

QUINZAINÉ
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
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IN HIS OWN IMAGE

A FILM BY
THIERRY DE PERETTI

LES FILMS VELVET
PRESENTS



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Fragments of the life of Antonia, a young photographer for a local newspaper in Corsica. Her commitment, her friends, and her loves intertwine with the major political events of the island, from the 1980s to the dawn of the 21st century. It is the fresco of a generation.

INTERVIEW WITH THIERRY DE PERETTI

Interview by Anne-Claire Cieutat

Based on Jérôme Ferrari's novel of the same name, *In His Own Image* works as a female mirror to your previous film, *A Violent Life*, with, at its core, a character who offers a point of view rarely portrayed onscreen: that of Antonia's, whose partner is a nationalist activist who has chosen the path of armed struggle. How did you find out about this author? Also, isn't this the first time you've written a script based on fictional characters?

It is true that I had never made an adaptation before, and *In His Own Image* gave me the opportunity to try my hand at it with contemporary writer Jérôme Ferrari. He covers fictional, political and historical grounds that are familiar to me, but in a radically different way.

When I read the novel, I was fascinated but also baffled, because I had just made *A Violent Life*, and it felt like the novel was starting a dialogue with the film somehow. At first, I thought that adapting it would be a bad idea, because it would be like doing the same thing all over again, only with new characters... But oddly, this is precisely what made me want to do it. As soon as I finished the book, I talked about it with my producer, Frédéric Jouve, who then bought the rights.

I was fascinated by the character of this young woman who goes through more than two decades of history, and by her reflections on her work as a photographer and more generally on image. It is also a political chronicle, just like *A Violent Life*, but this time from the point of view of a female character, who is at once *inside and outside*. *Inside*, because it is her own group of friends

who are throwing themselves into the struggle, so she is at the heart of it. And *outside*, because she's not directly involved, and because being a photographer puts a physical, critical distance, a filter between her and what is going on.

What is new for me is that the starting point of the project is a novel. The political events that punctuate the story are historical (I have my own memories of them as a child and a teenager): the Bastelica-Fesch case, the double homicide at the Ajaccio jail, the death of Robert Sozzi, the division of the FLNC [The National Liberation Front of Corsica, a militant group that advocates an independent state on the island of Corsica, separate from France] ... But the characters are purely fictional. Until then, I had only made films with characters based on real people, so to me, this was exciting but also a little scary.

The novel is at once a reflection on photography, on its relationship with reality and loss; a requiem for a deceased photographer; the portrait of a woman in love; a dive into the contemporary history of Corsica...

In his novels, Jérôme Ferrari manages to capture and redefine the imaginary of Corsica, our common land. In *In His Own Image*, he creates an emotion that I recognize immediately, and which comes from the depths of our culture, of our society, while steering clear of any form of folkloric or exotic treatment, in the style of Maupassant or Mérimée. He sets the photographer's journey against the backdrop of key episodes in contemporary

political history; I find in his work the strength of great, violent novels that are also deeply rooted in one particular place, like those of Leonardo Sciascia or Mario Vargas Llosa, for instance.

Just for a sequence, your film takes us outside of Corsica, to Belgrade...

The war in former Yugoslavia was a traumatic experience, first and foremost for the communities of the former Republics, of course, but also for Europe as a whole. As was the Black Decade in Algeria, also in the 1990s. Those were two terrible civil wars. Incidentally, you can hear Cheb Hasni voice in the film. Today we are going through a period of extreme violence, due to several simultaneous high-intensity conflicts, but the 1990s were also horrendous in that regard. So, Antonia is caught up in a general climate of violence, in Corsica and beyond. This sequence in Belgrade, that alludes to the beginning of the conflict in former Yugoslavia, falsely opens the film and, to me, it offers a strong visual and political counterpoint, again without exoticism.

What touches you about the character of Antonia?

I've decided to make films because I realized that what was happening in Corsica, the places, the history, the people of course - everything made for inexhaustible, original and splendid material for cinema. Antonia is a young photographer who works for Corse-Matin. She is fully immersed in the history of the island in those years. She is a powerful character, unprecedented even in contemporary fiction, whose relationship with images resonates for me with what filmmaking and scriptwriting ultimately are about.

Maybe Antonia and I both share an ambivalent yet visceral relationship to this place. But today this relationship is probably less painful to me than it is to her. I'd say things affect me in a

more Proustian way than her. I try to film what I see and what moves me about these people and their recent history. I am more tender-hearted than she is. She is more radical and makes fewer concessions. She takes a critical and sometimes cruel look at what surrounds her.

At least initially, she deprecates what she sees, as if she found nothing or very few things worthy of being photographed, or perhaps she fails to show what she sees. It's as if her photos always betrayed a surplus or a deficit of meaning. This is what is said in the film and in the novel: "In her photographs, her friends looked like characters in a tragedy in the throes of unspeakable torment, when the problem happened to be the total absence of tragedy." It is this small discrepancy between what she sees and feels, and the actual result on print, that troubles and perhaps even hurts her. In any case, this is what she is going through. But that doesn't stop her from searching, from having her own projects, from trying. Yet she is not satisfied. She needs more - more meaning, more History, more truth.

This leads to a comical scene with her news editor...

Antonia has difficulty standing the lack of urgency or purpose inherent in her work at Corse-Matin. Just like she loathes deceitful narratives, or the legends that are built up without regard for the truth. In her view, her childhood friends hiding behind balaclavas is just theatrics, deception, and she finds it hard to share their belief in this cause, and even more so perhaps, in activism.

Especially as Antonia is kept in the dark about Pascal's fight?

Probably. But only at the beginning, because for her, not everything revolves around Pascal, far from it. It's true, at least at first, it makes her mad that she always arrives after the battle, that

she feels left out, or late. Not in the thick of things. It's a feeling I've had too. But today, it is exactly what I find interesting. That's why I am so fond of a certain Taiwanese or Chinese cinema, which never shows the event itself, but what comes before or after. These films focus on the aftermath or on the forerunners of things. In the end, Antonia also manages to be touched by smaller, more fragile things, but that's when she dies.

You wrote the screenplay with Jeanne Aptekman. It marked your third collaboration. What made you think this novel could be adapted for the screen?

Actually, I don't think it was the best candidate for an adaptation... But that's the point, really: why make a film out of a novel that absolutely doesn't need it? The book works perfectly well on its own. So why adapt it? Is it a question of making a translation using the tools of cinema? Is it about seizing a motif or a fragment of the novel and transforming or isolating it? Is it about rereading the whole thing? Above all, I think I wanted to spend more time with the text and to have a *dialogue* with it.

Did you work directly with Jérôme Ferrari?

We worked *with* his book. Which isn't to say that we didn't talk to each other, that we didn't have him read a couple of versions, or that I didn't pepper him with questions. But he was graceful enough to trust us, and even to suggest that since Jeanne and I had spent so long studying his text, we probably knew it better than he did! Which isn't true, obviously. He has enough faith in his writing not to fear that a film might betray it. He was interested in the process, curious, I think, to know who was going to play whom, to see the actors' faces; he also came a few times during the rehearsals with the cast. But he really gave us a lot of freedom. We asked him a lot of questions about the

part in Serbia, during the former Yugoslavia conflict, because it was a little abstract to me. It was hard for me to picture the places, Vojvodina, Belgrade, Vukovar, and he really knows all that history really well.

Why did you choose to have a third-person voice-over ?

It is not a film about words, as my two previous films may have been, but it is true that this tool, the voice-over, came into the process, maybe not immediately, but rather quickly. This is contradictory, because for us, this voice-over was a way of having part of the dialogues taken care of and having fewer lines. But at the same time, it just puts the words elsewhere! Language isn't absent at all. We didn't want to forget about literature, we were really keen to keep the dialogue with the novel alive, even if the script was probably going to take us quite far away from the original text.

With Jeanne, we went to see the rerelease of *Confessions of a Cheat* by Sacha Guitry. It is always so interesting to watch films like this one, or others by Jean Eustache or Marcel Pagnol, during the writing process, because of the faith they have in language, but also because they are very *local*, very French filmmakers, even if their films aren't about France as a whole but are more specific. There are a lot of words in Guitry's film, yet the characters don't talk at all. There isn't a single line of dialogue in the film, but at the same time, the omnipresent voice-over talks for the characters we see on screen.

Whose voice narrates your film?

It is the voice of Simon (who is played by Marc'Antonu Mozziconacci), Antonia's childhood friend and lover, who goes underground with the other boys in this group. With Jeanne, we had written the voice-over before we even decided who



the narrator would be. We thought that it could be her uncle, or even Antonia herself after her death... But in the end, when we decided it would be Simon, who is a bit like her *biographer*, something opened up.

Your film opens by introducing us to Antonia: she is in a bedroom, speaking to her mother on the phone. This opening sequence ends with roller blinds plunging the space into darkness: the place turns into a darkroom...

This was meant to be the last shot of the film, but in the edit room, it became the opening shot.

Undercover started the other way around: your character, also on the phone, stepped out of the shadows before returning to them at the end. The dialectics of light and shadow is common to both films, especially *In His Own Image*, which is about photography.

I try to put the viewer immediately in the present of the story, that is to say in the same time as the character. The sequence shot allowed me to give this impression of a pure, unaltered present. For me, this is often what guides the writing and the cutting: a shot equals an *entire* moment.

Here, the roller blinds create, in a slightly derisive way, a metaphor for photography, and maybe they foreshadow Antonia's death. This death is one of the mysteries in both the film and the novel. I love the tension between tragedy and a silly accident. Even though she is still a little drunk from the night before, Antonia takes the wheel, she gets dazzled, comes off the road and dies. She leaves the frame in full light. As for this "prologue", since I have often been criticized for not filming the celebrated beauty of Corsican landscapes, well there it is: the beautiful beach, the bright sun, the happy wedding, the nice Italian music... and then

bang! I approach tragedy as a literary or film genre with which I can engage in a dialogue, nothing more, and it certainly doesn't define Corsica or its community.

The film is informed by a sense of tragedy as well as of comedy. The sequence when the three friends have a chat in the car, for instance, is very funny.

That comedy should be present in the midst of grave, even dangerous events is important. To me, many scenes are comedy sequences. In fact, almost all of them, including the most violent ones, share a farcical element. But I think that humor also comes from the wit and sense of humor of the actors and actresses in the cast, and therefore from the characters themselves. Clara-Maria Laredo embodies this perfectly well.

Your film is interspersed with group scenes, oozing with a powerful energy.

I really love weaving together big party scenes, with loads of people. It's hard to imagine anything more joyful, more exhilarating than that, right? The concert sequence early in the film summons personal memories of concerts in my home village (Bastelica, the place shown in the film). Local authorities tried to ban these events, but the best bands from the area would come and perform anyway: groups like *Canta u populu corsu*, *Chjami Aghjalesi* (the band in the film), or *I Muvrini*.

When I was a kid in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a very tense atmosphere in Corsica, heady with political tumult. These concerts would perfectly epitomize the movement known as *Riacquistu*, literally "the reappropriation". Although it is impossible to pinpoint a precise date for the birth of this movement, it is generally defined as "the great Corsican narrative of the post-war period". For at least twenty years,

the *Riacquistu* was instrumental in Corsicans reclaiming their language, their history, their collective heritage, their art and their environment, as well as their historical and political rights. Beyond its physical and musical dimension, this sequence also enables me to contextualize the political commitment of many young people back then, including the characters in the film: their political engagement is not a choice, or an ideological stance like any other, but a necessary act of resistance, or even survival.

Music, in general, plays a pivotal role in your film. In a beautiful sequence where Antonia takes a picture of Pascal on the phone, we can hear a full song by Bérurier Noir...

Bérurier Noir was an iconic French punk band, contemporary to the period depicted in the film. This song, "Salut à toi", is about the emancipation struggles of those years, i.e. struggles for self-determination, farmer struggles and third-world struggles. The way the lyrics are chanted is trance-like, but borders on the comical at the same time.

This type of *raw*, live recording, poor as it is, has a similar effect on me as the song by Maria Violenza later on in the film, at the end of the Serbian part. She is a contemporary punk artist from Sicily. The song, "Quanu iu moru", is a cover of a song by Rosa Balistreri, an iconic Sicilian realist singer, who sings about life in Sicily in her day. "Quanu iu moru" actually means "When I Die". It's a song from the traditional Italian repertoire. Balistreri wrote it for her fellow resistance fighters, telling them what to do after her death: bring her red flowers, sing her songs to other people, and not feel alone...This is a requiem.

Your sets feature openings, doors or windows, where light flows...

I shoot in places I am very familiar with, where I live, and whose

light I can almost anticipate, depending on what time of the day it is. Along with Josée Deshaies, who worked as cinematographer on the project (she worked on my first short film too) and Toma Baqueni, the set designer (who also worked on my two previous films), we are always on the lookout for shooting angles and shot durations that allow light to move almost in real time, before our very eyes. Light in a tragedy also makes it possible not to be too overwhelmed by what's unfolding.

Can you elaborate on the casting process with Julie Allione?

It is a long process that we put in place with Julie, who casts all my films, and who is involved in every step of their development. We don't apply one specific method to all my films. We think beforehand about what the best approach might be for each particular film, what would be the most efficient, but also the most interesting and fun process for us.

For *In His Own Image*, at first we thought that we would make the film with the cast of *A Violent Life*, because we really wanted to work with them again, and we liked the idea of a single troupe for both films very much. But the actors' ages were an issue. They were already too old for the beginning of the story (which makes up a large part of the script), but too young for the end of it.

The issue of age and the passing of time (the novel spans twenty-five years) was a real headache for me until quite late on. Julie and I finally decided that there would be a single cast of actresses and actors close in age to the characters at the start of the story, but mature enough to be believable thirty-somethings by the end of the film. So we started or started again the casting process from scratch, knowing that the film would take place over fifteen rather than twenty-five years, even though it meant compressing times and drawing historical landmarks closer a little artificially.

Having established this, we didn't only want to put together a cast,



but also to meet as many people as possible to tackle head-on the issues raised in the film, political or otherwise. This documentary-like phase was as important to us as finding the right people for the parts. Especially since we didn't have preconceived ideas of what the characters should be like.

So you chose people steeped in the political context of Corsica...

First, we didn't run screen tests based on the script, as is usually the case, but instead we conducted interview sessions with the persons who had answered the casting call. At exactly the same time, there were riots and violent unrest in the Corsican streets, after nationalist leader Yvan Colonna was attacked in prison. Of course, it had an impact on the way Julie conducted the interviews.

The actors who were finally chosen to play the main characters are genuinely steeped in the contemporary reality of Corsica: Clara-Maria Laredo, who plays Antonia, ore Marc'Antonu Mozziconacci, Andrea Cossu, Pierre-Jean Straboni, Savéria Giorgi, Barbara Sbraggia, Louis Starace, Harold Orsoni, but also Paul Garatte, Antonia Buresi, Victoire Dubois, Alexis Manenti and Cédric Appietto, with whom I often work. Therefore, their own way of living or thinking this reality also creates a dynamic with the characters. We spent some time together to think about all this, about what this story is about, to rehearse, improvise, rewrite. They are all actors with exceptional intensity, acting skills and intelligence.

You play the priest, Antonia's godfather. A man we see dressed in leather, right before he puts on his cassock...

I absolutely didn't want it to be a meta thing: *the director plays the priest*, it's so unsubtle, or else it calls to mind a whole

tradition of filmmakers playing priests, and I didn't want the role to be about that. In the end, the part is quite small, and it allowed me to appear in the film and to experience the story with the actors in that way. But it wasn't very comfortable for me, I must say.

To me, the highlight was the preparatory work. I spent two weeks "immersed" at the Saint Luc seminary in Aix-en-Provence. I was a guest during the training of future priests, and I was moved by this community who is ready to embrace pastoral life. They let me study with them during their classes in Christology, Moral theology or History of Christianity. This helped me to update my understanding of what it means to practice Catholic faith today. How modern it actually is. The director of the seminary has a huge *Godfather* poster in his office: we talked a lot about Michael Corleone's guilt!

How did you work on the editing of the film, especially the ellipses?

We spent several months editing, with Marion Monnier and Lila Desiles, and then, as for my three previous films, on which they also worked, I shot a new bunch of scenes for a few days. New sequences that the film in progress required. I really like this way of working, which my producer supports: you approach things slowly, letting the film happen, without separating the various stages – writing, shooting, editing – but trying to blend them together instead.

We wanted the viewers to stay alert, or at least on the same wavelength as the characters. I wanted them to feel that something is being renewed before their very eyes, from one scene to the next, without even realizing it. Something in the film must shake up what we think or believe about a character or a situation at the beginning, our initial perceptions.

In His Own Image isn't a film about the passing of time, but rather about the memory of a bygone era. Beyond the melancholic aspect, which is accentuated by the voice-over and the archive footage, we also wanted the viewers to be gripped by a sense of the present, to really experience what the characters may feel, to be caught up in the movement of the film.





THIERRY DE PERETTI

Actor, film and stage director, Thierry de Peretti was born in Ajaccio (Corsica).

He has directed plays by Bernard-Marie Koltès, Grégory Motton and Don DeLillo.

His acting credits include Orso Miret's *Rules of Silence*, Bertrand Bonello's *Yves Saint-Laurent*, and Patrice Chéreau's *Those Who Love Me Will Take the Train*.

Apaches - selected at the 2013 Directors' Fortnight - is his first feature film. *A Violent Life*, his second film, was selected at the 2017 Critics' Week. *Fight Youth*, a feature-length documentary, was shown at the 2017 FID Marseille, and his third feature, *Undercover*, was released in 2022. It was selected in 2021 San Sebastian, where it won the prize for Best Cinematography. *In His Own Image*, his fourth feature, is selected in the 2024 Directors' Fortnight.



CAST

ANTONIA – Clara-Maria LAREDO

SIMON – Marc'Antonin MOZZICONACCI

PASCAL – Louis STARACE

MADELEINE – Barbara SBRAGGIA

LAETITIA – Saveria GIORGI

JEAN-JOSEPH – Andrea COSSU

XAVIER – Pierre-Jean STRABONI

GRACIEUSE – Antonia BURESI

PAUL – Paul GARATTE

MARC-AURÈLE – Harold ORSONI

JOSEPH – Thierry DE PERETTI

JELICA – Victoire DU BOIS

DRAGAN – Alexis MANENTI

PATRICK – Cédric APPIETTO

CREW

Director
Screenplay

Casting
Image
Editing
Sets
Costumes
Staging
Artistic Advisor
Script Supervisor
Sound
Musical Supervisor
Make-up
Photography Coach
Line Producer
Production Manager
Post production manager
Production administration

Production
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A coproduction
With the support of
With the participation of
With the support of
With the support of

In association with
Developed with the support of
With the support of

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MARION MONNIER, LILA DESILES
TOMA BAQUÉNI
RACHÈLE RAOULT
BARBARA CANALE, LÉA BOUBLIL
JULIA CANARELLI
ALEXIA MONTEGU
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