

THE RESTLESS

A FILM BY JOACHIM LAFOSSE



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
COMPETITION
2021 OFFICIAL SELECTION





THE RESTLESS

by Joachim Lafosse

2021 / 118 min / 2.35 / 5.1 / Belgium, Luxembourg, France / French

Synopsis

Leila and Damien are deeply in love. Despite his bipolarity, he tries to pursue his life with her, knowing he may never be able to offer her what she desires.

Cast

Leïla : Leïla Bekhti • *Damien* : Damien Bonnard • *Amine* : Gabriel Merz Chammah
• *Patrick* : Patrick Descamps • *Jérôme* : Jules Waringo • *Serge* : Alexandre Gavras

Crew

Director: Joachim Lafosse

Screenwriter: Joachim Lafosse

Co Screenwriters: Anne-Lise Morin, Juliette Goudot, François Pirot, Chloé Léonil,
Lou du Pontavice, Pablo Guarise

DOP: Jean-François Hensgens

Editor: Marie-Hélène Dozo

Set Designer: Anna Falguères

Music: Olafur Arnalds, Antoine Bodson

Sound engineer: Dirk Bombey

Sound Editor: François Dumont

Mixer: Thomas Gauder

Costume designer: Pascaline Chavanne

Make-Up: Garance Van Rossum

Hair Stylist: Antonella Prestigiacomio, Corinne Logiacco-Paulé

Production Director: Vincent Canart

Luxembourg executive producer: Brigitte Kerger-Santos

1st Assistant Director: Johan Knudsen

Production:

Stenola Productions (Anton Iffland-Stettner, Eva Kuperman)

Samsa Film (Jani Thiltges)

KG Productions (Alexandre Gavras)

Prime Time (Antonino Lombardo)

Distributors : Les Films du Losange (France), Cinéart (Belgium/Netherlands)

Samsa Distributions (Luxembourg)





Director's Filmography

- ▶ THE RESTLESS (2021)
- ▶ KEEP GOING (2018)
- ▶ AFTER LOVE (2016)
- ▶ THE WHITE KNIGHTS (2015)
- ▶ OUR CHILDREN (2012)
- ▶ AVANT LES MOTS (2010) (SHORT)
- ▶ PRIVATE LESSONS (2008)
- ▶ PRIVATE PROPERTY (2006)
- ▶ CA REND HEUREUX (2006)
- ▶ FOLIE PRIVÉE (2004)



Questions to Joachim LAFOSSE

How did you come up with the idea for this film and how did it take shape?

Initially, the script was inspired by my experiences with my bipolar father. He wanted to be a photographer and indeed was one for a while, but he didn't really fulfill his dream. He left me with a great admiration for portrait artists in particular, and right from the start, I was thinking of Julien Magre's work, hoping to find at least a little of that extraordinary simplicity. My father had always insisted that he wouldn't do wedding photography. He wanted to make a living as a photographer without having to do that sort of work, and that's how he started photographing paintings.

The artists would bring their work to him, and my father would set them up, light them, and photograph them. I grew up surrounded by this, in a direct relationship with the paintings, the light, the framing, and the photograph. This gave me an immense admiration for painters, which was later crystallized in the work and personality of Belgian visual artist Piet Raemdonck. Right up until the day we started prepa-

ration for the film, the character was a photographer. And then Damien arrived. He had studied fine art and was the assistant of the Brussels-based painter Marthe Wéry. And so, the character went from being a photographer to a painter. During the writing process, I often visited Piet and I somehow wanted his studio to be transposed into the film. Just as Bernard Dufour's became that of Michel Piccoli in *La Belle Noiseuse*, Piet Raemdonck's studio became Damien Bonnard's.

Damien spent three weeks with Piet, preparing the paintings for the film together. Damien started some which Piet went on to finish. Several were painted entirely by the two of them, like the one Damien paints in the film, during a manic episode. When I saw the paintings on set along with all Piet's materials, the film began to come alive.

And the film has come to life as I always dreamed my films would. It feels like it's not dogmatic and that it lives alongside its actors, who allow themselves to be observed. Indeed, it's because of them that everything works. It all really started coming together when Leïla





Bekhti and Damien Bonnard came on board; when I saw them take charge of the characters, when I saw they really wanted to do something with them. For the first time, I didn't have to assert myself; I simply had to observe. That's also why the DP Jean-François Hensgens, with whom I've made four other films, and I never had to theorize.

Everything was decided in a very natural way. When I made *Nue Propriété* and *Elève Libre*, I knew that the films would have 60 shots, because I had decided they would and because it was a way for me to style myself in the footsteps of Michael Haneke. It was nothing like that for *Les Intranquilles*. We just knew we would follow the actors, always filming them at face height. It wasn't about letting them simply do as they wished – if a reverse-shot was needed, we'd film a reverse shot, but we wouldn't worry about it. The film had to love the actor, in the same way that Mike Leigh loved the brilliant Timothy Spall as his Turner.

Leïla's character in the script is fragile; she suffers the psychosis of the father of her child. I was overwhelmed by the strength and resistance Leïla Bekhti brought to the film. She conveyed desire, sensuality, fatigue, and an ability to say 'no', which I think is quite rare. From

her first reading, Leïla understood that this was not a film about bipolar disorder but rather a questioning of our capacity and limits with regard to our commitment to love. Realizing she had very quickly grasped the unsettled nature of her character was a great relief and stopped it from becoming a 'themed' film.

How did the other actors and technicians approach the set?

It was great how enthusiastic the crew was about making a film about the life of a painter. It was as if there were a special relationship between films and painters. We rehearsed on set for around 10 days and then we started shooting almost immediately, so we were able to adapt the scenes to the variables that arise in any production and, above all, to the actors. Damien and Leïla really took a hold of the movie. They even took charge of little Gabriel who plays their son, so that I didn't have to direct him alone. In reality, I just offered a different perspective, which was both unusual and very exciting at the same time. And because only the actors didn't have to wear masks on set, the crew and I felt like entomologists observing creatures going about their lives. The right distance between them and us was established very naturally. The challenge

for me was managing to remain silent, which wasn't so difficult in the end, I was so fascinated to see these "unsettled" people existing. Indeed, those with close relationships to bipolar people also become "unsettled" themselves.

The film uses movement and acceleration to drive the narrative and carry the viewer along. Was it all a matter of editing?

Before we started shooting, I was more anxious about the moments of crisis than of depression. But for Leïla and Damien, it was the opposite. And they were right. Depression is more than a matter of pure cinema; it is, above all, a question of rhythm. And it was while editing the film with Marie-Hélène Dozo, the film's editor with whom I was working for the first time, that we found the right pitch for the melancholy, and it all went very smoothly and naturally.

And during rehearsals I never hid it from the actors that I didn't yet know how the film would end. The mother and son might have left together, just as the husband and wife could have fallen into each other's arms – I simply didn't know until the final day, and the

final hour. On the morning of the day when we shot the final scene, I asked Leïla and Damien what they wanted to happen to the characters, and we chose to feed all of our experiences from the shoot into the end of the film. It was Leïla and Damien's feelings and emotions that inspired how I wrote the end of the film.

At a certain point in the film, the focus shifts from Damien, who no longer appears on screen, to Leïla. Is this because you were afraid of a certain imbalance?

I was thinking about the psychoanalyst Roland Gori, who says that a diagnosis is for the doctor and certainly not for those close to the patient. Indeed, once a diagnosis has been made, there is a risk that nothing else will be discussed; that any behavior, any shift, or any other problem encountered will then be attributed to the illness. I remember that in my family, at times, my father's bipolarity was a very convenient scapegoat. The unsettledness of the husband and father inevitably becomes the unsettledness of his wife and son. This is also expressed in the scene in which the little boy repeats the words used by his father when in crisis some time previously, and then you wonder if he, too, might be moving that same way. But in reality, that's





not the case. He's trying something out and testing to see whether his parents will take it as a joke or not.

Would you say that, in a way, Piet Raemdonck is a character in the film through his paintings?

It's triangular. Leïla and Damien admire Piet's work, but he's not in the film and yet he is, in a way. Indeed, when I saw the paintings arrive on set, I knew I'd been given an incredible opportunity. Thanks to Piet Raemdonck's work, it was no longer just us; there was an otherness, something other than acting or directing. There was another art present, another possibility to be fascinated in a different way.

Since your first film, *Folie Privée*, and even with your short film, you have always explored themes like a painter, in particular the shape-shifting questions of limits and norms, of madness, of good and evil. Would you define yourself as a moral filmmaker?

I think that making movies means taking a stand and defending a certain view of existence. I never set out

to moralize, but yes, I do have a filmmaker's morality in the style of Albert Camus. I don't want to convert people in a religious sense - I hate that - but the great filmmakers I admire, Jane Campion, Abbas Kiarostami, the Dardennes brothers, Chantal Akerman and so many others all seem to be auteurs with a moral standpoint. For years, I have been trying to sketch out the limits of our connections by confronting this aspect of existence, by questioning morality and its consequences, and I've also ended up wanting to defend a certain ethic of cinema. One shouldn't use what one criticizes to find success! When one enjoys the power of directing, ethics are fundamental to convey a sense of trust to the actors and the crew that helps us give shape to our films.

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Leïla Bekhti

THE RESTLESS (Joachim Lafosse, 2021) • HOW I BECAME A SUPERHERO (Douglas Attal) • THE THIRD WAR (Giovanni Aloi) • PERFECT NANNY (Lucie Borleteau, 2019) • I'LL GO WHERE YOU GO (Géraldine Nakache, 2018) • BATTLE OF THE CLASSES (Michel Leclerc, 2018) • SINK OR SWIM (Gilles Lellouche, 2017) • A MAN IN A HURRY (Hervé Mimran, 2017) • BEIRUT (Brad Anderson, 2016) • CARNIVORES (Jérémy Renier, Yannick Renier, 2016) • ALL THREE OF US (Kheiron, 2014) • ASTRAGAL (Brigitte SY, 2014) • NOW OR NEVER (Serge Frydman, 2013) • BEFORE THE WINTER CHILL (Philippe Claudel, 2013) • NOUS YORK (Géraldine Nakache, Hervé Mimran, 2011) • ARMED HANDS (Pierre Jolivet, 2011) • THE SOURCE (Radu Mihaileanu, 2011) Nominated for the César of Best Actress • ITINERAIRE BIS (Jean-Luc Perreard, 2011) • BACON ON THE SIDE (Anne de Petrini, 2010) • A BETTER LIFE (Cédric Kahn, Catherine Paillet, 2010) • ALL THAT GLITTERS (Géraldine Nakache, Hervé Mimran, 2010), César Award for Best Promising actress, Étoile d'or for Best Promising Actress, Swann D'or for best promising actress, nominated for Globes de Cristal's Best Actress • LEILA (Audrey Esstrougo, 2009) • LE COSE CHE RESTANO (Gianluca Maria Tavarelli, 2009) • A PROPHET (Jacques Audiard, 2009) • MESRINE: KILLER INSTINCT (Jean-François Richet, 2008) • DOLLS AND ANGELS (Nora Hamdi, 2007) • PARIS, I LOVE YOU (Gurinder Chadah, 2006) • BAD FAITH (Roschdy Zem, 2006) • SATAN (Kim Chapiron, 2005)





Damien Bonnard

THE RESTLESS (Joachim Lafosse, 2021) • LE PROCESSUS DE PAIX (Ilan Klipper, 2020) • THE FRENCH DISPATCH (Wes Anderson, 2019) • AN OFFICER AND A SPY (Roman Polanski, 2019) • ONLY THE ANIMALS (Dominik Moll, 2019) • PURE AS SNOW (Anne Fontaine, 2019) • LES MISERABLES (Ladj Ly, 2018) Nominated for César Best Actor • THE WOLF'S CALL (Antonin Baudry, 2017) • CURIOSA (Lou Jeunet, 2017) • THE TROUBLE WITH YOU (Pierre Salvadori, 2017), Nominated for the César of Best Supporting Actor • BASED ON A TRUE STORY (Roman Polanski, 2017) • 9 FINGERS (François-Jacques Ossang, 2018) • THIRST STREET (Nathan Silver, 2017) • DUNKERQUE (Christopher Nolan, 2017) • STAYING VERTICAL (Alain Guiraudie, 2016), Nominated for the César of Best Promising Actor, Lumière Award for Best Promising Actor • THE STOPOVER (Delphine et Muriel Coulin, 2015) • VENDEUR (Sylvain Desclous, 2015) • ASTRAGAL (Brigitte Sy, 2015) • MERCURIALES (Virgil Vernier, 2014) • AUGUSTINE (Alice Winocour, 2012) • A PERFECT PLAN (Pascal Chaumeil, 2012) • THE CLINK OF ICE (Bertrand Blier, 2008) • OUTSIDE THE LAW (Rachid Bouchareb, 2010)

INTERNATIONAL SALES

Fiorella Moretti - CEO, Sales & Acquisitions - fiorella@luxboxfilms.com

Hédi Zardi - CEO, Sales & Acquisitions - hedi@luxboxfilms.com

Vanessa Saal - International Sales - vanessa@luxboxfilms.com

Marie Lambœuf - Festivals & Sales - marie@luxboxfilms.com

www.luxboxfilms.com

INTERNATIONAL PUBLICITY

Le Public Système Cinéma

Alexis Delage-Toriel - adelagetoriel@lepublicsystemecinema.fr

Caroline Aymar - caymar@lepublicsystemecinema.fr

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