young female students resort to prostitution to finance their studies.

In the media, the subject is treated, on the one hand, with moral disapproval and, on the other, with voyeuristic curiosity. Sex sells in all its forms. On the same pages of magazines, there are advertisements for countless objects of consumer desire. Women as sex objects. And sententious, moralizing reports, indignant yet fascinated by the women who use sex to obtain these objects by selling their bodies.

We wanted to treat the subject of student prostitution through an exchange of women's views. A female journalist, one of those Parisian women who are established in an enviable material situation, questions two students. Two girls who long to climb the social ladder and who finance their studies through prostitution. The clients of these girls are often the husbands of these women. The investigation will completely change the journalist's view of her own desires.

We wanted to explore these desires on both sides, without judging them.

BIOGRAPHY

Malgoska Szumowska was born on March 26, 1973 in Cracow. She is a graduate of the Lodz Film School and also studied History of Art. Her first short film "Silence" received many international awards. "Ascension", her second short film, was presented in the 1999 Cannes Cinefondation section.

She is also the author and producer of several documentaries. At the age of 25, she made her first feature film "A Happy Man". It received a special prize at the Thessaloniki Film Festival and was nominated for Best Director Prize at Sundance. She was chosen by "Variety" as one of the 10 best young European directors

Her second feature film, "Stranger" was presented at Sundance and at the Panorama Special section of the Berlinale.

In 2005 she started to work with Zentropa both as director and producer of one part of the series, "Visions of Europe" entitled "Crossroad".

In 2008 her third feature, "33 Scenes from Life" received the Silver Leopard Award at the Locarno Festival. It was selected by the Polish Film Academy. Her fourth feature "Elles" was presented at the 2009 Cannes L'Atelier section.

She is currently preparing a new feature film project entitled "Nowhere".

FILMOGRAPHY

2008	33 SCENES FROM LIFE Special Jury Prize - Locarno Film Festival
2004	STRANGER Official Selection - Sundance Film Festival
2000	HAPPY MAN
1999	THE SILENCE (Short)

TINE BYRCKEL / SCRIPTWRITER

Before becoming a critic and editorialist for the Danish daily "Information", Tine Byrckel studied philosophy and psychoanalysis. She has translated numerous works of fiction - Houellebecq, Gavalda, Cyrulnik, Lars von Trier. She is currently working partly as a psychoanalyst, partly as a screenwriter and script-doctor for French production companies.

INTERVIEW WITH JULIETTE BINOCHÉ

What was your initial reaction when you read the screenplay of ELLES?

Juliette Binoché: I immediately sensed the intelligence in the development of the subject matter, an approach that was both courageous and not over-simplified. The screenplay deals with the difficult subject of student prostitution. The film doesn't accuse anyone, but questions us. It gives us a sense of the insidious changes in our society which influence the way we are and how we think. Indeed, it's not easy to study when you have financial difficulties. Prostitution pays well, doesn't take up much time, allows a certain financial comfort and lets you feel a part of the consumer society. We are used to advertisements in the streets and magazines in which barely pubescent girls are surrounded by luxury in provocative postures verging on the pornographic. In time, these advertisements lead you to think that youth, luxury and sex blend together quite well and it isn't so serious after all. Doing a casual job becomes more degrading than making love for money.

How did it go, the first time you met Malgoska?

Juliette Binoché: Slawomir Idziak, Kieslowski's director of photography on "Blue", had told me about Malgoska, saying she was one of the most gifted Polish directors of her generation. I liked the screenplay, so I was looking forward to meeting her. She was intriguing, funny,

and almost wary. The first time we saw each other, she said it would never work between us, because our personalities were both too strong!

So, relations were difficult between you?

Juliette Binoché: On the contrary! There was a mutual understanding and respect right from the start. I felt there was something of her in the film which needed to come out into the world. It was an artistic, emotional, and intellectual birth.

This film has a rather unusual structure. By playing the part of the journalist who writes an article on these young women, do you not become Malgoska's alter ego?

Juliette Binoché: It's not really about her, but about the questions she poses. What is a woman? What is her sexuality? What is love? What is her fear? What are her judgments? Prostitution? Pleasure? Youth? What excites her? What is it like to be married? To feel shame? What is it like to be stuck? Shocked? To be a mother? A journalist? The director explores all these questions through my character. I become her accomplice, her inspiration, her second wind, her sister, her researcher, her sculpture when circumstances are ideal.



As the French actress with the most international awards, are you at a point in your career when you want to take more risks?

Juliette Binoche: I find risk-taking intoxicates me, stimulates me, makes me lose my bearings. It's necessary to take risks to avoid resting on your laurels and in order to open yourself up to new, pertinent experiences. Artists owe it to themselves to risk exposing their deepest self to stir their soul, to confront it with new material, new meanings, new thoughts. The real risk would be to repeat oneself, to get bogged down in certainties. Fortunately, we're not looked at for ourselves, but beyond that. And that's why I can stand that intimacy. Otherwise I'd prefer to hide - it's more comfortable! In a film, there's the idea of conveying something intimate and extraordinary that the director seeks to reveal through the actor or actress.

You seem surprised, shocked, and amused by the girls' replies to the journalist's questions...

Juliette Binoche: On the shoot, there is, of course, a listening quality which is inherent to the shoot. How can you not be fascinated, intrigued, horrified, envious of the seeming freedom of youth, of this lifestyle choice, for a while? It's the whole question of conscience which rears its head during these interviews. You can see these girls as monsters, but also as scared little girls. The solitude of these young students and of this mother aren't so far apart at times.

One also senses a burgeoning closeness between the journalist and the two girls. Did it also exist among the three actresses?

Juliette Binoche: Yes, but in a different way. Anaïs is a rising star of French cinema, she has a remarkable ear and sensitivity. She has instinctive intelligence. What Joanna conveys is, above all, her desire

for freedom, a wild side which can be expressed at any moment. We feel that she puts her whole life on the line when she acts. We both have one thing in common: we like to laugh our heads off.

Malgoska's work on intimacy is quite far-reaching, particularly in certain scenes. Did your own intimacy suffer as a result?

Juliette Binoche: No. I go as far as I can with my heart, my sweat, my guts, my intuition and I only feel good if I have the sense of a job well done, an inner journey. Even if I don't always look my best in a film, I don't regret it, because each shot is necessary and tells a story. A day's events can give us many different faces.

In ELLES, the idea of prostitution is extended to the whole of society...

Juliette Binoche: Nobody is spared. It's up to each of us to reflect on it. The film isn't judgmental, but it raises the alarm. Malgoska's idea is that the audience are excited by what they see so that they are caught red-handed taking part in a system. It's up to each of us to see for ourselves, and to see into ourselves.

Is it inevitable to use the word "feminism" in describing ELLES?

Juliette Binoche: Talking about women, the feminine, and intimacy isn't being a feminist. To me, the word "feminism" is inadequate, but I can understand if some people use it, because it's a subject which can make people uncomfortable. Seeing a young student selling her body for money isn't trivial. The subject is taboo. The film doesn't try to be moralizing or assert a right. It looks at the use which is made of the body and throws light on a situation that society induces by its

desire to sell, to shock, to influence, and to show the body as an object by denying a person's existence. Love in all its forms can take us to the most nightmarish situations as well as the most beautiful. True freedom is choice. It's our responsibility to make sure that this choice is safeguarded.

FILMOGRAPHY

2010	CERTIFIED COPY by Abbas Kiarostami Best Actress - Cannes Film Festival
2008	SUMMER HOURS by Olivier Assayas PARIS by Cédric Klapisch
2007	DISENGAGEMENT by Amos Gitai FLIGHT OF THE RED BALOON by Haou Hsiao Hsien
2006	BREAKING AND ENTERING by Anthony Minghella
2005	MARY by Abel Ferrara HIDDEN by Michaël Haneke
2003	IN MY COUNTRY by John BOORMAN
2000	CHOCOLATE by Lasse Hallström Nominated - Oscar of the Best Actress CODE UNKNOWN by Michael Haneke
1999	THE WIDOW OF SAINT-PIERRE by Patrice Leconte Best Actress Nominated - Cesar Award
1998	ALICE AND MARTIN by André Téchiné THE CHILDREN OF THE CENTURY by Diane KURYS
1996	THE ENGLISH PATIENT by Anthony Minghella Best Actress in a Supporting Role - Oscar Academy Award Best Actress - Berlin Film Festival
1995	THE HORSEMAN ON THE ROOF by Jean-Paul Rappeneau

1993	THREE COLORS - BLUE by Krzysztof Kieslowski Best Actress - Cesar Award Best Actress - Venice Film Festival
1992	DAMAGE by Louis Malle
1991	THE LOVERS ON THE BRIDGE by Léos Carax
1988	THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING by Philip Kaufman
1986	BAD BLOOD by Léos Carax
1985	RENDEZ-VOUS by André Téchiné FAMILY LIFE by Jacques Doillon HAIL MARY by Jean-Luc Godard





ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER / CHARLOTTE

SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2011 | THE LAST WINTER by John Shank
SNOWS OF KILIMANDJARO by Robert Guediguian |
| 2010 | LIVING ON LOVE ALONE by Isabelle Czajka
Most Promising Actress Nominated - Cesar Award
ELSEWHERE by Frédéric Pelle
DEAR PRUDENCE by Rebecca Zlotowski
SWEET EVIL by Olivier Coussemacq |
| 2009 | GROWN UPS by Anne Novion
Most Promising Actress Nominated - Cesar Award
BE GOOD by Juliette Garcias |
| 2008 | THE BEAUTIFUL PERSON by Christophe Honoré
GIVE ME YOUR HANDS by Pascal-Alex Vincent |
| 2006 | L'ANNEE SUIVANTE by Isabelle Czajka |
| 2003 | THE TIME OF THE WOLF by Michael Haneke |



JOANNA KULIG / ALICJA

FILMOGRAPHY

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2011 | THE WOMAN IN THE FIFTH by Pawel Pawlikowski |
| 2010 | REMEMBRANCE by Anna Justice |
| 2010 | LOS NUMEROS by Ryszard ZATORSKI |
| 2009 | MARATON TANCA by Magdalena LAZARKIEWICZ
1 000 000 \$ by Janusz KONDRATIUK
I LOVE YOU SO MUCH de Maciej BOCHNIAK |
| 2008 | JANOSIK: A TRUE STORY
by Agnieszka HOLLAND and Kasia ADAMIK |
| 2006 | WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY MORNING de Grzegorz PACEK |

MARIANNE SLOT / PRODUCER

Marianne Slot is a French producer of Danish origin. She founded the independent production company Slot Machine in 1993. She has worked with Lars von Trier since 1995 from "Breaking the Waves" to "Melancholia". She has produced extensively in Latin America, including films by Lucrecia Martel, Lisandro Alonso, Albertina Carri and Paz Encina. She produced Juliette Garcia's "Be Good", Marian Crisan's "Morgen", Hélène de Crécy's "Escort", and Malgoska Szumowska's "Elles".

CAST & CREW

Juliette Binoche
Anaïs Demoustier
Joanna Kulig
Louis-Do de Lencquesaing
Krystyna Janda
Andrzej Chyra
Ali Marhyar
Jean-Marie Binoche
François Civil
Pablo Beugnet
Valérie Dréville
Jean-Louis Coulloc'h
Arthur Moncia
Scali Delpeyrat
Laurence Ragon
Alain Libolt
Swann Arlaud
Nicolas Layani
Laurent Jumeaucourt
José Fumanal
Martine Vandeville
Jenny Bellay
Tom Henin

Anne
Charlotte
Alicja
Patrick
Alicja's mother
the sadistic client
Saïd
Anne's father
Florent
Stéphane
Charlotte's mother
Charlotte's father
Thomas
Charles
Colette
Colette's husband
The young client
The guitar client
The beauty mark client
The crying client
The university secretary
The retired neighbour
Florent's friend

Directed by
Written by

Producer
Director of photography
Editors
Sound
Executive producer
1st AD
Casting
Costumes designer
Art Director
Location Manager
Coproducers

Malgoska Szumowska
Tine Byrckel
Malgoska Szumowska
Marianne Slot
Michał Englert
Françoise Tourmen, Jacek Drosio
André Rigaut
Olivier Guerbois
Nicolas Cambois
Aurélié Guichard
Katarzyna Lewinska
Pauline Bourdon
Benoît Baverel
Agnieszka Kurzydo
Bettina Brokemper
Beata Ryczkowska
Reinhold Elschof
Daniel Blum
Malgoska Szumowska
Peter Aalbaek Jensen
Peter Garde

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