



Le dos rouge

Portrait of the Artist

Antoine Barraud

Producer Vincent Wang, Cédric Walter, Antoine Barraud. **Production companies** House on Fire (Paris, France); Centre Pompidou (Paris, France); Anna Sanders Films (Paris, France). **Director** Antoine Barraud. **Screenplay** Antoine Barraud. **Director of photography** Antoine Parouty. **Production design** Antoine Barraud. **Make-up** Carrie Arbogast. **Sound** Gilles Bernadeau. **Music** Bertrand Bonello. **Editor** Cathérine Libert, Frédéric Piet.

With Bertrand Bonello (Bertrand), Jeanne Balibar (Célia Bhy No. 1), Géraldine Pailhas (Célia Bhy No. 2), Joana Preiss (Barbe), Pascal Greggory (Pascal), Sigrid Bouaziz (Édith), Valérie Dréville (Alice), Nicolas Maury (young journalist), Barbet Schroeder (doctor), Nathalie Boutefeu (Catherine), Nazim Boudjenah (Prométhée), Isild Le Besco (Renée), Alex Descas (Scottie), Marta Hoskins (Edwarda Kane), Charlotte Rampling (mother/voice)

DCP, colour. 127 min. French, English.

Premiere 3 October 2014, Centre Pompidou Paris

World sales Reel Suspects

A Chinese aphorism says that although the poet dreams he is a butterfly, it is perhaps instead the butterfly that dreams it has become a poet. In *Le dos rouge*, a famous filmmaker played by Bertrand Bonello searches for an image of the uncanny. An eccentric female art historian accompanies him through museums, where they examine and discuss numerous works of art. A metamorphosis gradually takes place, as red marks appear on the filmmaker's back. It seems that gazing at all that monstrosity has brought about a transformation in the observer. Bonello, a victim of Stendhal Syndrome, gradually loses himself in his admiration of the sublime uncanny. When he is hypnotised by the artworks, he exudes a fascination as great as that of the objects themselves. It's a pleasure to watch one artist gazing at another, for this film is a multi-layered mise en abyme. By creating a fictional portrait of an aesthete, Barraud subtly allows the paintings to enter into a dialogue with his newly created images. Artificiality meets art, and during the search for the ideal monster, a playful, aesthetic spell is cast.

Cécile Tollu-Polonowski

Monster paintings

I have always had a deep-felt, mysterious obsession with museums. I am impressed by their apparent calm and solemnity in displaying what would be classified elsewhere as madness, psychiatry, beat-up lyricism or even absolute violence. Their nature is kind-hearted. I usually say my mother made me love the paintings and my father, an antiques dealer, the frames around them. I have spent several hours strolling through the long corridors museums and copying the pictures in my little sketchbooks. Nonetheless, with time, I couldn't avoid becoming a 'hasty' visitor, more eager to 'see' the paintings than actually 'looking' at them. I have recently discovered that the average time spent before a work of art is less than twenty seconds.

Le dos rouge took shape in an effort to counter this troubling trend. It was an opportunity to take the time to really look at the pictures. This need fused with the idea of putting together a personal panorama of monstrosity in art. I had a long-lasting passion for a few paintings that drew their inspiration from that theme, which I have been exploring since my first film. The transfigured face of a young girl by Hans Bellmer, the skin disorders of a Brazilian slave in a painting by Joachim da Rocha, Léon Spilliaert's emaciated figure in his self-portraits, the veiled and phantom-like gaze of Balthus' Alice, and then Bacon, Caravaggio, and many more. My desire to film those pictures was parallel to the desire of taking the close-up shot of a Hollywood actress. And then, I wanted to give Bertrand Bonello the leading role. His initial surprise gave way to curiosity, and he came on board with me on this unexpected adventure, excited and terrified at the same time. I imagined a gallery of strange and witty creatures for him to communicate with: his spouse, his producer, a historian, a young journalist and many others. The multiple faces and characters in this film are the expression of his own self. They all convey towards him. What makes this film exciting for me is the outcome of two different desires: mine and Bertrand Bonello's.

It is the result of two separate universes, both unrestrained and uncensored. *Le dos rouge* is in itself a unique creature.

Antoine Barraud

"It was an incredible feeling to have the Louvre to ourselves"

Can you tell us how the idea of your new feature film was born?

Antoine Barraud: It arose from the collision of different desires. On the one hand, I wanted to make a film with several distinct characters, because my previous films were all focused on one or two main roles. Also, I wanted it to be light. Or at least lighter and funnier than what I'm used to working with. And having Paris as the backdrop also played a part in it. I've always thought of making films as a great excuse for travelling and even if I've always loved that city, it never really inspired me. But this time around, I really discovered another side of Paris that went hand-in-hand with not only the desire to film the paintings, but also the places that give them a home. It was an incredible feeling to have the Louvre to ourselves during an entire day of shooting, to be so close to such masterpieces. I wanted to trick the watchmen so I could stay there all night, alone, with the paintings, and look at them by candlelight, like Michèle in Carax's *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*. I remember feeling the same way the first time I saw the Cranach room of the

Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. I felt I could live there with just a mattress and a drawing book. And from time to time, I'd walk a few rooms down and stare at the paintings by Bellini.

Was it an obvious choice to have Bertrand Bonello in the main role?

I wrote the movie with him in mind. I can't explain why. When you work on a movie, you spend a lot of time with the actors, with everyone involved in it... and I guess I wanted to spend some time with Bonello. I also felt he had some kind of hidden talent for acting... I think the character he plays can also be seen as a weird, twisted portrait of himself. Like in Cubism. But who cares for resemblance? Lies are as good as facts. Even better, sometimes.

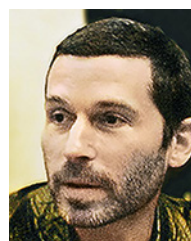
What was Bertrand Bonello like on set?

He was a brilliant actor, very professional and generous. Totally devoted to the movie. Day or night, covered in red paint, he was always great.

How did you persuade him to be in front of the camera?

I wrote him a letter. I told him I considered his films 'monster flicks', because they're all about different creatures. I also explained some fragments of the film's story and he said yes, with no conditions. The shooting was a long, hard ride. Four years! Sometimes we would stop for six or eight months and then get back together and take it from where we'd left off... Meanwhile, he directed *L'apollonide (House of Tolerance, 2011)* and *Saint Laurent (2014)* and I directed my first feature film, *Les gouffres (The Sinkholes, 2012)*, produced *Age is...* by Stephen Dwoskin, and wrote other projects. And during all this time, *Le dos rouge* would reunite us every now and then. It was really charming and exciting in a way. It gave me the time to give free rein to my ideas. There was no pressure. I felt like I was writing a very long novel. At one point we had no money, no schedule, nothing, really. But I felt everything was possible.

Source: production



Antoine Barraud was born in Aulnay-sous-Bois, France in 1971. Since making his first short film, *Monstre (2005)*, he has directed and produced several more films.

Films

2005: *Monstre (27 min.)*. 2006: *Déluge (48 min.)*. 2007: *Song (59 min.)*. 2008: *Monstre numéro deux (36 min.)*. 2009: *River of Anger (38 min.)*. 2010: *La forêt des songes (54 min.)*. 2011: *Son of a Gun (Co-director: Claire Doyon, 13 min.)*. 2012: *Les gouffres / The Sinkholes (65 min.)*. 2014: *Le dos rouge / Portrait of the Artist*.