



# SPIRIT OF ECSTASY

## LA VÉNUS D'ARGENT

A film by Héléna Klotz

**tiff** OFFICIAL SELECTION 2023  
**Platform**  
TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

**PYRAMIDE**  
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LES FILMS DU BÉLIER  
PRESENTS

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**THE PR FACTORY**

**BARBARA VAN LOMBEEK**

barbara@theprefactory.com

+32 486 54 64 80

**MARIE-FRANCE DUPAGNE**

mariefrance@theprefactory.com

▷ INTERNATIONAL SALES

**PYRAMIDE INTERNATIONAL**

32 rue de l'Échiquier, 75010 Paris

+33 1 42 96 01 01

sales@pyramidefilms.com

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Jeanne is 24 years old. She lives on a military base with her father, a police officer, and her little brother and sister. She's determined to make it in the world of finance. Not for the glory or wealth, but because it's leading her on the path to freedom.

# INTERVIEW WITH HÉLÉNA KLOTZ

## How did the script come about?

I don't think in terms of narrative and plot, but in terms of spaces and worlds. I started from two mythologies. On the one hand, the police barracks and the suburban high-rises; and on the other, finance and business district buildings. In the middle, a female character trying to break through the glass ceiling of her social class to create a future for herself. I didn't think of her as a girl who wants to become a trader, but as someone looking for a possible future. Jeanne Francoeur might be seen as the distant female heir of Julien Sorel, Eugène de Rastignac or Martin Eden, and *Spirit of Ecstasy* as a female coming-of-age story.

## This future starts with her breaking the window of a clothing store.

I imagined this opening scene two weeks before the shooting. When I wrote it, I thought about the metaphor of a class defector who breaks windows to overthrow the established order. There was also the fact that Jeanne claims a male suit for herself and, by doing so, transcends her own genre, age, and social class. And I also thought of the scene as a rite of passage for Claire Pommet, a way to establish her as an actress.

## Costumes are really important in the film.

I have always loved cinema's ability to create iconic characters. Mouchette wouldn't really be Mouchette without her ribbons and clogs. I worked with costume designer Judith de Luze, and with Christelle Kocher, a friend of mine for fifteen years who is also the designer of the Koché fashion label. She is the one who thought of Jeanne's biker jacket: it had to be a leather jacket, because Jeanne never goes anywhere without her scooter. Christelle suggested a colourful one, to avoid an all-black look like in *Millenium*. As for

the suit, I didn't want a classic black and white hitman suit, like in a Kitano movie. So I thought of Tom Cruise's suit in Michael Mann's *Collateral*. The grey colour gave his character a very curious look, as if he were already dead.

## In the opening scene, Jeanne steals a suit, but she hurts herself in the process. Throughout the film, she nurses the wound that a shard of glass has opened on her chest.

The wound is on her heart, of course. Like a stigma of the other wound that needs to be tended to – the trauma of what happened in her relationship with the character played by Niels Schneider. *Spirit of Ecstasy* is a physical film. It takes place within the body of a young woman who finds her own skin back. I wrote it like an intimate thriller. I liked the idea of a character who has to move forward, bearing the scars of her own experiences. There is something chivalrous about Jeanne. It is somehow epic to be stabbed with a glass spike, like a spear in a joust.

In some films, since Cronenberg, this kind of thing can indicate the beginning of a transformation, with the character becoming a monster. But the way I see it, Jeanne doesn't become someone else, she survives and invents herself. She uses finance to try to find a way to freedom, to avoid being assigned to a specific role or a place. She wants to be able to stand on the border. Socially and physically, that's where she is: she dresses like a man yet she is very feminine, she goes from one world to another, like a modern "stalker." And I'm interested in this fluidity.

## But when you stand on the border, don't you run the risk of not belonging anywhere?

At the end of the day, whether Jeanne crosses the bridge or not is up to her. In order to know where she will land, she must have had



the choice first. The ending remains open, we don't know what will become of her. What matters is that she is finally vertical, and no longer bent over, staggering, fleeing, or lying down. Something on her journey has crystallised.

### **The silver Vénus hints at that verticality?**

The title obviously refers to the hood ornament of Rolls-Royce cars, a strong and metallic figurine that Jeanne imitates at some point in the film. She has wings. She stands up against the wind, ripping through the air.

### **The source of Jeanne's trauma remains unclear. We will never know exactly what happened between the two lovers.**

I had no intention of adding a scene to get to the bottom of what happened between them, because that's not how it works in real life. First of all, they don't really know who's been through what. And there is no way a third party could have a clearer view of things. That being said, for many women, the first time is often a pretty violent experience. Jeanne clearly states in the film that it was indeed painful and that he didn't understand. The important thing for me is to observe how the characters will eventually fix themselves. I wanted to see how a young man agrees to change his perspective, to put himself in a woman's shoes to understand her. She has experienced a violent act and she makes it clear enough so that he hears her. And after that, how can they move forward together?

### **How did you choose Claire Pommet – who is a singer known as Pomme – for her first role in a film?**

I personally take care of the casting process. The way I see it, choosing actors and actresses is already a way to start directing. I only meet with a few persons for each role. Claire was the obvious choice for the part. I had read an interview in Mediapart in which she explained the difficulties she had faced in the music industry. I thought that she would understand straightaway Jeanne's

ambition and her wound.

### **Were you familiar with her music?**

Not so much when I chose her. But the fact that she was a musician was decisive. I knew she would bring to the character things I hadn't thought of. And she is used to practising scales and rehearsing. She knows that hard work always pays off. We rehearsed for about six months so that she could feel and know her character, which later allowed ideas to arise on set like reflexes. It is really important to me that actors participate in the construction of their characters, which Claire, Niels Schneider, Anna Mougalis or Sofiane Zermani did. I value their input, and I want them to be comfortable with their lines, so that they can make their characters their own. We are on an equal footing. They are genuine allies in the work.

### **For this film, you've worked again with Niels Schneider, who was still in the early stages of his career when you collaborated for *L'âge atomique*.**

Niels is a brilliant actor, with a natural charisma that is even more powerful today. Our friendship also saves us time on set. There are no ego difficulties. Niels is a profoundly good person, but on screen there can be something ambivalent about him, both angelic and devilish, which is exactly what I wanted for his character.

### **In the other world of the film, that of finance, the leading male role is played by Sofiane Zermani, also known as rapper Fianso.**

I discovered Sofiane in Rebecca Zlotowski's *Les Sauvages*, and I was struck by his voice and by the way he delivered his lines. He accepted the part right away. As with Claire, I knew that he would understand the ambition of his character, Farès, and his relationship to business and money. Oddly, at first, I didn't fully grasp that they were both musicians. Something happened between them in a documentary way that went beyond the story of the film. They were in tune.





### Are voices a decisive factor when choosing actors?

Sound is a very physical thing to me, you cannot choose actors without considering their voices. Maybe it has to do with all the old films I watched as a child, in which voices seemed slightly out of sync because of the dubbing. Voices have a bewitching effect. For the character of Elia, for instance, I absolutely wanted Anna Mouglalis. Her voice haunts Jeanne. Anna is a super pragmatic, present actress, but at the same time, she carries a form of abstraction that casts a spell and takes you elsewhere. She is also like this in real life; when you leave her company, it feels like coming back to earth. This impression also helped me shape her character.

### Do you see a connection between those slightly unreal voices and the world of finance, which is a place full of illusions, a chimera?

Indeed, it is a bubble. The sound in the financial districts and the sound in the barracks were designed much differently. In the finance world, voices are mixed upfront and there is a kind of buzzing that gives you the impression that you are entering a place devoid of air where time has stopped, like in a spaceship. There is almost nothing going on off-camera, whereas in the barracks, there is off-screen sound. It was very interesting to work on having nothing off-screen, while the very principle of sound in films is to recreate a 360° reality around what is visible on screen.

The same logic of contrast was applied to other aspects in the film. Image-wise, we chose state-of-the-art lenses for the finance world, with razor-sharp acutance, and vintage lenses for the barracks, which create a dusky image. This helps to create different sensations, and the impression that the perception of things is different in each of these worlds.

### Tell us about the film's locations.

Olivier Lellouche was our production designer, and his contribution had a tremendous impact on the film. We needed to stress the difference between a space linked to order, and another

linked to affect. We wanted Jeanne's room to seem a little out of time. It is the antechamber of success. It is both a soldier's bedroom and that of a child, with stars indicating an escape, a way to enlarge space through imagination.

For the business district, the sets had to be at once credible and abstract. The first job interview scene was shot inside the Gustave Eiffel building of the Centrale Supélec engineering school, an airy, metallic space designed by Rem Koolhaas. At the Défense business district, we were lucky enough to find an empty office space in one of the skyscrapers. We recreated a set like those in the films about finance from the 1970s and 80s, like *Wall Street*, giving it an outdated look.

Finally, Elia's private mansion underlines her aristocratic side, with its ancient materials and warm lightning. It is quite empty, as if she were in transit, with a few elements carefully chosen though: a skull, a bunch of flowers, a few works of art... especially a piece by Théo Mercier depicting an exhaust pipe covered in shiny scales, and a blurred sculpture by Xavier Veilhan.

### This sculpture has a very strange feel to it, almost as if it had been added using computer-generated imagery.

It is a soft form, compared to which everything seems clearer. Jeanne is faced with a blurred female body, almost a reflection of what she is going through. From that moment on, the film takes a turn and we descend into another world. Through the editing and the rhythm, I tried to gradually create a dreamlike consistency, something confusing and hypnotising. When Jeanne goes back to the hotel and realises that Farès has left without her, it is as if she had dreamt the whole thing, as if nothing had ever happened.

### The music also contributes to the ethereal atmosphere.

I have always worked with my brother Ulysse. When Vangelis died, I listened again to "Rachel's Song," which he wrote for the *Blade Runner* soundtrack. I thought that such celestial voices were perfect



for the scenes where Jeanne rides her scooter, like an inner voice that would give access to her truth, a sort of melodic, sung voice-over. I thought that Claire could do vocal exercises. That was kind of our starting point.

Then, reading the script gave Ulysse some ideas. He made a few propositions, and when I started the editing process, we could already try to insert his compositions. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, then Ulysse proposed new things, and the music slowly evolved that way to suit the film. I always tell Ulysse that I prefer when he does things his way first. Then we spend some time in his studio, watching the scenes, and sometimes he records some music live.

Ulysse and I have listened to so much music together that we have common references. We thought of White Lotus, Ennio Morricone... As for the Hardcore in the car scene with Claire and Niels, it is a slightly epic music, it's about adventure. At first, I had considered using a romantic song, but I remembered that piece composed by Ulysse that I love, and it gave this romantic scene a kind of very high heart rate.

### Can you explain the research you made on the language of finance?

I met with high-ranking traders and I organised fake job interviews with real City traders. Most of the dialogues and the verbal sparring you hear in the film stem from this purely documentary work. This hyper-technical, coded jargon is like a foreign language. The idea was to exceed the limits of comprehension, as in the opening scene of *The Social Network*, and to see very young people talking like robots.

The challenge of the film was to show a somewhat robotic character, skilful yet maladjusted, who manages to develop and thrive over the course of the film. She has a hard time expressing herself, and she finds a way to do so through figures. Throughout

the film, she gets back into her own skin. It took me some time to figure out what a modern-day heroine would be like.

### Mathieu Amalric plays a part in the final scene.

It is partly a nod to one of my parents' films, *La Question humaine*, whose making-of I directed. Maybe filming my parents at work unconsciously sparked the will to make *La Vénue d'argent*. Mathieu Amalric played a human resources director in their film. In mine, he plays a businessman. As if it were the same world. That's why he agreed to do it in the first place. History of cinema runs through the actors. It's the same thing with Grégoire Colin, who plays the gendarme father, as a reference to his part as a legionnaire in *Beau Travail*.



## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

HÉLÉNA KLOTZ grew up in the suburbs of Paris. She began her career at the Théâtre de Chaillot as a sound designer. In 2003, she directed the medium-length film "Le léopard ne se déplace jamais sans ses taches". In 2006, she completed the documentary "Les Amants Cinéma". In 2012, she shot "The atomic age", which won the FRIPESCI prize at the Berlin Film Festival and the Jean Vigo Award, and then traveled to over fifty festivals around the world. In 2013, she was a member of the Golden Camera Jury at the Cannes Film Festival. In 2014, she was the artistic director of Jacques Audiard's "Dheepan", which won the Palme d'Or. In 2016, she directed several music videos, including one for Philippe Katerine. She also collaborated on several screenplays, including "Madeleine Collins" by Antoine Barraud, starring Virginie Efira, selected for the 2021 Venice Film Festival. After the short film "Amour Océan", shot in 2021, she has just completed her new feature film, "The Spirit of Ecstasy", produced by Les Films du Bélier, presented in the Platform section at the Toronto Film Festival 2023.



## CAST

Claire Pommet  
Niels Schneider  
Sofiane Zermani  
Anna Mouglaïs  
Grégoire Colin  
Irina Lellouche Klotz  
Gabriel Merz Chammah

With the participation of  
Mathieu Amalric

Jeanne  
Augustin  
Farès  
Elia  
The father  
Camille  
Baptiste

World Aid's boss

## CREW

Director **Hélène Klotz**  
Produce **Justin Taurand, Les Films du Bélier**  
Screenplay **Noé Debré, Emily Barnett and Hélène Klotz**  
Image **Victor Seguin**  
Editing **Julien Lacheray**  
Art Direction **Olivier Lellouche**  
Original Music **Ulysse Klotz**  
Costumes **Judith De Luze and Christelle Kocher**  
Sound **Dana Farzanehpour**  
Sound Editing **Mikael Barre**  
Mixing **Daniel Sobrino**  
Script Supervisor **Anaïs Sergeant**  
1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Director **Alistair Artault**  
Unit production manager **Julien Flick**  
Make up **Marjolaine Vialle**  
Location manager **Gaspard Rivoire**  
Lighting **Xavier Sentenac**  
Grip **Bruno Cellier**  
Color Grading **Elie Akoka**

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