



65th CRITICS'
WEEK
CANNES 2026
SPECIAL SCREENING

FLESH & FUEL

A FILM BY
Pierre Le Gall



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PRESENTS



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WEEK
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Alexis
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Julian
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FLESH & FUEL

A FILM BY
Pierre Le Gall

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PYRAMIDE INTERNATIONAL

IN PARIS : (+33) 1 42 96 02 20

IN CANNES : RIVIERA L3-6

AGATHE MAURUC: amauruc@pyramidefilms.com

MARINE DORVILLE: mdorville@pyramidefilms.com

SÉBASTIEN FOUQUE: sfouque@pyramidefilms.com

PRESS RELATIONS

THE PR FACTORY

BARBARA VAN LOMBEEK

barbara@theprefactory.com | +32 486 54 64 80

MARIE-FRANCE DUPAGNE

mariefrance@theprefactory.com | +32 477 62 67 70

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Étienne is a truck driver. Addicted to the road, he reduces his emotional life to anonymous and fleeting encounters in parking lots. When he meets Bartosz, a Polish truck driver, his solitary routine is turned upside down.



INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE LE GALL

Your first feature film combines romance with a reality rarely depicted on screen: the world of European truck drivers. What sparked the idea?

During the first lockdown, I was struck by news reports highlighting unglamorous but essential professions. I was moved by the men and women working in uncomfortable, even dangerous conditions during the pandemic, who nonetheless carried on without resentment. Despite the little regard shown to them, truck drivers seemed driven by a sense of solidarity, proud to transport everything people need to eat and live. I realized that without their trucks, France would run out of resources within 48 hours and that everything around us had, at some point, been carried by a truck. Absolutely everything. I became interested in their way of life: many drivers still travel away for the whole week, experiencing their relationships and their children's upbringing only at weekends or from a distance. Yet all of them speak of their love of the road. That, too, moved me: a profession with genuine pride in the work.

How did Étienne, the French trucker, and Bartosz, his Polish counterpart, come into being?

I put something of myself into Étienne, as well as of Jean-Sébastien Lefort, the trucker with whom I discovered the trade. Jean-Sébastien is a trucker's son — his father passed the passion on to him, as still often happens in this profession. He is a meticulous, loyal worker, and above all a sensitive, curious, and

generous man. He immediately agreed to take me on board. I accompanied him to England, where we experienced first-hand the reopening of post-Covid borders and a maritime workers' strike. We got along well and set off together again to Italy and Switzerland. Jean-Sébastien even became the technical adviser for the trucks during filming.

Bartosz, for his part, was conceived as a man free in his mind, yet forced to accept exploitation to buy his freedom. My early research had made me aware of the competitive economic reality of European trucking: French drivers are no longer competitive enough in Europe and are confined to working only within France. Naturally, this creates tensions; Western truckers feel a great deal of resentment towards their Eastern counterparts. The desire to recreate a sense of brotherhood between foreign workers gave rise to this Polish trucker character, who subverts xenophobic assumptions by being free-spirited, funny, and surprising.

How did you approach this world?

At first, Jean-Claude Raspiegeas's sociological study *Routiers* was my first bible. Its humane, grounded, and precise writing helped me understand the challenges of a sector battered by social contempt and ultra-liberal European policies. Then I hit the road to feel the kilometers, the endless days, the nights in a bunk, the unloading at warehouses, the meals at truckers' diners, the shower at service stations... What struck me most was the contradictory relationship with time: on one hand, the constant

mental countdown and the stress of being on schedule; on the other, the sense of time stretching infinitely along the road between destinations.

There was also a novel that haunted me: *On The Line* by Joseph Ponthus. The author recounts how he followed his wife to Brittany and ended up working on an assembly line because he could find no other employment. Beneath its free-verse poetry, Ponthus addresses the dehumanization and violence of labour, while speaking of love and loneliness. It is in homage to this man, worker and writer, who died of cancer at 42, that the fictional company in the film is called Ponthus Transports.

Finally, there was my encounter with Julien Depaeuw, director of Depaeuw Transports. We filmed the company scenes at his premises including the barbecue and Étienne's truck comes from his fleet. Julien also helped me identify all the places where human connection exists within the transport world, so I could bring them out in the film.

How did you determine your narrative perspective?

Since I wanted to speak about solitude, I opted for a single point of view: Étienne's. I enjoyed letting the viewer's imagination work by keeping Bartosz partially offscreen. What is his life like when he's not with Étienne? What does he experience in Poland? Who is he really? I wanted viewers to feel the same absence that Étienne does for Bartosz's absence to generate mystery, questions, obsession, the way it feels when you fall in love with someone you can't often see.

You film this love story and its environment in a very sensory way.

That was our golden rule with Camille Pertion and Martin Drouot, the co-writers: to tell a love story that was neither psychological nor intellectual. The emotion had to come from looks, gestures, bodies, the desire running through Étienne and Bartosz. It's sexual instinct that leads them to meet in a forest; it's the euphoria of reunion that makes them exult on the bridge. Dialogue only comes later, for socializing or putting distance into words. When they're together, it's their bodies that speak. I wanted to give the audience the same physical sensations as the characters, those one feels when falling in love: bodies running, exulting, laughing, living... converging towards tenderness.

The gestures you film are precise; the sound design sculpts their texture...

I wanted to show viewers all the details that make up a truck driver's daily life. During my road trips, I had noted specific things, like the tachograph above the driver's head that records speed and timestamps driving hours. I photographed the practical interiors, where everything is accessible from the steering wheel or the bunk. I noted every professional and intimate gesture, every safety procedure; I wrote down phrases I heard on the loading docks at warehouses or during phone calls between the company and the cab. All of this allowed me to be very precise in my writing and in my artistic direction with the crew and actors, while always keeping one overriding idea in mind: avoid pure description and keep the scenes dynamic.



Everything feels very embodied in this film, even the trucks!

Yes! I started from the effect they'd had on me as a child and as an adult. Depending on the situation, they had fascinated, excited, frightened me. There's something impressive about them, and the front of a truck, with its big "eyes", can even give the impression it's alive. With that in mind, Bartosz's truck; red, with a panther on the trailer — had to convey animality, a certain eroticism, to generate excitement when you see it. Étienne's truck, blue and understated, represents a strict work tool. I love the mechanical, organized, respectful relationship the character has with it, as all the truckers I met do. Still, I wanted to add a slightly carnal touch, since Étienne's truck is on screen throughout almost the entire film hence the choice, with production designer Anne-Sophie Delseries, of a tarpaulin trailer that ripples in the wind.

Your sets are also very graphic and aesthetically striking, particularly in the night sequences.

Flesh & Fuel is a film about industry and non-places, where the question of work is central. The Hauts-de-France and Alsace regions, where we shot, are steeped in this French industrial history. With the art department, we carefully selected our locations to depict road transport as a whole. We were especially fascinated by the typical, colourful infrastructures of the 1960s. I still remember my visit to ArcelorMittal in Dunkirk—it was a real shock! The immense metal structures, the roaring noise, the smoke, the lights—it was teeming with life. I thought about all the workers who had come and gone here, who had given their lives to keep this steel machine running. I wanted all the industrial settings in the film to make an impact, whether through their architecture or their hive-like worker activity.

You portray a predominantly male world, without forgetting women, however.

Yes, the trucking profession is becoming increasingly feminized: today, women make up 5% of the workforce, and they are sometimes more numerous than men in the offices of transport and logistics companies. So, I wanted them to be seen and heard. Whether through Anita's voice, speaking with Étienne over the truck radio as she assigns him his routes, or by filming real female assembly-line workers in a distribution company. That scene is there to remind us that women also do physically demanding jobs and that they are courageous. There's also the truck-stop restaurant scene with Zaza, who talks about her menstruation with her macho colleagues while raising a simple issue of hygiene. These are concrete realities that many men are unaware of, and it's essential to talk about them.

The sex scenes between Étienne and Bartosz are both raw and tender.

This film came from a simple desire: to see two hard-working men experience a great love story. I wanted to give these two truck drivers a right to beauty and freedom. The love scene in the truck came very early in the writing. Étienne and Bartosz using their work tool to have sex, playing with the cramped space of the cabin—I saw that as a genuine human act of rebellion.

For me, it was essential to film sex the way one films work: with directness, precision, and authenticity. The sex scenes were choreographed and paced with Stéphanie Chene, the intimacy coordinator, and the actors before shooting. Stéphanie is first and foremost a choreographer with a keen sense of movement. Her perspective helped us find the grounding and trust needed to make the sex feel embodied and sensual.

I also wanted there to be humour between Étienne and Bartosz when they make love. It creates tenderness and an extraordinary complicity—between the characters themselves, but also between the characters and the audience, who laugh with them. It breaks down a barrier: we become accomplices to the scene, rather than just slightly embarrassed observers. Humour also allowed me to break away from the laborious, performative masculinity often found in sex scenes in cinema. Having sex is a liberating and precious dialogue—one that can even continue after orgasm. That's why the scene continues in real time after Étienne and Bartosz climax: it's while catching their breath that they truly speak to each other for the first time.

How did you put together your cast?

I chose Alexis Manenti for the mystery he conveys. His face is a fascinating, heterogeneous landscape: both virile in its features, evocative of elsewhere through his Serbian and Corsican origins, with an adolescent gaze. Above all, when you look at Alexis, you never quite know what he's thinking. Since Étienne is often alone on screen, the actor playing him needed to sustain the viewer's curiosity throughout the film. Alexis also had a build that matched the truck drivers I had met. I liked his solid, grounded physique, firmly anchored to the earth. I liked the idea that his shell-like body would crack open, expand, and rise in contact with Bartosz—like a metamorphosis. In fact, I often saw Alexis explore new emotions he had never tapped into before as an actor.

I discovered Julian Swiezewski through a friend who showed me a photo of him. He was sitting on a toilet, wearing a cap and tracksuit, his pants around his ankles, holding a small dog. I looked at my friend and said, "That's him!" It was like love at first

sight. I met him six months later during casting in Warsaw. He was the last to audition, and as soon as he entered the room, it was obvious: his look, his cap (the one in the film), his radiant energy, his feline, airy gestures, his shy laugh, his everyday madness, his freedom—everything about him was Bartosz.

What were your directing choices?

Making a film with trucks means playing with the inertia they impose on the set. Five meters high, eighteen meters long, forty-four tons—you don't just move that around! So, we had to be clever to maintain a sense of motion on screen. With Antoine Cormier, the director of photography, we quickly chose handheld camera work with a constant objective: to capture the energy of bodies among machines. In this world where the economy is insatiable, we needed to film as close as possible to the harshness of the job and the cramped living spaces. That's why the camera always stays inside the truck, so the audience experiences the road only from the cabin. We thus developed a consistent visual grammar of shots, even if it meant repeating them—it created a visual routine reflecting the characters' daily lives. Above all, I didn't want to make a film about landscapes, but a film about faces. *Flesh & Fuel* is an anti-road movie, in the sense that the horizon is absent. There are no vanishing points, no perspective: here, the road doesn't inspire dreams—it confines and offers no sense of freedom.

You can feel a heartbeat pulsing through the film, mirroring Étienne's emotional state...

I was fortunate to work with Xavier Sirven, who had a very clear guiding idea for the editing: if Étienne doesn't have time to live his life, then the audience doesn't have time to follow it either. Only Bartosz manages to slow Étienne down. In the film, love stops time. From the writing stage, I was obsessed with an existential question: when we spend our lives working to be free and dignified, how much time do we have left to give to the people we love? I wanted the editing to make that question resonate powerfully.

While we were working on it, the man who raised me died in eight weeks from a sudden cancer. He had spent his life working for his family, and he died two days after retiring. I was hit head-on by the message of my own film...

How did you approach the music with Paul Sabin?

The idea of breath is central to this love story, and I wanted a wind instrument to characterize Étienne. He's a character who speaks very little, and I wanted the instrumentalist to speak for him and give us access to his most secret emotions. With Paul, we chose the clarinet for its depth in the lower register and its slight awkwardness in the lighter high notes. The clarinet sometimes represented the road-bound Étienne—rigorous and self-assured—and sometimes the lover Étienne—wavering and tender. It was quite a challenge for Paul, who comes from techno—this was the first time he composed for clarinetists! Throughout the creative process, the music had to create physical sensations, all the way through to the end credits. For me, it was essential that the film end on a note of joy, and that the audience leave the theatre feeling alive.



A man with a full beard and a brown cap is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He is wearing a black jacket with a bright orange high-visibility vest over it. Large white headphones are around his neck. He is holding a white script or document in his hands. The background is dark and out of focus, with some faint, illegible text visible on a surface behind him.

PIERRE LE GALL

Growing up across from a country road, Pierre also dreamed of driving away. It led him to Paris, into the arms of a man, and toward screenwriting. Since then, he has written for television, theater, and film. This includes the animated short film *Scars We Love*, which was part of the Official Selection at Cannes and nominated for a César Award in 2026.

Flesh & Fuel, his first feature film, explores the two themes that fascinate him most in cinema: time and love.

CAST

Étienne	Alexis Manenti
Bartosz	Julian Świeżewski
Jordan	Armino Alves De Sa
Sandra	Julie Duclos
Claude	Bernard Debreyne

CREW

Directed by	Pierre Le Gall
Produced by	Nicolas Blanc
Written by	Pierre Le Gall, Camille Pertont
Adaptation	Martin Drouot
Image	Antoine Cormier
Editing	Xavier Sirven
Sound	Cédric Berger, Renaud Bajoux, Xavier Thieulin
Music	Paul Sabin
Sets	Anne-Sophie Delseries
Costumes	Caroline Spieth
Continuity	Marion Bernard
1 st Assistant Director	Basile Jullien - A.f.a.r.
Production Coordinator	Benoit Carlier
Production Manager	Fabrice Bousba
Post-Production Managers	Mehdi Sellami, Pierre Huot
A Production	Ex Nihilo
In Coproduction with	Lumisenta Film Fondation – Patryk Sielecki, Adrianna Rędzia
With the support of	CINÉ+ OCS, CNC, PICTANOVO, La Région Hauts-de-France, Strasbourg Eurométropole in partnership with CNC, LA PROCIREP-ANGOA
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