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CANNES 2013
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Move Movie presents

SUZANNE

A FILM BY KATELL QUILLÉVÉRÉ

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MOVE MOVIE presents



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OPENING FILM

SUZANNE

A FILM BY **KATELL QUILLÉVÉRÉ**

France / 2013 / 94' / French

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SYNOPSIS

The story of a destiny
Suzanne's and her family's
The ties that bind them, keep them together, and the love
she pursues... to the point of leaving everything behind.



INTERVIEW WITH KATELL QUILLÉVÉRÉ

Suzanne intermingles two different narrative forms: realism and fiction, which unfold over a 25-year period.

Yes, it walks the line between these two narrative forms. I believe that a film finds its aesthetic in this antagonism, when different aspirations meet and collide. If everything goes in the same direction, after a while, it becomes boring.

How did you come up with the character of Suzanne?

When my companion was reading a number of books about French public enemies such as Mesrine, Besse or Vaujour, he gave me their wives' autobiographies. I was fascinated by these women's attitudes. They were at once extremely courageous, but also caught up in a form of almost suicidal submission to their husbands. In their books, the first chapter is always devoted to their childhood and their adolescence in order to search for, without really finding, events that could give sense to the direction their lives have taken, and which would explain this decisive romantic encounter. Why do they suddenly cross paths and fall in love with these particular men, tying their fates to theirs to the point of being capable of sneaking explosives into a prison, or learning to pilot a helicopter to help them escape? The roads they have traveled raise the question of destiny and chance. At the same time, I have always liked the American biopic format, like *Bird*, *Bound for Glory*, *Coal miner's daughter*... So the idea started to take shape in my mind to build a biopic around an unknown woman, who becomes a slave to a love that is so strong she is ready to abandon everything for this man.

The film is built around a number of ellipses that reinforce our implication in the story, for they push us to imagine what Suzanne has gone through during that period. This is particularly true when we find Suzanne again with her son, who is already three years old.

Yes, building a narrative based on ellipses was one of the gambles we took with this film. Both with my co-screenwriter Mariette Desert, and then Thomas Marchand, my editor, we wanted to create a very powerful off-screen story that would turn the spectators into active participants, allowing them to fill the gaps in the story with their own experience. Indeed, we chose to have Charlie, Suzanne's son, appear at age three instead of filming his birth. I felt it was more cinematographic to show this teenager who is suddenly a mother, in an abrupt cut. An ellipse's brutality can express, better than anything, the upheaval that can be provoked by an event. The film also speaks about universal questions, which deeply touch everyone's personal experience. Everybody can imagine what it means to have a child at only seventeen.

Very early on we also decided that we weren't going to shoot the lovers on the run. It's too expected and has already been seen so many times in cinema. At this point in the story, it is more interesting to follow those who stay behind, to flesh out Suzanne's character through her absence.

What constitutes the film's originality is following the main character while having the film lean towards a choral account.

This structure, walking the line between chronicle and choral film was already present in *Love like poison*. But we pushed the idea further, instilling a true romantic flair. Suzanne is the film's backbone –but we allowed ourselves to let her disappear from the story in order to learn about the other characters. The screenplay delved further into the story of each character. But while editing, we had to balance the story. We streamlined the film, using the following principle: scenes where Suzanne wasn't there, but still remained linked to her, indirectly, for they were filled with her absence...stayed. Whether it is the scene in Nicolas' trunk with the hitchhiker, or when Charlie comes home from school, everything refers back to her.

We have a premonition of the fact that her encounter with Julien is going to have dramatic consequences for her, but she has to see this love through, for there is true love between them...

Here again we raise the question of destiny. Sometimes, in an irrepressible way, we have to live something, no matter what it entails, whether it be violent or chaotic...Retrospectively, I believe Suzanne suffers from such a lack of love that she has to fill it with this particular man. She doesn't have the choice. She has to walk down that road, even if it means this extreme and taboo gesture of abandoning her own child. The challenge was to be above judgment and not to moralize. To construct an emotional story, and to constantly make the love flow between the characters, so that the audience can feel this love, and that it provokes enough empathy in the audience to make the spectator want to accompany Suzanne as she is, without judgment, in total ambivalence.

One of the reasons we don't want to judge Suzanne is that we see her more often face the consequences of her actions than question the choices she makes...

Indeed, we are not approaching this from a psychological point of view. Most of the time, the most important decisions that Suzanne makes happen off-screen. She is always one step ahead of us and the other characters. She eludes us like she eludes her father, her sister, and even Julien in the end. It is this mysterious facet that makes her a truly fictitious character. But the film always takes responsibility for the weight of her decisions. She constantly pays the price of her freedom.



When Suzanne is in the bar with her child sleeping on her lap, the close-up on her face allows us to feel both her distress from having become a mother too soon, and the strength that she derives from this little sleeping being...

This child ties her down, and at the same time, helps her to live. She will never regret having kept him. Suzanne is a love film from start to finish, with the constant contradiction of our emotions and life's endless to and fro. Suzanne loses Charlie in order to find Julien, then must lose her sister to find herself, and really become a mother. Some deaths are filled with an enormous sorrow that can at the same time be liberating. It allows us to pass from one thing to the next; it allows us to grow. Suzanne is also a film about resiliency, it shows us how the life instinct can be stronger than anything else. When Suzanne is in the prison visiting room at the end, contemplating her two children, the idea is that beyond the chaos, something has been constructed and transmitted. Life continues, above and beyond her. That's why the last face in the film is Charlie's.

When Suzanne is at her mother's grave, it is suddenly obvious that she is subjecting her child exactly to what she was made to endure as a child: a mother's absence...

Absolutely. This mother's death contains the film's central meaning, and her tomb a place of ritual where everything that is truly important is said, happens, or is learned. But this death is only one clue in finding meaning. I don't treat the subject as if it were a childhood trauma. There is dramatic tension in the classical sense of the term, as often is the case in biopics. In contrast, I wanted to develop the notion of mystery and happenstance. There is an original "cause," that didn't wait for us so that the story could be told. There are even times when we don't know the cause and it eludes us, yet it is our driving force, like a source that comes to nourish us.

After LOVE LIKE POISON, what strategy did you use for directing your second feature film?

For Suzanne I tried to "let go," to make room for chance, reality, and the actors, in order to make a film that was freer and less even. In particular, I was looking as soon as it was feasible to introduce documentary material in order to plunge the fictive story into a realistic environment. At the same time, with Tom Harari, my cinematographer, we gave ourselves more formal challenges, in order to bring a lyrical feeling to the film.

The difference with our preceding film, was principally that we were inspired by American photography in the sixties, William Eggleston and Stephen Shore; other references were Tom Wood and Lorca di Corcia, who Virginie Montel, our artistic advisor had us discover. These influences lead us to capture spaces in almost the manner of a documentary and yet at the same time in the manner of a composi-

tion. Many of the shots were nourished by this approach such as the parking lot with the trucks, the gas stations, the harbor, Suzanne's family in the living room, framed by a static shot...I sought to introduce the social aspect in the film uniquely this way, showing it through their living space, their environment...because social determinism also factors into this story. If the father hadn't been a truck driver, and thus hadn't been so absent, maybe things would have happened differently. In particular, he could have kept Charlie. If Maria hadn't had to start working at such a young age...

Maria is Suzanne's little sister but she takes a great deal of responsibility for her sister.

It's common in families: when one child causes problems, the other child feels the necessity to be well-behaved. It's all interrelated, people fill the space that remains. There is a type of fusion between the two sisters, it's as if they can't exist at the same time. That is why I allowed Maria to brutally disappear. Suzanne was in a place in her life where she needed this electroshock in order to react.

The shot of the ferry headed for Morocco, growing distant in the night, has a lyrical intensity. It evokes both an ending and a new beginning, the threat of a shipwreck and the promise of elsewhere...

The beginning of the film, which is rather raw and choppy, is a reflection of its characters. As the story progresses, the influence of the direction grows and unfurls, allowing for a certain lyricism. I wanted the direction to evolve with the story, for it to become increasingly mature and confident, grow in scope and extent, like Suzanne's character.

You also allowed a few forays into fantasy, when Suzanne appears to Maria in the night club, and when she finds Julien again on the bus...

I simply wanted to inscribe the power of fantasy in real life. What does it feel like to be haunted by someone? How can cinema transcribe this phenomenon? This very strange feeling is at the same time very natural. When we miss someone terribly, we have the impression that we see them everywhere: we pass them in the street, see them in stranger's faces. In my mind, that is what happens in the nightclub. On the contrary, on the bus, it's an emotional shock for Suzanne. This apparition is practically nightmarish. She has barely just started to rebuild her life. Julien is everything she wants to escape and at the same time, everything she has been waiting for. Such a moment can only be addressed in imaginary ways.

We are accustomed to seeing Sara Forestier in a more expansive register. Here, she is almost being cast against type...

Suzanne's character demanded a modest interpretation, Sara was immediately convinced of this along with the rest of us. From that point on, our collaboration was both obvious and fascinating. She's an unbelievably good actress, with a rare intensity, capable of taking on very violent acting situations. And at the same time she is radiant, which was an enormous advantage for the character, because I knew that the film was potentially very dark. I knew that her inner light and her energy, once channeled, could bring the breath of fresh air that the film would need. I was fascinated by the emotional maturity of this young 25-year-old woman during the shoot. She could express everything, from violence to amorous passion, the sorrow of mourning someone, maternal joy, as if she had already lived a hundred lives...

And Adèle Haenel?

I had seen her in *The Devils* by Christophe Ruggia, then in *Water Lilies* by Céline Sciamma and *House of Tolerance* by Bertrand Bonello. I had wanted to work with her for a very long time. She is an uncommon person and actress. She has so much depth, it was fascinating to lead her to lighter areas. I knew that the frivolousness that I was looking for in *Maria* would never be hollow, that she would know how to bring to the surface the melancholy and the drama that are hidden behind her laughter. I also wanted to bring out her whimsy and imagination, for she is a very funny person. Above all, I invited her to let go. I kept a lot of the suggestions she made during the shoot.



The scene where Maria and Suzanne, teenagers, are behind the railing, heckling boys, is in fact very funny...

Exactly – in this part about adolescence, many things come from the actresses. I gave them the basic framework of the scenes, but then I left them a lot of freedom. Sara, Adèle, and François Damiens are very strong in improvisation. It was a true delight. In the barbecue scene, for example, I put the set in place, the mood, the extras, but then afterwards I let them improvise so that something rich could happen, something closer to reality.

And the choice of François Damiens?

I had very much liked his work in Axelle Ropert's very beautiful film, *The Wolberg family*, and then I discovered his comic abilities, the candid camera that made him famous in Belgium. He made me laugh so, he is a genius, an incredibly good actor. I feel he has the scope and breadth of actors like Jean Yanne in *We won't grow old Together*, Guy Marchand, or even Pialat himself. He renews something in his physical aspect, his relationship to the role, in his emotional expression, it is very sincere, raw. He touches me deeply, I didn't see any other person playing the role of Nicolas.

And Paul Hamy ?

He wasn't an actor to begin with. I wanted Julien to be someone unknown, that this person be the aesthetic link between the documentary side of the film and the narrative fiction. So I discovered him through an open call. Taking a non professional for such an important role was a dangerous gamble. If the love story between Suzanne and he didn't work, if you wonder what she is doing with him, the film falls apart at the seams. It was a long road to find him, and for me to be sure that it was him. We worked a great deal, preparing... Paul has a magnetic presence on the screen, and an extraordinary intuition for acting. He has all the right ingredients to become a great actor.

Portraying the passage of time over twenty-five years on the actor's faces is a real challenge...

Yes, one of the challenges of the film was the artistic direction involved with aging the characters. A mistake in the choice of a wig, a detail in the makeup that is noticed and the spectator is distracted from the story. Luckily, I was surrounded by an extraordinary hair and makeup team. We very quickly decided that François would be the linchpin of time, for his physical appearance is very malleable. He can easily be thirty-eight at the beginning of the film and sixty at the end. We enormously modified his face, his body; he worked on how his walk would evolve. All of this preparation weighed heavily on him. More than 2 and 1/2 hours were needed just for his face. For Sara, as for Adèle, we decided to let the essential be expressed through their acting, with precise and sober elements that reinforce the passage of time and maturity: bangs, shorter hair... how the way they dress evolves.

In this same spirit, time subtly passes in the scenery...

With our production designer, Anna Falguères, we decided not to try and recreate a time period, but instead try and evoke it, make things feel like they come from the time period. An object, a material, a certain wallpaper were enough to suggest a particular era. We felt that it would work if we didn't question it. I wanted the time to flow, the changes we notice should occur almost unconsciously, as small indicators of the time that passes.

And the music...

It was important for me that the film have a rock and roll sound from the 1990s and 2000s. This would say something about Suzanne's teenage years and my generation. I used songs that Electrelane, an all girl English rock band, had already written and that I love, and I also asked Verity Susman, who was the lead singer in the group, to compose a few new songs. She is the one who found the main theme that opens the film, and which returns several times during key moments, bringing an emotional and temporal continuity. There are also a few songs from the time period that are federating: *Noir Désir*, *Courtney Love*, and finally *Nina Simone's* gospel version of *Suzanne*.. with her voice that seems to have experienced everything, all of life's ups and downs.

...which is the main theme of Leonard Cohen's song.

Yes, and to whom I pay homage, even if it is just for anecdotal reasons. When I was getting ready to make *Love Like Poison*, the shoot was cancelled because we didn't have the financing. I was depressed, I wasn't sure if this film would ever be made...I was toying with the notion of writing another project when I went to see Leonard Cohen in concert. It was so beautiful to see him back on stage – it filled me with such a life force that I started writing again. And Suzanne was born.

One of the pleasures when watching this film is letting the story take us away, following it without any indication of what direction it is taking...apart from the name of the film, which is a stumbling block...

Yes, the title imposed itself from the start. It helped us to accept the fact that at the beginning of the film, there is not a main character. Suzanne is our guide, everything happens in connection to her, the way life circulates and the love flows around her.

Suzanne is also the heroine of Pialat's *A nos amours* (English title: *Suzanne*)...

...which is a cult film for me and my producer, Bruno Levy. Before every film shoot I (re)watch several films by Pialat - he is a touchstone for me. Something very deep inside links me to his cinema. With hindsight, in *A nos amours*, it's the almost incestuous love between Suzanne and her father that left an impression on me. In a very discreet way, my film is also the story of a young girl who tries to escape her father's suffocating love.

The opening scene refers to this strong link, with the little girl dancing while her father watches her admiringly...

Yes, it's really a father looking at his daughter. That is why I decided to isolate him in the frame. At the beginning of the film, I was just trying to put the spectator in a place of childhood reminiscence, to create emotional links with the characters, creating a sort of underlying matrix: in the beginning, there was this intensely close trio, that doesn't make sense right away, but will later be recalled. At the end of the film, in the visiting room, a strange family is recreated; the father has returned in Suzanne's life.

Yes, but we tell ourselves that Julien will come back too, after the other ellipses! Possibly... in any case, the end of the film does not mark the end of her love life!

Interview by Claire Vassé.



DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

- 2012 **SUZANNE**
Critics' Week, Cannes 2013 - Opening Film
- 2010 **LOVE LIKE POISON**
Prix Jean-Vigo 2010
Directors' Fortnight, Cannes 2010
- 2009 **L'ÉCHAPPÉE**
short 17 min
- 2007 **L'IMPRUDENCE**
short 13 min
- 2005 **À BRAS LE CORPS**
short 19 min
Directors' Fortnight, Cannes 2005
César 2007 nomination

SARA FORESTIER

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2012 **SUZANNE** by Katell Quillévéré
2011 **PIRATE TV** by Michel Leclerc
UNE NUIT by Philippe Lefebvre
2009 **THE NAME OF LOVE** by Michel Leclerc
César 2010 Best Actress
GAINSBURG : A HEROIC LIFE by Joann Sfar
WILD GRASS by Alain Resnais
2005 **HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME?** by Bertrand Blier
UN FIL À LA PATTE by Michel Deville
2004 **GAMES OF LOVE AND CHANCE** by Abdel Kechiche
César 2005 Best female newcomer

FRANÇOIS DAMIENS

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2013 **PLAYING DEAD** by Jean-Paul Salomé
2012 **SUZANNE** by Katell Quillévéré
2011 **TANGO LIBRE** by Frédéric Fonteyne
2011 **DELICACY** by David et Stéphane Foenkinos
2010 **NOTHING TO DECLARE** by Dany Boon
HEARTBREAKER by Pascal Chaumeil
2009 **THE WOLBERG FAMILY** by Axelle Ropert
LITTLE NICHOLAS by Laurent Tirard
2007 **COWBOY** by Benoît Mariage
2006 **OSS 117: CAIRO, NEST OF SPIES** by Michel Hazavanicius

ADÈLE HAENEL

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2012 **SUZANNE** by Katell Quillévéré
2011 **ALYAH** by Elie Wajeman
THREE WORLDS by Catherine Corsini
HEAT WAVE by Jean-Jacques Jauffret
2010 **HOUSE OF TOLERANCE** by Bertrand Bonello
2007 **WATER LILIES** by Céline Sciamma
2002 **THE DEVILS** by Christophe Ruggia
Acting Award Cannes Junior 2002

PAUL HAMY

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2012 **SUZANNE** by Katell Quillévéré
ON MY WAY by Emmanuelle Bercot

CAST

Suzanne	Sara FORESTIER
Nicolas	François DAMIENS
Maria	Adèle HAENEL
Nicolas	Paul HAMY
Eliane	Corinne MASIERO
Vince	Karim LEKLOU
Suzanne as a child	Apollonia LUISETTI
Maria as a child	Fanie ZANINI
Charlie (baby)	Timothé VOM DORP
Charlie (young kid)	Maxim DRIESEN
Charlie (young teenager)	Jaime DACUNHA



CREDITS

Direction	Katell QUILLÉVÉRÉ
Screenplay & dialogues	Katell QUILLÉVÉRÉ & Mariette DÉSSERT
Producers	MOVE MOVIE - Bruno LEVY
Cinematography	Tom HARARI
Sound	Yolande DECARSIN
Editing	Thomas MARCHAND
Original Score	Verity
Casting	Sarah TEPER, Leila FOURNIER, Saul PAREDES
Casting (children)	Ophélie GELBER, Manon PINSKY
Production director	Mathieu VERHAEGHE
Production coordinator	Julie LESCAT
1st assistant director	Nicolas GUILLEMINOT
Script Supervisor	Annick REIPERT
Artistic Advisor	Virginie MONTEL
Settings	Anna FALGUÈRES
Costumes	Moïra DOUGUET
Make-up	Laure TALAZAC
Hair	Milou SANNER
Stage manager	Luc MARTINAGE
Machinery	Marc WILHELM
Electricity	Nicolas ALMEDEO
Sound editing	Florent KLOCKENBRING
Mix	Emmanuel CROSET
Music Supervisor	Frank BEAUVAIS

