

Gaumont
presents

NADIA TERESZKIEWICZ

BENOÎT MAGIMEL



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
UN CERTAIN REGARD
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE 2023

ROSALIE

A FILM BY
STÉPHANIE DI GIUSTO

PRODUCED BY
ALAIN ATTAL

SCREENPLAY,
ADAPTATION AND DIALOGUES BY
STÉPHANIE DI GIUSTO AND SANDRINE LE COUSTOMER
BASED ON A TREATMENT BY SANDRINE LE COUSTOMER AND ALEXANDRA ECHKENAZI
LOOSELY BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Duration: 1 hour 51 minutes

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Synopsis

France, 1870s. Rosalie is a young woman unlike any other. She hides a secret: she was born with a face and body covered in hair. She's concealed her peculiarity all her life to stay safe, shaving to fit in. Until Abel, an indebted bar owner unaware of her secret, marries Rosalie for her dowry. Will Abel be able to love Rosalie and see her as the woman she is, once he finds out the truth?

“After my first film, I wanted to take some time to write. Writing is the creative moment that is most precious to me, a moment when everything is still possible, when you feel free. I felt a great emptiness after my father’s death, and a subject took hold of me.

After Loïe Fuller, I encountered another out of the ordinary woman, Clémentine Delait: a bearded lady who was famous at the turn of the twentieth century. That woman’s bearded face fascinated me. I had photos, her gaze, a mystery to explore. I read a text on the subject, something that might make a biopic, but I wanted to dig deeper to find what resonated so deep inside me while looking at those photos. I knew that she had refused to become an ordinary carnival freak. On the contrary she wanted to “live her life”. A woman’s life. I became interested in other women suffering from hirsutism, the scientific name for this problem. Most of them died alone, in carnivals, reduced to vulgar phenomena: “freaks. After much research, all I wanted to retain of these woman’s lives was what touched me. I did not want to make a biopic. That didn’t interest me.

I began to dream the life of one of those women. She was already a film character, with a fascinating physical presence, but also with a secret grace... and the promise of a romantic destiny, to conquer the world and herself. That is how Rosalie was born.

Rosalie is emancipated but will have to stand up to others, affirm her odd femininity against the prejudices of an era. Should she submit, should she shave to look “normal”? Or on the contrary, try to affirm herself as is? What is the meaning of desire for a woman like Rosalie? And still more fascinating: can a woman like her be desirable? I loved filming her female face and body, that eroticism between grace and animality. For me, cinema begins when we are fascinated by a poetic presence, when the clock stands still, untouched by time. When an image becomes poetry... or cinema...

Each film is a response to the time in which we live today. A way to survive the world around us. I think that love today has become a struggle in a progressively dehumanized lifestyle. That is Rosalie’s combat. Loving someone else, loving herself. I wanted to write a story about absolute, unconditional love.

I could soon feel her heartbeat. Rosalie was becoming a young woman who feels lost, looking for herself... who also looks for herself in the eyes of the man she loves. Rosalie and Abel will domesticate each other as time goes by. There is cruelty, a certain kind of emotion, demure and violent, in the love life of such a peculiar being... Rosalie will encounter the same truths as all other sensitive people: the fear of being abandoned, the desire to love and be loved despite the cruelty, the refusal of victimhood, revolt, the bestial and delicate nature of feelings, the problem with how others see you.

Hair is an essential part of presenting ourselves to a society that you can submit to or from which you can emancipate yourself. Because hair is seen as something animalistic and primitive. It is associated with private, secret parts. The beast. Sexuality. The monster tamed by our so-called “civilized” societies that never cease to expose their own monstrosity, with wars (here 1870) or with social and sexist humiliation...

I agree and confirm: Rosalie is a woman in love, but trite romance is not her thing. She doesn't want it, she has no right to it. When like her, you are someone "apart" - whom some consider a monster, even though she was already so feminine and delicate - love becomes much more than that.

Abel has a hard time channeling his violence. War has damaged him and left its indelible mark. He is no longer able to love. He no longer believes in anything. Rosalie will put him to the test. She wants him to love her as she is. That is the emotional struggle I wanted to capture.

How are feelings born of a desire that is beyond them? That dimension of the story fascinates me: the mystery of a body. Filming skin, daring to film hair, revealing the sensuality of bodies where least expected, to unveil something troubling, vibrant and beautiful. To abandon the usual codes seen on screen. Smooth almost surrealistic bodies. The camera needs to have skin contact with my story.

We need to create something beautiful out of the unexpected. That is one of the reasons that I make movies. To film desire from another angle. Looking for it elsewhere.

I was unable to find an actress to play Rosalie. I did a lot of auditions using costumes and the beard. That gives you an entirely different and surprising perception of the actress. With them, I never managed to believe in the character. I knew Nadia Tereszkievicz from my first film because I had chosen her to play a young dancer in Loïe Fuller 's dance company. I ran into her in the street, by chance, and asked her to come in for a screen test. When she came to the casting session, she was one of the rare actresses who did not look afraid. No theatrical affectations, which would be understandable when being asked to play a bearded lady... Most of them kept looking in the mirror, bewildered. Others kept scratching themselves... But Nadia immediately and fully adopted the beard. It was carnally evident. I had no doubts as I watched her act. She had an actress' pure energy, and the natural enthusiasm I needed in the character. Even with the beard, she exuded something troublingly sensual. During her past as a dancer, she suffered greatly. Her body was constantly being judged since it did not correspond to the canons of classical dance. She had the strength, but also the fragility I expected. I believe that the character of Rosalie also touched her for that reason: she too had to learn to live with a body that suffers.

Every morning on the shoot, each and every hair was glued on Nadia's body, one by one. I did not want to cheat and use a cheap hairpiece on an actress who needed to believe that it was real too. That meticulous, obsessive work helped her to possess the role completely, *carnally*. I treated Rosalie's body like a sculpture, strange and desirable. The idea was to create a second skin that the actress put on every day to feel its "weight". That decision stimulated me on a daily basis. That is the miracle of cinema, making believe, making something unnatural look natural, revealing the poetry in something that seems devoid of it.

I need the cinema to look for what the movement of a body in the kitchen or in bed can reveal about secret lives.

Nothing would be possible without Abel, the love of her life... And nothing would have been possible without the miraculous presence of Benoît Magimel. We grasp Rosalie's emotions through Abel's eyes. I knew it would be difficult, that it would take courage for an actor to lay himself bare like this. Benoît alone struck me as being capable of this simultaneously sensitive and bestial, interior and physical embodiment.

At our first meeting, he had already understood everything about Abel and was ready to take the risk. It seemed obvious, like so much in cinema. He gets so dedicated, so involved in the director's remarks, in the film itself, and the others. He's a fabulous beast... purely and permanently emotional. And best of all, that "obviousness" anchors the entire film in a real world that he imposes and poeticizes. He cannot do something he does not feel, but he always finds the right gesture, the right respiration, the right "music". He is blessed. We know that. We see that. And that's it.

My greatest concern was that he and Nadia not meet before the shoot. We shot in chronological order, and so built it together. I wanted them to get to know each other as time went by, like in the film. We truly constructed the film together.

Benjamin Biolay, Guillaume Gouix, Juliette Armanet, Gustave Kervern, Anna Biolay, Serge Bozon, Lucas Englander, Eugène Marcuse all support Rosalie in her combat. I hope that energy comes across in the film.

The café is another character in the movie. While refurbishing the café, Rosalie raises consciousness and encourages free speech. She brings people together and liberates emotions. The café is a place where lives intersect, where lives become social. The café was painted by many of the Impressionists, to exalt the simplest, most banal of scenes. Resurrecting that living theater, capturing those moments of life, believing in them, fascinated me. Rosalie is the catalyst that reveals those around her to themselves. Her hobby horse is how lucky she is to be alive. Against one and all.

I found that that old forge in the middle of Brittany. Les Forges des Salles, an entire village with its factory, isolated, empty and well kept up by its worthy owners since the end of the 19th century. Without that natural setting, there would have been no film. I didn't have the budget to construct that kind of set. It's an entire world unto itself. History seeps through its stones and buildings. We used the same extras every day, so we got to know them and were able to film them better. The idea was to create the most realistic microcosm possible, so that Abel and Rosalie would feel literally immersed in the story.

Rosalie's freedom will also be her undoing. Freedom is always a threat to those who reject it: in the name of religion, morality, society, law and order of course, and the war to come. Inevitably. Rosalie pays the price when she becomes the scapegoat of the commune. Still today, many consider women who create anything more than children dangerous. Rosalie is not normal. She is therefore a potential threat to society. After idolizing her beard, the entire community joins together against Rosalie, who becomes their chosen victim, blamed for any disorder. Rosalie is seen as being in collusion with the "power of evil". Lurking behind this love story is the issue of human nature, always ready to destroy anyone different.

This film is mainly about love. And the freedom to accept yourself, to create yourself. Very few people allow themselves that freedom, probably because they are aware of the price they will have to pay. All my character Rosalie wants is to be herself. Love streams out of Rosalie, like one last message that nullifies hate and differences. She will believe in life. And Abel will be there beside her.

Stéphanie Di Giusto.

Cast

Rosalie

Abel

Barcelin

Pierre

Paul

Jeanne

Jean

Clothilde

Nadia TERESZKIEWICZ

Benoît MAGIMEL

Benjamin BIOLAY

Guillaume GOUIX

Gustave KERVERN

Anna BIOLAY

Eugène MARCUSE

Juliette ARMANET

Crew

A film by	STÉPHANIE DI GIUSTO
Screenplay, adaptation, and dialogues	STÉPHANIE DI GIUSTO and SANDRINE LE COUSTUMER
Based on a treatment by	SANDRINE LE COUSTUMER and ALEXANDRA ECHKENAZI
Music	HANIA RANI
Cinematography	CHRISTOS VOUDOURIS
Production design	LAURENT OTT <small>ADC</small>
Editor	NASSIM GORDJI-TEHRANI
Sound	PIERRE MERTENS JULIEN GERBER THOMAS DESJONQUÈRES ERIC CHEVALLIER
Casting	PASCALE BÉRAUD
1 st AD	PASCALE JEANNIARD
Costumes	MADÉLINE FONTAINE <small>AFCCA</small>
Executive Producer	XAVIER AMBLARD
Production Manager	FRANCOIS LAMOTTE
Postproduction Managers	NICOLAS MOUCHET SÉVERINE CAVA
Musical supervision	EMMANUEL FERRIER
Coproduced by	TRÉSOR FILMS GAUMONT LAURENT DASSAULT ROND-POINT ARTÉMIS PRODUCTIONS
With the support of	CANAL+
With the participation of	CINÉ+
Coproduced by	SHELTER PROD
In association with	TAXSHELTER.BE ET ING
With the support of	TAX SHELTER OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF BELGIUM
With the support of	LA RÉGION DE BRETAGNE
In partnership with	CNC
In association with	COVINOVA 19 PALATINE ÉTOILE 20 CINÉCAP 6 LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 16
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