

MK PRODUCTIONS
PRESENTS



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2023 OFFICIAL SELECTION

ROOM 999

A FILM BY LUBNA PLAYOUST

WITH THE SUPPORT OF CHANEL
IN COLLABORATION WITH WIM WENDERS STIFTUNG

2023 – FRANCE – COLOR – 85'

mk2
FILMS

SYNOPSIS

In 1982, Wim Wenders asked 16 of his fellow directors to speak on the future of cinema, resulting in the film *Room 666*. Now, 40 years later, in Cannes, director Lubna Playoust asks a new generation of filmmakers the same question: is cinema a language about to get lost, an art about to die?

INTERVIEW WITH LUBNA PLAYOUST

In the 1982 documentary *Room 666*, Wim Wenders asks a number of film luminaries to reflect on the question, “Is cinema a language about to get lost, an art about to die?” How did you get interested in the film?

I’m not sure how I first heard about it. Perhaps it was mentioned by someone during the course of a conversation. It is one of Wim Wenders’ least known films. A good number of cinephiles are only just discovering it. It has since become a reference work for me, a source for gleaning ideas, a bit like Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Sculpting in Time*. My response to the film and my interest in cinema have evolved simultaneously. With each new viewing, I take away something new. Wenders said a “black hole” was opening in film history. He was worried that the television aesthetic had superseded the cinema aesthetic, that films were copying each other instead of drawing inspiration from life, that the trend was toward blockbusters to the detriment of “small films,” which were increasingly scarce. He was also concerned that films would become instantly available on video and that people would watch them at home instead of going to the cinema. The question Wenders asked in the 1980s was definitely prophetic.

Is that why you decided to take up the concept of his film?

These issues are still relevant forty years later, and the same questions are forever coming up. Except it all happened at an unbelievably exponential rate. It is quite dizzying really, especially for those of us just starting to make films. The question is, are we still coming up with genuine innovations today, in terms of language and form. I knew one day Wenders’ camera would be set up again and his question reframed. Then, it somehow gathered momentum in the runup to Cannes 2022. The “death of cinema” was on everyone’s lips. Wenders’ documentary had been shot exactly 40 years earlier, the year I was born, which made it even more meaningful. In a matter of weeks, I had discussed my idea with Rosalie Varda, the film’s producer, received the greenlight from mk2 and the Festival de Cannes, and organized the shooting. The stars were aligned, no question about it. The time for doing a remake had come.

The question of the “death of cinema” hangs over Wim Wenders’ *Room 666*. What does that old refrain mean to you?

The death of cinema is a regular and recurring notion that is often linked to global upheavals: the COVID pandemic, the environmental crisis, wars, the technological revolutions, and so on. *Room 666* is in no way a definitive answer. It is an attempt to take stock of the situation from the perspective of various filmmakers. For me, what matters is that a question remains. It is still here and is being raised once more, 40 years later, and why not 40 years from now, too. Wenders’ film and *Room 999* are not just about cinema. They are about the world we live in.

Did you and Wim Wenders discuss the project?

I wrote him a letter asking permission to do a remake of his film. I told him I had seen *Paris Texas* on television when I was little, that watching his film made me realize that cinema can be a window onto the world. I also told him that as a viewer, I had no qualms about switching between the cinema and television. Television had always been another way of discovering films for me. I also shared my reservations as a filmmaker, which, ultimately, were very similar to his own in 1982. And he wrote back giving me permission to make the film. I wasn't in touch with him after that, and he made no attempt to intervene. I think the idea of transmission is very important to him, and that he is interested in learning from other people's work. We met at Cannes when he came into room 999 – to answer my question, in turn. I was acutely aware of his reactions. It was as if he were playing *Spot the Differences*. The camera location, the frame, the duration, the questions... Then, he turned to me and said, "you decided to hide the camera, I see!" The camera was concealed in a recess in the wall. In the 80s, cameras were much too big to do that.

How did you adapt the setup to make it more relevant today?

I wanted to be able to look at the two films, side by side, to reveal what had changed in the past 40 years, but without any trace of nostalgia. I went over the various parts of the film and thought about the ones I should keep. The most important was the setup: a room in Cannes, a question, a static shot, a director and a camera. It made it possible to put all the other filmmakers on an equal footing so the audience could concentrate on their answers alone. I agreed with Marine Atlan, my director of photography, that shooting on film the way Wenders did in 1982 wasn't important, that it was the atmosphere created by Agnes Godard, the director of photography who had worked with Wenders, that needed to be captured. However, we maintained Wenders' constraint regarding the directors – they would be alone in the room during the film shoot – and chose not to use an external monitor. It was the key, I felt, to making them feel unobserved, to feel perfectly at ease and even a little awed by the impressive film camera. Then, there were all the seemingly insignificant details that reflected aspects of the present day. In Wenders' film, there was a television in the background. But what would it mean to film a television these days? Wenders gave the filmmakers 12 minutes maximum to answer his question, a duration imposed by the 16mm reel. Was it justified to use the same timeframe for a digital shoot? Ultimately, what mattered was the opportunity to invite a wide range of filmmakers, to capture a moment in time in the history of cinema to reveal both how its evolution and its limits.

Wim Wenders' contribution to *Room 999* is somewhat pessimistic. Yet at the same time, it is an open door: Wenders believes that the upcoming generations have the means to save the world of cinema.

To me this has to do with his nature. It's his way of dealing with the world, a sense of disquiet that drives his actions. *Room 666* embraced that dark worldview to rouse the audience.

Ultimately, the film's objective is a message of hope. To me it was important, in *Room 999*, to convey that message to future generations instead of repeating, yet again, that the world is dying.

In your film, Arnaud Desplechin says something to that effect. "Cinema is undergoing a never-ending death. It is the very principle of its existence." Would you say that is true?

It is important to acknowledge the fragility of the film industry. Cinema has always been fragile. Filmmakers have frequently mentioned this. Let's embrace the problem, they say. Let's explore the illness. One might say, to quote a line from Wenders' *The Wings of Desire*, "*Time will heal everything, but what if time were the illness?*"

What were you going for during the editing, a balance between optimism and pessimism regarding the future of cinema?

Nicolás Longinotti, who edited the film, was amused by how closely filmmakers resemble their films. So was I. But we didn't want to categorize people according to degrees of pessimism or optimism, which is more a question of character. And we didn't want to lump their statements together by theme. We were interested in exploring the question's many facets, which I am often at a loss to understand myself. We wanted the film to inspire a debate, to question the very nature of film and our faith in cinema.

Some people consider the survival of cinema to be a political strategy. Do you agree?

I think films are political, and that we all express ourselves from a particular standpoint. Obviously, there is more than one way of resisting, but debating, sharing, and giving voice to the world's myriad languages is of vital importance, because ideas are a window onto the world.

The director Ayo Akingbade talks about wanting to film unexplored narratives, especially stories from the continent of Africa. Her position seems to go against the commonly held belief that there are no new stories left to tell. As a young director, does her reflection seem particularly relevant to you?

It reminds me of the time the artist Christian Boltanski quoted Tolstoy: "Paint your village and you will paint the whole world." I believe we all have a village, and that by talking about it, we can understand the whole world. Ayo's words resonate with me, like a call to action, or a movement. It's as if all at once, the world of cinema had just been discovered.

What would you have said if you had been asked into room 999?

First, I would have made myself a coffee. Then, I would have asked questions... My answer, ultimately, is the film itself.

Why did you call the film *Room 999*?

How could I come up with a title as good as Wim Wenders'? The devil's room! 999 is the reverse of 666, of course. But in numerology, it has a strong symbolic significance. It marks the end of a cycle and the start of a new beginning. It seemed to be the perfect reflection of today's world.

LUBNA PLAYOUST

DIRECTOR

Feature film

2023 **ROOM 999** by Lubna Playoust

Short film

2021 **LE CORMORAN** by Lubna Playoust (22'30)

Telluride 2022 / San Sebastián 2021 / Clermont-Ferrand 2022

2019 **OÙ VONT LES CANARDS EN HIVER** (5'48) - Produced as part of a workshop with Lucrecia Martel in Barcelona

2016 **ZULIA** (13'02) - Film produced as part of a workshop with Abbas Kiarostami at the Cinema school of Cuba

2014 **VALSE À TROIS** (8'36) - with Jean Pierre Marielle, Agathe Natanson and Lubna Playoust

Other works

2018-
2023 **MK2 CURIOSITY** – Founder and curator of the digital cinema platform for MK2

2017 **BARTABAS** – Introduction film for the radio show « *Transmission* » on France Culture

2017 **APOLLONIA POILANE** - Introduction film for the radio show « *Transmission* » on France Culture

2017 **BOUCHERIE NIVERNAISE** - Introduction film for the radio show « *Transmission* » on France Culture

2017 **BIENVENUE À L'APE** - Immersion in the day-to-day of a nursery (documentary)

ACTRESS

2023 **SIMPLE COMME SYLVAIN** by Monia Chokri

2019 **THE FRENCH DISPATCH** by Wes Anderson

2018 **JAAN KAPLINSKI** – Reading of Jaan Kaplinski's poem – staging by Raphael Giannelli

2018 **THE LAST WEEK END** – Directed by Raphael Giannelli for Mastermind magazine (voice-over)

- 2018** ***THE TRANSLATION PROJECT*** by Eulalie Juster & Nick Quine (short-film)
- 2016** ***THIRST STREET*** by Nathan Silver
- 2016** ***FIN DU VOYAGE*** by Jessica Bros & Benjamin Decoin (short-film)
- 2015** ***LE VOYAGEUR*** by Hadi Ghandour (feature film)
- 2015** ***COURS TOUJOURS*** by Lola Bessis (clip)
- 2015** ***FIN DE PARTIE*** by François Ray, LA FEMIS (short-film)

ABOUT CHANEL

Ever true to its commitment to accompany and support cinematic creation, CHANEL is the exclusive partner of Lubna Playoust's film ROOM 999, which will premiere on 24th May 2023 at the Cannes Film Festival, in the Cannes Classics section.

Lubna Playoust is a French director and actress whose third short film, *Le Cormoran*, was selected in 2021 at the festivals of Saint-Sébastien, Clermont-Ferrand and Côté Court de Pantin. Inspired by the original interviews in Wim Wenders' 1982 film ROOM 666, which was concerned that television was taking over from cinema, Lubna Playoust has reproduced the same device forty years later, in the age of digital technology and streaming platforms. In a hotel room on the Croisette, she received filmmakers presenting their films at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival and invited them to react to Wim Wenders' ever topical question: "Is cinema a language about to get lost, an art about to die?"

The reiteration of this question to a new generation of filmmakers – some of whom are close to the House of CHANEL, such as Olivier Assayas, Claire Denis, Arnaud Desplechin, Audrey Diwan, Nadav Lapid, Baz Luhrmann, Ladj Ly or Rebecca Zlotowski – sheds a fertile and contemporary light on the seventh art. The new answers and comments given in 2022 resonate with the original 1980s answers from renowned directors including Michelangelo Antonioni, Ana Carolina, Jean-Luc Godard, Werner Herzog, Susan Seidelman or Steven Spielberg.

Motivated by its passion for cinema, CHANEL wishes to share these reflections with as many people as possible, spurred on by those who make the works of today and reflect on those of tomorrow. This commitment to contemporary creation, alongside major institutions that promote French cinema internationally such as MK2 – ROOM 999 is an MK Production in association with the Cannes Film Festival, supervised by Nathanaël Karmitz and Rosalie Varda, a friend of the House – perpetuates the approach initiated over a century ago by Gabrielle Chanel, that of supporting actresses, filmmakers and nascent film lovers by promoting the seventh art.

CAST

Wim Wenders
Audrey Diwan
David Cronenberg
Joachim Trier
Shannon Murphy
James Gray
Arnaud Desplechin
Lynne Ramsey
Asghar Farhadi
Nadav Lapid
Claire Denis
Davy Chou
Buz Luhrmann
Alice Winocour
Ayo Akingbade
Olivier Assayas
Paolo Sorrentino
Agnès Jaoui
Kirill Serebrennikov
Christian Mungiu
Kleber Mendonça Filho
Albert Serra
Monia Chokri
Ninja Thyberg
Pietro Marcello
Rebecca Zlotowski
Ali Cherri
Ruben Östlund
Clement Cogitore
Alice Rohrwacher

CREW

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Director | Lubna Playoust |
| Producers | Nathanaël Karmitz, Elisha Karmitz, Rosalie Varda |
| Editor | Nicolàs Longinotti |
| Director of Photography | Marine Atlan |
| Operator Assistant | Élise Poulain |
| Colour Grading | Pierre Mazoyer |
| Sound and Mix | César Mamoudy |
| Music | Pierre Rousseau |
| Production | MK PRODUCTIONS |
| Production Management | Étienne Rouillon, Ysé Mercury |
| International sales | mk2 Films |

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INTERNATIONAL SALES

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