

SOPHIE DULAC & MICHEL ZANA PRESENT

QUINZAINE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2011

CLÉMENCE POÉSY

THE SILENCE OF JOAN

A FILM BY PHILIPPE RAMOS



Sophie Dulac et Michel Zana present



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France - 2011 – 1h32– 35 mm & digital – color – 2,35 – dolby 5.1 & LTRT – Visa n°120 922

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QUINZAINE
DES RÉALISATEURS
Société des réalisateurs de films
CANNES 2011

SYNOPSIS

1430. After a year of victorious battles, Joan of Arc is taken prisoner. Handed over to the English by King Charles VII, she lets herself fall from the keep where she is imprisoned. The young woman miraculously survives, but she no longer hears the divine voices that guided and protected her all these years. Why has God abandoned her at such a difficult time? Joan is left alone to face her grim fate.



FOREWORD

During the first half of the 15th century in France, the 100 years war was at its peak. The geopolitical situation was, briefly, as follows: the English occupied Northern France and were claiming the right to the kingdom's "crown." Eastern France was occupied by the Burgundians (who were allied with the English). "French" territory, with Charles VII, the heir apparent, as its ruler, included the land that reached from the Loire Valley to the Pyrenees.

The French were in a delicate situation at the beginning of 1429: Orleans was besieged by the English. The fall of the city could open the way for the English to descend upon all of Southwestern France. The situation was desperate when it was decided that a young and insistent prophetess should be allowed to visit the Royal court to see the young dauphin. The young woman (only 17 years old, at the time!) claimed to bear a divine message that ordered her to lead the heir apparent to Reims so that he may be crowned King. This message had come to her as voices; voices that had accompanied and guided her since the age of 11. The King and the politicians that counseled him were far from being taken in, but they saw in this "divine protégé" the heaven-sent opportunity to fully claim the right to the French crown: the heir apparent was to become King with "holy endorsement." Furthermore, the French armies were in an urgent and desperate situation. Joan was seen as a force who could boost the troupes, helping them to rediscover the courage that had been evading them for several months.

After having met the dauphin, the young woman was investigated by the Church who recognized her as being a virgin and a true Christian; a standard was created for her and she was equipped with armor. She was now ready for the "great crusade." Joan rejoined the Royal army and then headed for Orleans. Barely ten days later, the English lifted the siege. As a result, the young woman was adulated and became a veritable living legend for her contemporaries. The dauphin's coronation was now just a matter of time. In July 1429, Joan's premonition came to fruition: the King was crowned in Reims. And from this date, the English began a campaign, using every means possible to "desanctify" this coronation, in order to undermine the French King's legitimacy. And what better way to do so than to accuse the person who helped make Charles king of being a witch and a heretic! But we haven't yet reached that point in our story.

In the months following his coronation, Charles VII gradually searched for a diplomatic solution to the conflict: his idea was to ally himself with the Burgundians, and drive the English out of France. Joan didn't agree with this strategy and pursued her belligerent cavalcade at the side of military leaders who shared her idea that France had to do battle with weapons. Joan's war "crusade" became embarrassing to the King. At the same exact time (was it an accident?) the young woman was captured just near Compiègne. The year was 1430.

The prisoner was in the hands of a powerful lord from Northern France, John of Luxembourg. The Luxembourg family in itself was an example of the time period's complex politics: although John was clearly on the side of the Burgundians, (who, it should be remembered, were themselves allied with the English), his aunt, Joan of Luxembourg, was Charles VII's godmother, therefore in favor of the French. Joan of Luxembourg, through her power and importance, was able to prevent her nephew from selling Joan of Arc to the English, undoubtedly in the hope that the King would take action. But the King had decided to abandon Joan of Arc, and made no gesture to free the prisoner. Months went by. In the autumn, Joan of Luxembourg died in Avignon. John then ratified the sale of Joan of Arc to the English. The young woman understood that her fate was sealed: with her protector dead, her King oddly absent, there was no one left to help her. One morning, she was found lifeless at the foot of the tower where she had been imprisoned. She then remained several days without eating or talking...and in the end survived a jump of approximately twenty meters: This is where THE SILENCE OF JOAN begins.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Joan

Joan of Arc depicted in armor on her horse, holding a standard embroidered with Jesus' name, is a recurring image in the iconography attached to this famous figure. For she is, above all, the reflection of the image that each person believes her to be. It is the most widely known and seen representation. Choosing her time in captivity as the film's focus meant stripping away Joan of Arc's so powerfully symbolic costume. You could say that I took off her armor to discover the young woman "hiding" inside it. It was no longer Joan of Arc the figure, but Joan, the young woman whom I was going to try and discover.

Towards Silence

During my preparatory research, I was happy to learn that there was an entire stretch of Joan's story that had been little covered in the many different cinematic adaptations of her life: the discovery of the sea, the baring in Rouen, the ashes thrown in the Seine river and her leap from the Beaurevoir tower. I did not invent this act. Although the jump from the top of the tower has long been considered as an attempted escape, today's most serious historians put forward the hypothesis of a suicide attempt by a young woman who had been abandoned. It was evident that this tragic act could constitute the heart of my project as it demonstrated Joan's complexity and fragility, despite all of her faith and heroism.

And so I invented a narrative line that would be drawn from that point in her story: following her jump from the tower Joan is, in a certain manner, being tested by the Lord...Her divine voices, which were so vital to her existence, disappeared. Joan will answer God's silence, with silence: "Without my voices, I am nothing." She will thus speak no longer. How will Joan carry on, how will she survive without this precious guidance? Will the voices return? And if so, what will they tell her? It's what the audience will discover.



Joan and Men

I am unable to define Joan with words that belong to a religious register such as prophetess, mystic, pious Christian, saint... I would describe her as being someone who carries infinity within. Through the divine voices she hears, Joan presents herself to her contemporaries as the recipient of God's word. She is the one in whom the heaven's infinite immensity has found refuge. This immensity that fulfills her is one of the reasons she interests me. Isn't it marvelous that this young woman is invested with such a mystery? All the more so when the divine words spoken at an earlier time then become a reality. In the Middle Ages, when everyone was sensitive to the smallest sign from God, this nineteen-year-old virgin appeared to people as a veritable wonder, a shooting star, infinity's messenger.

This incandescence, and her presence with a victorious French army, will make her a living legend. And that being the case, where does one stand in reference to Joan? Each of the film's male characters answers this question in their own way: some respectfully and humbly accepting their relation with her, others endlessly wondering how they should conduct themselves, or others still, choosing to reject her with violence. Moreover, I tried to make this confrontation of the different masculine characters with Joan the film's veritable driving force. So much so that, if I had to give a brief summary of THE SILENCE OF JOAN, I could say: "It's Joan and the Men."

Joan, Clémence

A very specific feeling convinced me to offer the role of Joan to Clémence Poésy. So I worked on the casting and I asked Clémence to take a screen test with me. That day, after the reading, we worked on a scene from the film: the moment when Joan is convinced that her voices are going to reappear, and she asks the Lord to let her hear the voices again. I had rented irons and I put them around Clémence's wrists. She was on her knees on the ground. I was standing on a chair above her, with my camera. I only asked two things of her: to speak to the camera and to speak to God as if she were speaking to a lover. She played the scene with a mix of fervor and a childlike smile that satisfied me entirely. But I also noticed something else in her, which touched me considerably: on her face, somewhere between her profoundly blue eyes and the strange mystery of her beauty marks, was an opening into an abyss, like a reflection of grace, in which I knew the sign of infinity might be glimpsed...or, if truth be told, a sign of God. I never stopped trying to find this sign again during the filming. It became an obsession. Every day I scrutinized her face, filming her as closely as possible, approaching an ear, or a bit of white skin, watching for a tear-drop, letting myself get caught up in the wind blowing through her hair, a suspended glance, or by a gesture touched with grace.



Francesca Woodman

Clémence immediately asked me for reading suggestions to sustain her work. I realized that she wanted to not only better understand Joan of Arc, but especially that she wanted to understand who “my” Joan of Arc would be.

I first gave her two films in which I saw metaphors for what might have been the childhood and adolescence of the Joan I wanted to evoke. So I told Clémence that if I had to choose a child character who could be my Joan as a child, it would be the little girl in Victor Erice’s film *The Spirit of the Beehive*, for the connection with the supernatural, the night, and bees shown in this great piece of work. And if I had to choose a teenage Joan, it would be the teenager in Robert Bresson’s *Mouchette*, because of the abandonment, and death as a direct consequence.

But it is especially through the work of the American photographer Francesca Woodman that I hoped to guide Clémence towards the Joan I wished to depict. From the beginning, Woodman’s photographs were a model for the writing stage, a source of inspiration, a medium that allowed me to dream up my film. Everything about this young artist inspired me: the feeling of a person wavering in permanence between presence and absence; the fact that she killed herself at 22, her link with death, her body, nudity, angels...

In the film, I wanted to pay tribute to her, as a way of thanking her for having given me so much through her work. Thus, the scene where Joan says she’d like to disappear behind a curtain or a chest, is more than a quote; it’s a warm thought.

Investing realms

My work with the actors consists of proposing an emotional and physical territory that they are free to draw from as they see fit. This realm is the screenplay, which defines the frontiers, the landscape, the topography. During the film shoot, I’m the watchman. That is to say the one who makes sure that no actor leaves this given space...Because if they “escape” a bit too far, they will leave my universe, and thus the film's poetry. All of the actors had a very particular way of taking possession of the artistic realm: Thierry Frémont, like a meticulous watchmaker, never ceased exploring the details of the emotional and physical landscape I was proposing. He traveled through this territory with a type of quiet strength and great intelligence. Some asked me to accompany them on their journey, Liam Cunningham for example, who doesn’t speak French and who worked on the dialogues phonetically. It was a journey taken by two people, infused with a constant exchange. or Jean-François Stévenin, in his case perhaps more amicably, since we had already worked together on *Captain Ahab*. Others entered into their roles in a freer fashion, like Mathieu Amalric or Louis-Do de Lencquesaing, greedily covering the territory, making it their own with great ease. As for Clémence, she very quickly and with great sensitivity closed the gates to this given realm, claiming the right to hide there. In a certain way, I was thrilled because that took me back to the words spoken by Joan in a scene that has since been cut: “I’m in a closed garden,” she said. Clémence became this closed garden for me, sharpening my above expressed desire to observe her, discover her, to go and meet her.



Running



The confrontation between Joan and the men who surrounded her still had to be taken into account. This universe and its substance, of which I was speaking, approaching this young woman’s body, capturing her words, her silence, her gestures and glances still remained to be shown. Yet, time for filming is short. The hierarchy, the weight of blocking out scenes, the preponderance of the technical aspect, everything worried me and weighed upon me until the day I asked my producers to let me take care of framing and the lighting myself. It was decided, I would be the cinematographer and no one else. And when they accepted...it was liberating. It resulted in an intense period of creation for me, where nothing hindered the flow between thought and action. Equipped with a sort of harness prolonged by an arm, the weight of a rather heavy camera was lifted from my shoulder. I could then film scenes that were taking place before my eyes, in an absolutely total improvisation of frames and shot length. Free, and thirsting at the possibility of capturing life, I felt like I was filming in a way that I had never filmed before, in a way that approaches the gesture made by a painter on his canvas. A gesture where the hand and the eye try to capture the soul of beings and things in perfect silence: just being able to transcribe what one sees. No technical discussions, no explanations, no need to convince anyone...just free. Each day that passed, and every day, after having sculpted the light as I desired, the actors came onto the set, they played and replayed scenes and every day, with the camera attached to my shoulder, I freely drew from the deep pool of material they offered me. What bliss! I was full of so much energy that I couldn’t stop myself from working as quickly as possible. Many asked: “Philippe, why are you always running on the set?” Seeing a ray of light piercing through a cloud, an actor concentrating on his or her work, or the wind rushing through the leaves in the trees, I answered: “Life is swiftly passing, and it’s not going to wait for me.”



INTERVIEW WITH CLEMENCE POÉSY

Joan of Arc is a famous French historical figure, but also a character that has been loved by cinema from its very beginnings. How did you handle being confronted with such a legend?

Before meeting Philippe Ramos, I had never taken the time to learn more about Joan of Arc, for I didn't find her particularly fascinating. What is very troubling, when you start to take a more active interest in the subject, is to learn about the difference in perception of this figure in France as opposed to the rest of the world... Having spent a great deal of time in England and the United States, surrounded by a certain style of Anglo-Saxon music, I knew that for an entire generation of musicians and writers, she had an aura that was different from the one I felt here. She remained a "rebel." I'm referring to Patti Smith, who cites her often, or the very beautiful Leonard Cohen song, which I find quite close to what Philippe says about fatigue and death's oncoming. My biases (as a French person) completely disappeared after having read the screenplay... For the screenplay is a very intimate portrayal, far from the dogmas and heroics found in history books. Philippe Ramos touches upon what he imagines her to be in her moments of doubt...we are neither in battle, nor at her trial...it's a moment where she is alone with God, and these men who are trying either to destroy her or save her. Afterwards, I saw Captain Ahab, and everything made complete sense to me. Like a form of lineage. In THE SILENCE OF JOAN, Philippe tells the story of a woman who is more fragile than Ahab, but already in Ahab there is the impression of a "solitary" choir: characters who construct their story individually, episodes, a nonlinear narrative, the place taken by the ocean, and a heroine in quest of the absolute.

How did you prepare for the role?

For points of reference, Philippe spoke to me very early on about Francesca Woodman's work. From the beginning, he gave me books; I thought her work was beautiful, but I didn't necessarily understand where Philippe was heading with all of this. Just before shooting, I spent a few days in an abbey in Brittany, by the sea - I had just shot two films that were very different from Philippe's universe and I needed to refocus. It's the first time I ever did something like that. During the day I worked on the screenplay, walked on the beach, and went to bed very early. It was at this time that I read the books he gave me and I reproduced in watercolors some of Francesca Woodman's photos. Everything became crystal-clear for me; the film and the photographer share the same references to the body: someone who fades away, to the point of looking to become an angel; someone who seeks to blend themselves into nature. In Philippe's film, this obliteration into nature is becoming one with God, for God is revealed in the wind, the sea, and what nature gives us, like honey... This is also what worried me from the beginning: playing a strong character who fades away, who spends her time wanting to disappear, and at the same time frightens everyone; someone who is a strong, powerful presence. Afterwards, there was all the work that needed to be done for the atheist or agnostic that I am, in order to understand Joan's relationship with God. I treated it as a very concrete love. And then there was all the work I had to do with my body in order to incarnate a silent character. Very early on, Philippe spoke to me about the film Mouchette, by Bresson, more so than his Trial of Joan of Arc, and he gave me Panvilov's Le Début that I watched before filming, as well as Victor Erice's The Spirit of the Beehive, and Jane Campion's The Piano, which he associated with "his" Joan. I very much appreciated these unspoken things in fact, that we created common references without over explaining them. In reference to Woodman, I just sent him a photo of one of my watercolors so he knew that I had finally understood why she was so important to him. Of course I read Colette Beaune's book, which he had recommended to me, and then I kind of abandoned these "Joans" to find my own references. Since, I've seen the Dreyer and the Bresson films. Before I had been afraid that they might paralyze me. It was Ramos' vision of Joan that needed to be told.

Philippe Ramos' directing style is quite peculiar. What kind of an experience would you say it was for you?

It was wonderful shooting with such a small crew, it left an extraordinary amount of space for acting. It took me two weeks to realize that we didn't have a continuity-person. It was Philippe who decided just about everything, who was on the set, and made all the decisions during the takes. If he felt like taking a close-up of your eye, he did it with his hand-held camera. There was real freedom, we were constantly on the alert; that is something that is precious for an actor, not to be waiting, lethargically. It is easier to find a common energy in a small group. We understood one another well. Philippe pays a lot of attention to his actors. He is very respectful of their work and very tuned into them. It's the first time that I've worked with someone who was filming me at the same time that he was directing me. It's a whole other connection. Everything became rather obvious. I think that is very much due to the fact that we had time to get to know one another during the film's preparation phase, which was quite long, and to renew the confidence we had in one another. There were no doubts there...I think.



CLÉMENCE POÉSY

Clémence Poésy played her first role on stage at the age of 14. But her career really started with the comedic film *Welcome to the Roses*.

She has since been juggling roles in both international and French cinema.

Among many other films, she has been seen in *Le Grand Meaulnes*, based on the book by Alain Fournier; Ariel Zeitoun’s *Masked Mobsters*; Olivier Panchot’s *Sans Moi*; Eric Forestier's *The third part of the world* with Gaspard Ulliel; Martin McDonagh’s *In Bruges* with Colin Farrell and Ralph Fiennes. More recently she has appeared in Philip Ridley’s *Heartless*, with Jim Sturgess; Denys Granier-Deferre’s *The Wedding Cake*; Benoit Philippon’s *Lullaby* with Forest Whitaker and Rupert Friend; Danny Boyle’s *127 hours* with James Franco, as well as *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* – Part I and soon to be seen in Part II.

Selected Filmography

- 2010 THE SILENCE OF JOAN by Philippe Ramos
127 HOURS by Danny Boyle
HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOW (Part I & II) by David Yates
- 2009 THE WEDDING CAKE by Denys Granier-Deferre
LULLABY by Benoît Philippon
- 2008 HEARTLESS by Philip Ridley
- 2007 THE THIRD PART OF THE WORLD by Eric Forestier
IN BRUGES by Martin McDonagh
- 2006 MASKED MOBSTERS by Ariel Zeitoun
SANS MOI by Olivier Panchot
- 2005 LE GRAND MEAULNES by Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe
- 2004 HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE by Mike Newell
- 2002 L'ÉTÉ D'OLGA by Nina Grosse
WELCOME TO THE ROZES by Francis Palluau



PHILIPPE RAMOS

Philippe Ramos was born in 1966 in the Drôme region of France.
Self-taught, he started making his first shorts in Super 8 and Super 16 at a very young age.
In 2001, he directed his first feature film, *Farewell Homeland*.
His second feature film, *Captain Ahab* was awarded with Best director and the International Federation of Film critics award (FIPRESCI) at the Locarno Festival in 2007.
THE SILENCE OF JOAN is his third feature film.



FILMOGRAPHY

- 2011
THE SILENCE OF JOAN
With: Clémence Poésy, Thierry Frémont, Liam Cunningham, Mathieu Amalric, Louis-Do de Lencquesaing, Jean-François Stévenin, Johan Leysen, Bernard Blancan
- 2007
CAPTAIN AHAB
With: Denis Lavant, Dominique Blanc, Jacques Bonnaffé, Jean-François Stévenin, Philippe Katerine, Carlo Brandt, Hande Kodja, Mona Heftré.
Best Director Award - International Federation of Film critics award (FIPRESCI)
Locarno Festival in 2007
- 2003
CAPTAIN AHAB (short)
With: Jean Paul Bonnaire, Alexis Loquet, Frédéric Bonpart, Mona Heftré, Valérie Crunchant.
Press award Paris Tout Court 2003
Press award Pantin Côté Court Festival 2004
- 2002
FAREWELL HOMELAND
With: Françoise Descarrega, Philippe Garziano, Frédéric Bonpart.
Special jury prize Albi Film Festival 2003
- 1999
NOAH’S ARK (Medium-length)
With: Philippe Garziano
Special jury prize Pantin Film Festival 1999
- 1996
ICI BAS (short)
With: Pascal Andres, Françoise Descarrega.
Canal+ prize at the Grenoble Film festival 1997
- 1995
VERS LE SILENCE (short)
With: Pascal Andres, Françoise Descarrega.
Grand Prize Nancy Film Festival 1995



CREDITS

Screenplay	Philippe Ramos
Image	Philippe Ramos
Sound	Philippe Grivel
Decor	Middle-Age architects and craftsmen
Costumes	Marie-Laure Pinsard
Hair and Make-up	Raphaële Thiercelin
Editor	Philippe Ramos
Production coordinator	Jean-Christophe Gigot
Production manager	Raoul Peruzzi
Producers	Sophie Dulac & Michel Zana Sophie Dulac Productions & Echo Films

CAST

Clémence Poésy	Jeanne
Thierry Frémont	The Healer
Liam Cunningham	The English Captain
Mathieu Amalric	The Preacher
Louis-Do de Lencquesaing	Jean De Luxembourg
Jean-François Stevenin	The Monk
Johan Leysen	The chief of Gards
Bernard Blancan	The Carpenter
Pierre Pellet	The Jailer
Pauline Acquart	The Carpenter's Daughter
Christopher Craig	The Convoy Sergeant
Kester Lovelace	The Prison Sergeant



With the participation of Centre National de la Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée,
of Région Ile de France, La Banque Postale Image 4, Orange Cinéma Séries & Sophie Dulac Distribution.
With the support of Procirep and of MEDIA Programm and European Union

