

AFTER BLUE (DIRTY PARADISE)

PRODUCTION NOTES ENGLISH AUGUST 2021

Written & Directed by **Bertrand Mandico**

Shot on 35 mm

Principal Photography: 7 weeks from November 12, 2019

Financing Partners: Cinéimage, Cinéventure, UFO, Kinology, CNC, PROCIREP ANGOA, Ha My productions, Région Nouvelle Aquitaine, Ciné+

Cast: Paula Luna, Elina Löwensohn, Vimala Pons, Agata Buzek, Pauline Lorillard, Michael Erpelding, Camille Rutherford, Anaïs Thomas, Claire Duburcq, Mara Taquin, Clàina Clavaron, with the participation of Alexandra Stewart

Produced by: Emmanuel Chaumet (Ecce Films)

Line Producer/Executive Production: Mathilde Delaunay

1st AD: Camille Fleury

Image: Pascale Granel

Continuity: Laure Saint Marc

Casting: Kris de Bellair

Production Manager: Louise Hentgen

Stage Manager: Benjamin Goumard

Production Design: Toma Baqueni

Costume Designer: Pauline Jacquard

Make-up: Bénédicte Trouvé

Sound: Geoffrey Perrier

Editing: Laure Saint-Marc, George Cragg

Sound Mix: Simon Apostolou

Original Music: Pierre Desprats

Associate Producer: Philippe Richard (Ha My Productions)

With the participation of UFO, CNC

With the support of The Nouvelle Aquitaine Region Procirep Angoa and Ciné+

In association with Cinéimage and Cinéventure

International Sales: Kinology

French Distribution: UFO

North American Distribution: Altered Innocence

Press: Karine Durance

Logos: UFO, le CNC, Nouvelle Aquitaine, Cinéimage, Cinéventure, Kinology, Procirep angoa, Ciné+

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Synopsis

In a faraway future, on a wild and untamed planet, a lonely teenager, Roxy, releases an assassin from the sands she was buried in. As soon as she's free, the criminal sparks death all around. Roxy and her mother Zora are held accountable, banished from their community and forced to track the murderer down. They start a long journey pacing the supranatural territories of their filthy paradise.

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A word from director Bertrand Mandico

After Blue (Dirty Paradise) is a futuristic fantasy, in a feminine world. A picaresque tale set on another planet, that of the imagination. In this film, the refusal of revenge resonates with the song of the spectres. The mother-daughter relationship is troubled by multiple and contradictory desires, solitude becomes a flamboyant abandonment and death a companion on the road. I wanted to weave an ode to cinema, an ode to actresses, a singular and universal adventure, borrowing from the western its trappings, from ancient tales their cruelty and from science fiction its lyricism.

On the connection between *After Blue (Dirty Paradise)* and Bertrand Mandico's previous works

« My feature films are ambitious adventure stories containing elements from my short films, which have a more « meta » dimension. All my films are communicating between themselves as a vast spider web.

In *Ultra Pulpe*, the director (Joyce Damato) tries to shoot a final science-fiction film (Apocalypse After) in a setting where studio and natural reliefs are mixed. It is a world of women, lost in their feelings. All these elements anticipate *After Blue*.

For example, a girl lost on the planet Mars observed by her mother.

Also, always in *Ultra Pulpe*, the titles of the films spelled out by Nathalie Richard (who plays the voice of Truth in *After Blue*), Nathalie Richard announces: *Paradis Sale...* and other films to come. There is also the appearance of an alien creature with a diamond face, a sketch of the Indians in *After Blue*.

From this creature emerges Vimala Pons in *Ultra Pulpe*, who plays Veronika Sternberg in *After Blue*.

There are many bridges between the two films and in particular, the relationship to the dead and to ghosts.

In the same way, a character named Kate Bush (played by David Patrick Kelly) appears in *The Return of Tragedy*, another short film from the same period. And finally in *Extazus*, I film an author of Heroic Fantasy exceeded by his heroines.

You could say that in the short films that precede the shooting of *After Blue*, I test ideas, I sketch, I comment, I question the feature film to come. »

INTERVIEW WITH BERTRAND MANDICO / Mathilde Henrot, Locarno, August 2021

Can you tell us about the choice of the title, the name of the planet, the world of women?

I imagined the conquest of a new world, somewhat similar to the conquest of America with its pioneers, but on a planetary scale, with an ecological conscience erected almost as a religion. Communities leaving the earth, and trying to create a better world. At least a world where one avoids building at all costs, where one avoids destroying, where one renounces machines, computers, where one advocates osmosis with nature.

A world in which we would live, by communities, governed by strict rules. Rules that drift and end up becoming excessive and feudal.

This world of after, this "after the earth", this "after the blue planet", pushed me to baptize the planet (and the film) "After Blue"... With a subtitle "Dirty Paradise". Because this Eden, preserved, is inevitably doomed to be dirtied by the human presence. It is not a lost paradise, it is a stained paradise.

The second meaning of the title comes from the experiments carried out around death, especially since the world of the dead, at least after death, is very present in the film. It seems that the last thing perceived by humans, when they die, is the color blue.

To take the biblical counterpoint of paradise and the exasperating idea of original sin attributed to women, I imagined a planet with a virus that prevents the presence of (biological) men. A planet where only the "ovary carriers" would survive, the people who could carry life. I built this exclusive rule, to go to the end of a utopia, not ideological, but biological. A new world populated and regulated exclusively by women, the idea of a real Amazon planet, never before seen in cinema.

This rule also allowed me to give actresses of all ages the opportunity to play atypical and intense roles, whether they are strong, fragile, wild or visionary...

Twenty years ago, I wrote the script as a Cocteau-style western, a story of pioneers in North America, a harsh world of men lost in a surreal world. I adapted and transposed my script to another feminine planet. My film changed gender, without changing the characters.

You said that this film was inspired by a dream of Fellini, can you elaborate?

I read that Fellini had a dream of making a Science-Fiction film. In a preface to a monograph by Moebius, he mentioned his admiration for the cartoonist's universe and the desire to work with him. There was also talk of him directing Flash Gordon. Traces of his SF project appear in *Satyricon* (he worked his ancient world as an alien world). There are also traces of SF in *8.1/2*. The hero prepares a SF film of which we see the sets under construction and some sketches. In the *City of Women*, we can

see fragments of scenes or situations linked to a world of anticipation. When I imagined the formal universe of the film, I strongly thought of Fellini, of Satyricon but also of John Boorman's pantheism. My film is an esoteric fantasy, soaked in subterranean influences.

Your film can also be reminiscent of a western - fable or a mythological tale, Kate Bush looks like Medusa in the first scene, was that your intention?

The dynamics of the western and the elements that characterize it (hat, gun, horse, wide open spaces, duel) are summoned in the film. I play with the idea of a cosmic western, but the structure of the story borrows from the tales of the Thousand and One Nights, the cruel genie that is delivered and grants us three wishes (Aladdin and the Fisherman's story). Kate Bush, is as much an evil genie as a Medusa. The secondary characters, such as Sternberg and the android Olgar2, refer in their characters and aesthetics to the universe of oriental tales. The quest for desire and (non) revenge led by Zora and Roxy constantly oscillate between western and mythological tale.

Your film is full of visual and scriptural references, both archaic and contemporary, can you tell us about them and the way you assemble them?

It's a game of progressive weaving, or by associations of ideas, I flesh out my story with several layers of readings. I summon the myth that I confront with the modern world, while maintaining a coherent stylization of the finished film. I like the idea of being able to make Sergio Leone and Vera Chytilova cohabit.

There is currently a reflection called hydro-feminism, did you hear about it and was it a current of thought with which you wanted your film to communicate?

I heard about it after the film was finished, I had the question of ecofeminism in mind of course. There are bridges between my story and hydro-feminism, which are obvious to me once the film is finished, but it was not conscious. What interests me is everything that escapes me and goes beyond me, and can echo with contemporary reflections (the hydro, the mineral and the beyond).

Can you tell us about the work done on the image, both its texture and its effects? Indeed, it is extremely worked, produces a dreamlike effect and yet some special effects are not post-produced but made at the time of shooting, can you explain these choices?

The film was shot in 35mm, and everything you see in the film was shot directly as it was. We created sets, retro-projections, used optical filters etc... I decided to do all my effects on the set, to live the films as performances, where the choral concentration on the set (that of the actors as well as that of the technicians) converges to reach an ultimate point, the balance of the filming. For me, what we fail to create on the set, should not exist, because it is "false" cinema, all that the spectator must see, is what has been filmed by the camera.

The work on the sound is also particular, a somewhat nostalgic theme, comes back often, like a ritornello, can you tell us about this choice and the way you work on this aspect of the film with your regular collaborator?

For the music, we imagined a certain number of scores beforehand, which were reworked during the editing process. It's a dialogue with Pierre Desprats, it's a question of musical references, desires for instruments or rhythmic impulses and melodic intuitions. The musical work is not theoretical, it is sensory.

On the other hand, the sound which is more organic, passes by another mode of manufacture, artisanal much more hybrid. The sound is the material that links the images to the editing... I build the soundtrack at the same time as my image editing, the soundtrack of my films is expressionist while my images are impressionist.

The choice of natural and interior settings never ceases to fascinate us, it is really the essence of cinema to recreate a world, real or not, can you talk about this aspect of your work?

We treated the exteriors as if they were in the studio, with the lighting and additional elements that create a shift. We had to believe in the other world, with a restricted copy and with the idea of staying in a concrete fabrication of the elements.

With Tomas Baqueni, the set designer, we thought of the places by quantifying the number of elements according to the acts, allowing us to create this sensation of manufactured sets.

Pascale Granel, the cinematographer, also used lighting that accentuated the sensation of alien lights and colors. The switch from studio to natural settings is permanent, sometimes in an insert, a counter-field or in the heart of a sequence. This loss of real reference points was the key to the formal coherence of our film.

How did you work with the actors and actresses?

The casting process was a long one, in order to find the right balance between characters. We rehearsed a lot, to find a fluidity of play and not to search on the set and allow me to shoot sequences. Then there was the post-synchro, where I continued to modify the vocal nuances of the game.

Elina Löwensohn, Paula-Luna Breitenfelder, Agata Buzek, Vimala Pons... To name but a few, totally abandoned themselves to their characters. The shooting was extremely physical, the weather conditions deplorable. This is a film that holds together thanks to the conviction and power of the actresses. My pleasure as a filmmaker is to be able to film them and build a story on their talent.

Was your film interrupted by Covid and if so, was it a complication or a break that proved fruitful?

Covid came in during the editing process. We had geographical containment concerns for our George Cragg engine, and Laure Saint-Marc took over. But otherwise, it was some monastic work in a suspended time...

You have directed many short films, and continue to alternate between short and long formats, especially after your first feature film *Les Garçons Sauvages*, which is quite unusual because many directors concentrate on feature films after a period of short films, do you think you will continue to alternate? If so, can you tell us about this choice?

I have the need to alternate, to explore new subjects and genres without boundaries. I shoot shorts to experiment, to go as far as possible in my reflections on cinema. This format is for me like a watercolor notebook, a notebook. I make shorts without money, others, better financed. I test ideas, I decline concepts, I gauge my limits, I challenge my principles with the short format.

It's not the same dynamic as for a feature film, the pressure is less.

The relationship to the story is very different, the novelistic aspect of a feature film is indispensable to me.

I need and like to shoot long films, and I have the impression that I have to make up for the "lost time" of not having been able to shoot long films earlier.

Bertrand Mandico Biography

Born in March 1971 in Toulouse, he joined CFT Gobelins in Paris where he graduated from "animation cinema" in 1993. However, he only directed one animated short film: *The Blue Horseman*, featuring a surreal, organic and lyrical pagan rite.

He extended his visual experiments by designing faked miniatures for Arte.

Inventor of dazzling, crepuscular, humorous and sensitive universes, he works on cinematographic and narrative material by revisiting genres. He writes and directs numerous short and medium-length films selected and awarded in a large number of festivals or retrospectives. In 2011 for example, *Boro in the Box* is presented at the Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival. Freely inspired by the life of Walerian Borowczyk, the film echoes a retrospective he piloted in Warsaw. Bertrand Mandico's researches are polymorphic (texts, photos, drawings, assemblages) and some of his films (*Living Still Life*) are exhibited in art centers.

Bertrand Mandico is also working on a 21-film project in 21 years with Elina Löwensohn, reflection on the bodily states of the actress and fiction, where dream lives and cinema mingle.

At the same time, he wrote and produced a science fiction series, *Prairie*, intended for Belgium and Norway. In February 2018 released his first feature film *The Wild Boys* after a successful festival tour. The same year he directed the medium-length film *Ultra Pulpe* presented at Cannes Critics' Week. *After Blue (Dirty Paradise)* is his second feature length motion picture.

Selected Filmography

ULTRA PULPE (36' – 2018)
LES GARÇONS SAUVAGES (110' – 2017)
DEPRESSIVE COP (12' – 2016)
SOUVENIRS D'UN MONTREUR DE SEINS (10'- 2016)
Y'A-T-IL UNE VIERGE ENCORE VIVANTE ? (9' – 2015)
NOTRE DAME DES HORMONES (30', 2014)
PREHISTORIC CABARET (10', 2013)
S... SA... SALAM... SALLAMMBÔ (11'- 2012)
BORO IN THE BOX (42', 2011)
LIVING STILL LIFE (17' - 2012)
LIF OG DAUDI HENRY DARGER (12' - 2011)
SA MAJESTE PETITES BARBES (10' -2010)
MIE, L'ENFANT DESCEND DU SONGE (11'- 2009)
IL DIT QU'IL EST MORT (18'- 2008)
ESSAI 135 (5' -2007)
TOUT CE QUE VOUS AVEZ VU EST VRAI (5' - 2006)
LE CAVALIER BLEU (11'- 1998)

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