



In co-production with LADY BOYS FILMS

presents



In France, 3,6% of inmates are women, imprisoned after trajectory almost always comprised of discrimination, precariousness and violence. Eleven such women incarcerated at the penitentiary in Joux-la-Ville were willing to play in our film. These fictionalized stories are not their own, but they are all true.

## **Pitch**

When Manon first arrived at the prison for having killed her own mother, the other inmates turned their backs on her. Some even mistreated her, like her cellmate Nadine. But little by little she opened up and became one of a group of women who spoke to us about their experiences as females, from early childhood to menopause, from pleasure to rape ... because these women, all inmates serving long sentences for the crimes they have committed, are above all victims of their condition as women...

## **A unique approach**

For the first time in France, ***So Far From Men*** is a feature film about women doing time, shot with real inmates in a real penitentiary. This film is another way to give inmates a chance to speak, to talk about being women in prison, about their bodies - from adulthood to old age - but also about their desires and pleasure. How else could it be done, other than with those who experience it in real life?

## **A real film and non docu-fiction**

The particular nature of this film project is to tell a prison story played by real inmates, along with professional actors Christine Citti and Fabienne Péryneau.

When Arnaud Ségnac presented the project last year to the Ministry of Justice, the prison authorities reacted very favorably. Then, this summer, he received the same reaction from the warden of the penitentiary in Joux-la-Ville, forty kilometers from Auxerre. It has a section for women serving long sentences. Only 15% of the women in it still maintain relations with the outside world.

In fact, this project corresponds to a strong commitment on the part of this specific penitentiary to favor inmate rehabilitation. It gives inmates a space in which they can speak about a subject that is a fundamental and constituent part of their condition. It is a fact that female inmates are more often abandoned by their families compared to men with equal sentence.? Women themselves more alone and precarious than their male counterparts.

We imagined one particular story for each of them, totally unrelated to the real pasts of these women behind bars.

During two-week workshops, the inmates were able to work on the characters written for them. They were then given time and space to speak freely, filtered through the prism of their fictionalized characters. Thus, by a mirror effect and via the liberated speech of the inmates, we were able to spotlight women’s issues proper to incarceration: maternity, gynecological problems, sex, the male violence which often provoked their crimes, but also their need for solidarity and shared laughter to withstand the violence and harshness of incarceration.

The stories of these eleven inmates mesh with the story of Manon and Nadine.



## The story

We meet 'newcomer' Manon, and see the shock she undergoes when entering prison for having killed her mother. Manon shares a cell with Nadine, who was sentenced to Joux-La-Ville three years earlier for having killed her abusive husband. Everything separates the two cellmates: the milieu they come from, their pasts, and their desires. Manon is homosexual, Nadine heterosexual. Their cohabitation in a 9 m<sup>2</sup> cell is tense and violent.

Week after week, by necessity, out of solidarity, but also thanks to their personal relationships and conversations with other inmates, Manon and Nadine gradually come to terms with each other. One thing links all these inmates: their femininity that is being mistreated in a prison milieu.

For a few months, Nadine's daughter Andrea refuses to come see her. To hold up, Nadine secretly takes pills, tranquilizers and antidepressants. One night, after Andrea has again refused to visit her mother, Nadine tries to commit suicide.

Manon saves Nadine, just in time.

Manon then suggests marrying Nadine so that she can take care of Andrea.

In fact, Manon's sentence has been reduced. She will be released in six months.

Manon is no longer guilty of killing her mother, but of having helped her to die.

A long road opens before them: first of all, Andrea will have to agree, and then the administration will have to validate the marriage.

If Manon and Nadine's wedding is at first a marriage of convenience, in the close confinement of a 9 m<sup>2</sup> cell, it gradually becomes a marriage for love.

And so ***So Far From Men*** addresses a new twist on same-sex marriage: between women in prison.



## **The production**

When Arnaud Ségnac came to talk to us about his project in late July 2017, just after he had been given the green light to shoot his film in Joux-la-Ville, we were unable to resist. This film is in perfect sync with the editorial line of Authentic Prod. A few years ago, we worked on a subject for television that brought female inmates. So going ahead with this project was a no-brainer!

No film has ever been put together as quickly as this coproduction between LadyBoys (Arnaud Ségnac and Laurence Katrian's company) and Authentic Prod (Aline Besson and Isabelle Drong): the final screenplay, the artistic dossier, casting, CNC approval, the elaboration of a budget and shooting schedule, authorizations from the Ministry of Justice, and drawing up ad hoc contracts for the inmates...

### ***The shoot was to take place over two periods:***

- Workshops took place in September to allow the inmates to work progressively and with confidence. With the help of improvisations, they were able to appropriate the text and situations, learn to act and become comfortable with cameras (even though in prison there are cameras everywhere!). The director was thus able to polish the script with co-author Fabienne Périneau, while shooting his first scenes, including the testimony of the characters, telling us how they arrived at where they are, and more particularly what happened to them during their childhoods.
- The shoot per se, which took place from October 2<sup>nd</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> (17 days).



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE OF INTENT

*"I say vagina, because what you don't say becomes a secret, and secrets often engender shame, fear and myth."*

*Eve Ensler – The Vagina Monologues*

Imagining this kind of project put us in a quandary when writing the text and explaining our intent. A great part of the film was to be made with real inmates. That is in fact the approach that is proper to this film: restoring their dignity to these women who before being guilty are often - actually always, - victims because they are women.

And so it was a film that had to be made outside of traditional conditions, in order to leave room for reality and improvisation.

I selected eleven women from among the inmates to whom I was able to present my project. They all volunteered to be filmed without being pixelated, first of all during a series of workshops they took part in, working on texts that deal with femininity in all its shapes and forms, at different stages of a woman's life. The inmates were free to provide their own testimony, but any moment they could ask for their words to remain off camera, unfilmed.

Even though the film takes place in a penitentiary, there was never any question of working with women on their own stories, but to give them each a role, as with any other actress.

### ***A film is always a struggle!***

It was a struggle to write it, to interest producers and distributors, and then to conceive it and make it into a one-of-a-kind object.

It was a struggle to express in simple terms the despair that sneaks up on these women who have been destabilized by a traumatic moment in their lives.

I wanted to avoid using the inmates' situations to construct a dark, anxiety-provoking story. I would even say that that is the opposite of what I was striving for. That is why the film answers a great many intimate questions about things that go unsaid, about the brutality of men against women, but also about pleasure and desire, the road from childhood to menopause and old age, without forgetting the comical aspect of some situations.

That is why the choice of a prison imposed itself, because it is a one-of-a-kind place where women are pressed together and can form a group in which words – whether inhibited or inflamed - take flight differently.

*“Prison is sometimes the place where some women feel safe for the first time in their lives.”*

***“We had to use our ignorance as a point of departure for giving new meaning to the text”***

The fact that real inmates, with their own personalities and pasts, are performing these roles, makes us hear these fragments of women’s lives differently. Because behind the words, whatever the social position of the individual woman, it all boils down to the different treatment and inequalities that have always been her lot as one of the so-called weaker sex. Behind bars, their words echo their confined, repressive position, as they dream of, and fight for freedom.

And then there are those who watch them, who guard them, and who either want to help them out of the vicious cycle in which they have been trapped by their fragile situations, or on the contrary want to punish them.

This is their shared struggle that I wanted to convey by filming, first and foremost, the humanity they exude, and the various struggles they all go through to arrive at solutions that are unfortunately never perfect.

For us to take a different and unsettling look, I wanted to treat the film in a naturalistic manner that fits perfectly with the social and human themes that our screenplay tried to address.

The camera stayed close to the characters, on their eyes and their slightest gestures, in an absence of dialogue, in a silence that was even more deafening than a scream.

I therefore tried to reproduce reality as best I could, while remaining true to the authenticity of my characters in a sweeping, boundless and emotional fiction.

*“Each film may be an uncertain fight, but a fight that has to be won.”*

*Arnaud Ségnac*





## ARNAUD SELIGNAC - BIOGRAPHY

When he was 22, Arnaud Selignac encountered John Boorman and worked with him on “Excalibur”. Boorman would later produce his first feature film, “Nemo”. Forty films were to follow, for both cinema and television, and shot in the four corners of the world: from New York to Bombay, to Sarajevo during the war. He has made thrillers, comedies, costume dramas, political or sci-fi films, anything that describes human nature and its many ways of existing, its struggle against fate and how it constantly rethinks immortality. Because images and texts are a way of expressing the truth, a truth that audience members can digest in their own good time, depending on what they decide to see there.



**Some of his films:**

**L'épreuve d'amour**

**Box 27**

(Special Jury Prize, Los Angeles)

(Special Jury Prize, Award for Best Actor to Eric Elmosnino, and Award for Best Music at the Festival de la Rochelle)

(Award for Best Actor to Eric Elmosnino, Seoul)

**Arletty** (Award for Best Actress to Laetitia Casta, Lauriers de l'audiovisuel)

(Press Award, Festival de Luchon)

**Où es-tu maintenant ?** (Award for Best Actor to Patrick Chesnais, Festival de la Rochelle)

**Silence, on viole**

**Rani** (Best Series Award, Lauriers de l'audiovisuel )

**Vieilles canailles** (Best Comedy Award, La Rochelle)

**Notre dame des barjots**

**L'évasion de Louis XVI**

**Divine Émilie**

**Vérités assassines**

**La chasse à l'homme**

**On ne prête qu'aux riches**

**Péril imminent** (Award for Best Series, St Tropez)

**Aurélien**

**Mausolée pour une garce**

**Fleurs de sel**

**Si je t'oublie Sarajevo** (Grand Prix, Barcelona and nominated at the Emmys)

**Kazan et Baree**

**Une femme pour moi** (Award for Best Television Film, Cognac)

**X-Road**

**Gawin**

**Chéreau l'envers du théâtre**

**Némo**

## AUTHENTIC PROD

We wish to emphasize simplicity, reactivity, respect, reliability and efficacy. In one word: authenticity.

Authentic Prod was born of a desire to pool our complementary competences and experiences, acquired over the several years we spent producing French fiction.

As our company name indicates, we intend to focus on simple and authentic ways to approach subjects, but also on what we ourselves are, that is to say, women, citizens and mothers. All kinds of stories fascinate us. For us, as an emotional experience, fiction is an essential means to apprehend the truth.

And our manner of envisaging work and work relations is much the same. We wish to highlight simplicity, reactivity, respect, reliability, and efficacy. In one word: authenticity.

Focusing on fiction, we work for all channels. We address all formats (short subjects, 26', 52' and 90') and all genres (drama, comedy, thriller), showcasing the themes and issues we care about: individual human beings, love, family, society, politics and culture, all undergoing constant mutation...

While still focused on television, we are expanding to cinema and documentary with the same editorial rigor.



## CONTACT

**Aline Besson**, Producer

**Isabelle Drong**, Producer

<http://www.authenticprod.fr/contact/>

+33 1 47 70 89 11