



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
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COUP DE CŒUR DU JURY 2022

Rodeo

Un film de Lola Quivoron

After successful running at Cannes and obtaining the Jury's Coup de Coeur award 2022, Rodeo will be released in Dutch cinemas in January 2023. On the occasion of the Leiden International Film Festival, we met the director Lola Quivoron for a lively and inspired exchange, just like her film.

You had already worked on the bike life in your short film *Au loin Baltimore* (2016). Is this a personal passion? How much documentary research is behind the film?

I grew up in the suburbs of Paris, seeing motocross bikes passing by my house. In 2015, when I was at the Fémis [the French state film school, editor's note] I spent my time outside! [laughs] I couldn't stand to stay in this Parisian microcosm. All my films take place outside of Paris. I'm in search of the territories that I grew up in. In my third year, I came across a video of young people doing bitumen cross. It felt familiar.

This phenomenon comes from the US. It was already a well-respected subculture there, and was on the way to becoming a more institutional movement. We can compare it to the bike life, literally: a life dedicated to the bike. Bitumen cross was imported into France through DMX clips, where there were always quads or motorbikes. It primarily came from working-class neighborhoods.. And for me, it immediately echoed questions that were already well established. What are these alternative families? How do these communities function? It turned out that they were men's groups, which interested me even more!



The way in which certain communities close themselves off through codes of similarity fascinates me.

One day I went to see them and got invited to stay with them. Immediately, I was overcome by their passion. Bike life: either you click or you get really scared. For me, it was immediate: I loved it. Smelling the petrol, spending time listening to stories about motorbikes and accidents. You can feel that there is a lot of solidarity, codes and sharing.



Julie Ledru Yanis Lafki Antonia Buresi

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There is a reappropriation of territory.

Everyone gives each other petrol. There's always a guy who doesn't have any petrol, and who will try to ask everyone for a bit of it. [laughs] And these are roads that are outside the cities and are not used. There is a reappropriation of territory.

I will end with that, but that's obviously the first thing that drew me to them: the spectacular and poetic dimension of the practice. And then, there is the political aspect: how to create a link in a place where society tends to cut it off?

It's a film you have been thinking about for a few years now. How has the script evolved since the initial idea?

Indeed, I spent seven years with them. After *Baltimore*, I went back on this road many times. I built some very strong friendships there, which allowed me to get into the trucks where they load the motorbikes to access the remote roads. I had written *Au Loin Baltimore* for people I had met there, such as Akro, the main character. For this first film, I wanted to ask myself what the spirit of the practice was, what drove young people to gather in groups with their bikes. It's a film about the transmission of this passion from an older brother to his younger brother, when the "real" family is failing, and that we have to create other links elsewhere. I then made a video clip called *Androgyné* for the artist and DJ Chloé Thevenin, who wanted to show this territory and this practice. We made the film together, with riders I knew. Then, I made on my own the 40-minute short film entitled *Ça brûle*.

The idea of *Rodeo* grew in me during those seven years. At the beginning, I imagined the main character to be a boy. And at some point, there was a shift because of an encounter I had during the summer of 2017. Her name is Baya, and she suddenly appeared in the community. At first, she was just the girlfriend of one of the riders.

Then, she starts riding on a tiny little bike. Everyone was laughing at her, as she was the only chick driving. I identified with her a lot. She had an incredible face, a violent face, a very aggressive attitude. She really moved me! And at the end of the summer, she disappeared.

I continued to frequent these roads, and she haunted me. I wondered what it would be like to make a movie about this girl I started to make it before I met Julie Ledru, who completely invested in the figure I had written.



How did the character of Julia come together between all these inspirations, and through Julie's acting?

This character is there to fill a gap: that of not seeing women on the roads. I wanted to tell the story of this unstoppable girl, who has a lot of inner violence and fights almost as a performance. Indeed, it is a mix of so many things. It is the ghost of Baya and the permanent mark she left in my head. It is also Julie (Ledru). And of course, there is me. From 2017 to 2019, I had written a character that was very much like me.

Julie arrived very late, three years before the shooting. It was like a miracle, as if the planets had aligned. On Instagram, she calls herself *l'inconnue_du_95*.

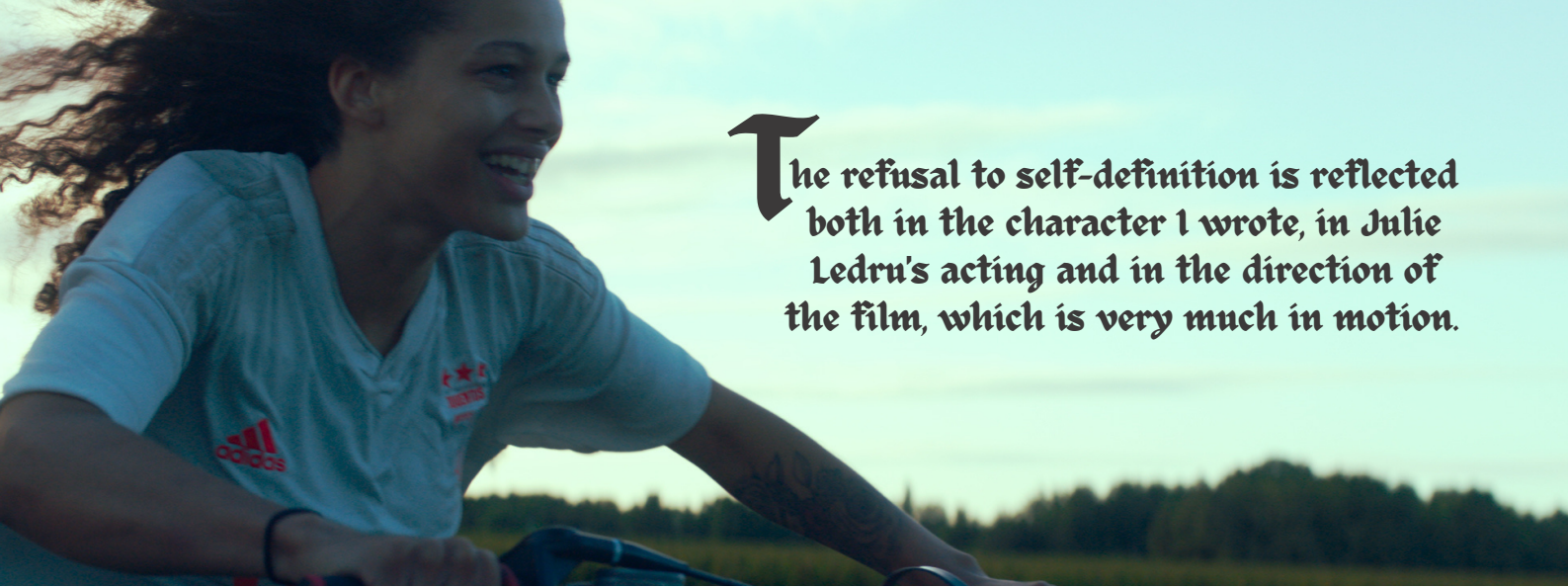
And the unknown, for me, is a call to the *western* imaginary, to the stranger, the outsider! The one who arrives in the community. When I met her for the first time, she was wearing an old Honda jacket, she was smoking one fag after another, and was not wearing any make-up. We talked about everything, and nothing, about her parents, about our past lives, about our teenage years in the suburbs. We even talked about our dreams, our nightmares, and magic. It was completely crazy! When I came back home, I said to my girlfriend Antonia - who plays Ophelia in the film: "But it's crazy, I have the impression that she has turned my brain upside down; there's something special about this girl. She's a witch, she's got me under her spell". She was so eager to be in the film that she was telling me the story of my character. It was as if a piece of her reality had collided with my fantasies and imagination, my mythology.

She was telling me the story of my character.

She is a character who plays with gender codes in an atypical way. You can feel it in the way others look at her femininity or non-femininity.

From the beginning, she was a free character, in the sense of being indefinable. A character who stands between worlds: the worlds of the dead and of the living, the worlds of dreams and reality, but also between the male and female paradigms. I wanted the character to transgress gender codes.

I am considered a woman in society, and often in the eyes of men: this means that I can be seduced. But on the inside, I have never identified with either the feminine or masculine norms—the latter, to be honest, scares me. Although there can be a pleasure in using them and



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in playing with codes. There's an incredible book that completely changed me and saved me: *An apartment on uranus: chronicles of the crossing* by Paul Preciado. There is the possibility of being on a spectrum, oscillating between the masculine and the feminine. It served as a propulsion for the film in my opinion. This book stimulated my desire to see this character, to see her density, her complexity, and her diversity, in the shape of a woman, like myself.

The questioning of codes is not only in appearances but also in her choreography, in her way of speaking. Was this something that came naturally [to Julie Ledru] or that you prepared together?

Both. I think there is a meeting here too. I immediately saw in her the fact that she had a stigmatised body like mine... I want to say: ours. This woman's body has been mistreated since birth, a form of societal mistreatment. Even a slightly insistent look in the metro is something that crystallises a lot of violence. I wanted to write about this experience. Being looked at as a woman's body. I say a woman's body, and I insist, because inside it's more complicated. But I like to think that sociologically, the body is the first façade. As they say, don't judge a book by its cover! And Julie had this experience of this stigmatised body, which has experienced racism and sexism. At the same time, what moved me about her was her immense loneliness. It was a real bond between us, something we could talk about.

I am talking about the loneliness of being on your own. The fact of having no one, as she says: "*being your own best friend, but your own worst enemy too*". And there is violence. You are angry in order to avoid suffering. Violence also creates links. It allows people to find a place, to be seen for what they are.

The refusal to self-definition is reflected both in the character I wrote, in Julie Ledru's acting and in the direction of the film, which is very much in motion.

Julia reminds me of the Dardenne brothers' characters. I think of Tori, Igor, or Rosetta, who are always in action, in a perpetual flight forward. Is this a reference you had in mind?

I have a cinephilia that was built quite late, around 17-18 years old. My parents did not transmit this knowledge to me. They never said to me "Hey, we're going to watch *Charlie Chaplin* this weekend or a film by Alain Resnais" when I was 12... [laughs].

On the other hand, my father was obsessed with the film *Le Mans* with Steve McQueen, who plays a driver in the 24 Hours of Le Mans (motorbike race, editor's note). I saw this film about fifteen times with him. It is a film about movement and at the same time about fixity. When you deal with violence, you have to talk about tenderness, kindness, and gentleness. You can't wallow in a single form of emotion. *Rosetta* was a shock. I was overwhelmed, I saw this film more than 10 times. Like *Jeanne Dielman* by Chantal Akerman. For me, these

are action films! Rosetta is alienated by her search for a job, and she twists the road to get there. The first sequences guided me to understand the violence of Julia's character, even if we are on another social level. In Rosetta's case, it is the search for work as well as the recognition and integration into society. For Julie, it's the quest for the absolute, without compromise. Having a bike between her legs all the time. It's an extension of her body that allows her to fly forward while also being like the boys in some ways.

At the same time, it's a fucking adrenaline shot, as the expression goes: you're hooked on the bike. There is a form of addiction. Movement is life. It is the fact of not stopping. It is a current, a continuous flow, an energy. The film is meant to be fluid. Certainly because fluidity is present in all relationships when you are genderfluid. In love, you experience other forms of desire. I think there is nothing worse than polarisation in masculinity-femininity, in politics, in everything.



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Queerness and fluidity are about not crystallising a look. In the same way, when we feel pain somewhere, it is often because the energy is blocked in the body. It is a question of making it circulate. When it freezes, it's death! The only still shot in the film is the death shot.

She is a character who is constantly on the move because she wants to escape the stereotypes of her gender and her origins. She is a character who runs and struggles to fit into the frame. Indeed, it is only death that makes her fit into the frame - of cinema. But it's not really a death for me; it's a rebirth; it's the Phoenix! [laughs]

Fluidity is present in all relationships when you are genderfluid

We are all looking for intensity. Especially in these times when everything seems to be closed, when many walls and borders are being built, when there is a return to conservatism. There's a backlash every time there's an advance in rights for LGBTQ+ people, as in the case of the #metoo movement. We are getting a big "spanking" now, as Virginie Despentes would say! [laughs]

Julia's arrival in the group changes the balance of power. There are collective scenes, especially when Julia brings back the motorbike, where we feel a lot of tension: some take sides, others laugh...

It's my favourite scene!

The chemistry works! How did you manage to create such a crazy energy on the set, with non-professional actors?

It's a lot of work. It starts with the casting. The casting director Julie Allione worked in groups at first, from fifteen groups we went down to two. Then the B-Mores group was formed. This process was already helping to get into collaborative work. At the beginning, no one knew each other, except for three of them.

A few months before shooting, we did a lot of improvisation. The only ones who had read the script were Julie Ledru and Antonia Buresi.

I wanted to work on the film's story as a collective narrative, as a myth. Every time we met, whether for fittings or otherwise, we narrated the film to each other. By demolishing the narrative document that is the script, you give the actors a space to represent themselves in the film.

The biggest part of the job of interpretation was therefore done before the shooting. Being a director means creating with the living.

There was such a richness on the set for this scene where she brings back the 450... This density is linked to several things.

Firstly, I leave a lot of freedom to my actors. Even though, sometimes, I want certain dialogues to be written in order to achieve certain emotional meetings that structure the sequences. We shoot a lot of sequence shots, with several points of view. In the case of the scene you

Besides, I wanted the actors to take up all the space - a bit like in a documentary - and the technical crew to be almost "in the way".

The second reason is literally the director's nightmare. During the second week of shooting, Julie sprained her ankle. I took her into my home, and we ended up creating this very strong bond of sisterhood. And during the two-week break, the whole team of riders wanted to stay in the Bordeaux region. Over there in the hotel, they created sibling bonds! They all remained close after the shoot.

When you are a filmmaker, you have the opportunity to create micro-societies that can reflect your ideals and beliefs... For this film, the aim was to crush the verticality of the organisation of a film, and to listen to each other. The energy in these sequences is due to the traders listening to one another.

Spirituality is very present in this film. There are many hints that suggest magic and fantasy. What is your approach to the supernatural?

It has to do with several things. First of all, I met Sayama on the docudrama *Ça brûle*, which I directed and edited myself.



are mentioning, it worked like a *millefeuille*. We started by filming Julie, and did around five takes. Then moved on to the other leading character in the sequence, then another... It creates several layers and a depth of understanding of the scene during editing. And I want to say again that they are incredible

I became aware of a lot of internalised things with her. There is the idea of the "other room" and the invisible world... Sayama is a kind of shaman, even if she would never define herself as such, out of humility. When shooting with her, you are crossed by so many emotions and energies.

Sometimes when people die, they are just as present as before.



We were never alone at work: there were all the entities of Samaya, who were there with us. Even the very Cartesian sound engineer was upset. He saw shadows on the walls, he couldn't take it anymore! [laughs] In *Rodeo*, the ritual of purifying the body with sage comes from Samaya.

Then there was the death of my grandmother during the COVID period. Sometimes when people die, they are just as present as before.

Finally, Julie Ledru herself has a heritage of Caribbean beliefs. It is a fusion of Christianity and voodoo. When we talk about voodoo, as white people, we don't really know what it is. Voodoo is not necessarily this negative connotation that we have in mind. It is a portal to another world. Finally, Julie is someone who remembers a lot and has a lot of nightmares... that fed the character

Especially since she dies by fire, which isn't anecdotal, I suppose.

Yes, indeed, she dies as witches were burned. My relationship with fire is special. I almost set fire to a hut once!

I was in my girlfriend's house in Corsica, a house of ancestors with archive books - in particular that of a Corsican martyr murdered by the Italian fascists. There had been a storm, so we used candlelight. A match, that was not properly extinguished, touched a sponge soaked in oil of turpentine. As I was not in the room, I sensed that something was wrong, and when I returned, I saw huge flames burning on the wall and spreading across the wooden ceiling. In a fraction of a second, the kitchen was on fire. Fire is simultaneously home, warmth, family, and at the same time destruction.

There's a book I discovered recently: Gaston Bachelard's *Psychoanalysis of Fire*. In it, he talks about fire as a cycle: from what gives birth to the earth through the nutrients of ashes to the eruption of volcanoes.

How can we avoid falling into the clichés when we are dealing with such a scorned environment?

Having complex characters is key! The characters' representations of violence are very different according to the characters.

I gave them leeway to interpret with their own singularities. You can understand why people are violent, and you can understand the origin of the violence. I've been criticised for showing these minority guys stealing. However, it is Domino, the white man in jail, who initiates this capitalist industry of stealing motorcycles. By the way, some of the B-More members are against it.

It is interesting because here is a counterpoint to all these people who have a lot of preconceptions about the practice. Perhaps it gives them comfort that these people steal and that their shitty ideologies are correct! Personally, I want more complexity.

Interview by H el ene Le Corre for the Alliance Fran aise d'Amsterdam
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Layout by Pauline Blache

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