



VIRGINIE EFIRA

MADELEINE COLLINS

A FILM BY
ANTOINE BARRAUD



UFO DISTRIBUTION PRESENTS
A LES FILMS DU BELIER PRODUCTION

MADELEINE COLLINS

A FILM BY
ANTOINE BARRAUD

WITH
VIRGINIE EFIRA
BRUNO SALOMONE
QUIM GUTIÉRREZ

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SYNOPSIS

Judith manages a busy double life between Switzerland and France. On the one hand there's Abdel, with whom she has a little girl, and on the other Melvil, with whom she has two older boys. Gradually, this delicate balancing act built on lies, secrets, and constant to-ing and fro-ing, starts cracking up under the pressure. Caught in a trap, Judith decides to run away from it all and her situation soon spirals out of control.

ANTOINE BARRAUD - BIOGRAPHY

Antoine Barraud directed his first short film, *Monstre*, in 2004, followed by *Déluge* in 2005 and *Monstre Number Two* in 2007. These three films were all shown at leading French and international short film festivals. He then went on to make several experimental documentaries about other filmmakers, including Kenneth Anger, Shuji Terayama and Koji Wakamatsu.

He co-directed the short film *Son of a Gun* in 2011 with Claire Doyon, and simultaneously co-produced the medium-length film *Madam Butterfly* by Tsai Ming Liang, which was released worldwide.

In 2012, he produced Stephen Dwoskin's latest film, *Age is...*, and directed his first feature-length film, *Les Gouffres* with Nathalie Boutefeu and Mathieu Amalric, which was produced by Les Films du Bélier. Both films had their world premiere at the 2012 Locarno Film Festival.

In 2015 he directed his second feature-length film, *Portrait of the Artist* with Bertrand Bonello, Pascal Greggory and Jeanne Balibar (presented at the 2015 Berlinale). That same year, he also produced, via his production company House on Fire, *The Ornithologist*, directed by the Portuguese director Joao Pedro Rodrigues (Locarno 2016 Director's Award) as well as *Cassandra, the Exotico* directed by Marie Losier (Acid 2018) in collaboration with Tamara Films.

Madeleine Collins is his third feature film.



INTERVIEW WITH ANTOINE BARRAUD

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR MADELEINE COLLINS COME FROM?

I came up with the idea of a woman who uses her professional work life to hide her complicated private life. I was thinking about the dynamic that this would create. A woman constantly on the move, travelling back and forth. A line of flight. In cinema, the idea of a man leading a double life is quite a common theme, but it hasn't really been explored for women characters. Because the question of children, if there are any, crops up straight away... I was interested in whether you could really keep a pregnancy secret? Whether it were plausible, and I quickly came up with this challenge when writing the script which would not arise if the protagonist were a man. I remember Danièle Dubroux, the director of the wonderful film *Border Line*, who said she always wanted to "*defend the indefensible*". There is something of that in the character of Judith: she is always defending what should really be indefensible...

WHAT WAS THE FIRST SCENE YOU IMAGINED?

It was a sequence where Judith goes to a nightclub, and gets chatted up by an over-insistent playboy type of guy. And for the first time in the film, she lies about her identity. That scene is no longer in the film. But it's the germination of an idea that allows the film to exist, and then got put aside. I wanted the film had to start at a time in her life when it would be difficult for her to manage a double life.

Writing this film was a very long, drawn-out process. It needed a script with a very rigid framework, from which it was difficult to take elements away without compromising the whole. When the question arose of which scenes I could cut or remove altogether to save costs - as is often the case with independent films on a limited budget - it was very complicated because every piece of information really counted... For the last two years, Héléna Klotz joined me in the writing process: I went back and forth a lot with her, and also with my producer, Justin Taurand. I was unsure about what was clear and what wasn't. Héléna was there to say, "*watch out, that's repetitive*", "*we already got that*", etc. It was very exciting and a very new experience for me.

AT WHAT POINT DID THE FILM BECOME A THRILLER THAT STEADILY DRIP-FEEDS THE VIEWER CLUES?

I realised quite quickly that it would have what I call 'a snail structure': you start at Z and arrive at A. But this approach scared me a little. I find writing quite easy, but I'm used to a linear structure... Here I knew I needed an unstoppable kinetic mechanism. Each scene we shot had to add an extra layer, not two, not fifteen, but one. So that the story-telling stays digestible but builds continuously. I like the idea of active, engaged viewers, always on the edge of their seats. I like the idea that seeing a film is a hyper-participatory experience. It puts the viewer in a state close to the character, because lying is hard work and exhausting and a full-time job. It requires a complex mental map, as you can't miss a trick. Being a liar is almost like being a novelist, by force of circumstance. Judith makes up stories all the time, sometimes she doesn't have time to, and seems trapped, but in the panic she makes something up anyway, and her lies are always on a knife edge, and can put her in jeopardy of losing everything...

FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN JUDITH LIES TO HER SON, WHO OVERHEARS HER PHONE CALL IN THE GARDEN...

Here, Judith is really devious, and even resorts to using the fact that she's found out that her son is gay to shift the focus away from her. She shows no emotion on her face, adopting a perfect poker face, she really doesn't look like she's lying. Virginie, who plays Judith, carries this off effortlessly.

THE OPENING SCENE SETS THE TONE FOR THE WHOLE FILM, IT HANDS THE VIEWER THE FIRST PIECE OF THE PUZZLE, BUT THE VIEWER HAS NO IMMEDIATE UNDERSTANDING OF WHERE THIS PIECE IS MEANT TO FIT...

It's a scene that came to me quite late on, and I love its theatricality: it's the afternoon lull in a department store, and suddenly, a young woman is overcome by an unexpected, strange malaise in the changing rooms. Even though she appears to be in good health. It's not clear exactly what's going to happen next. Is she going to steal an item of clothing?





The doubt, and hesitancy corresponds to the fleeting nature of a sequence shot. Especially as the whole narrative was going to be fragmented. I wanted this scene to be like a memory block. Which begs the viewer to ask who is this young woman?

THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY RUNS ALL THE WAY THROUGH MADELEINE COLLINS: WHO AM I? AM I THE PERSON I WANT TO BE OR THE ONE I'M BEING FORCED TO BE? ARE THESE THEMES THAT INTEREST YOU?

They appeared in my first film, *Les Gouffres*: Mathieu Amalric emerges from the bowels of the earth as someone entirely different... But honestly, these are universal themes that permeate my work and that I just allow to seep through without over-intellectualising them. As a result, they reoccur film after film, like the theme of the monster. For me, the character of Virginie is a kind of monster, a monster with many heads, like a figure from Greek mythology. But to come back to the idea of identity, even in the real world, identity is a game that we take more or less seriously, that we believe in to different degrees. Sometimes we don't believe that we are what we are, we don't recognise ourselves. Being oneself also means keeping up a façade, behaving consistently. Another idea explored in the film is the need for freedom, and a savage side. This might all be a game. Yes, sometimes it's a game, a dangerous one, but that's what makes it exciting.

WHAT MADE YOU THINK OF VIRGINIE EFIRA FOR THIS MULTIPLE ROLE?

The character is so complex, and at times almost perverse, and we needed to create a character that we could be happy to follow for a long time, and go a long way, without ever stopping loving her. Virginie has this ability to remain constantly intriguing: she is very beautiful, but her beauty is neither distant nor threatening, it is positive and appealing. Very quickly, I could imagine no one else but her in this role. We met, we talked, I saw that she understood the film perfectly, intelligently, in the right context, in the way that interested me. There was nothing to add. Before shooting, I used a technique I had tested out on *Les Gouffres*: rehearsing the gestures rather than the dialogue. Often, there is little time to search for the right body language on set, and last-minute improvisations aren't always the best. In French cinema, how often does a character light a cigarette, just to have something to do? It's better to prepare in advance: e.g. in such-and-such scene, you arrive, you unpack your suitcase, so what body language have you and your husband developed over the last twenty years when in a room together?

DID YOU WANT VIRGINIE EFIRA TO ACT IN THE SAME WAY WHETHER SHE WAS WITH ABDEL OR MELVIL?

Yes, and I particularly didn't want her to change her costume or hairstyle to go from one to the other, I didn't want it to look similar to Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*. The madness had to be within her. I didn't want to use a hand-held camera; I didn't want any mess. I didn't want anything other than her emotions and her actions to express her savagery. And to show her standing, to film her upright, stable, even when she was standing on the edge of the mental abyss, that's what defending the indefensible is. Even when faced with the harsh truth, she doesn't give up.

Virginie is someone who loves to work hard at her roles, in a good way. She spends a long time prepping her character so that she's never caught out. She always connects quickly and precisely to what we want to achieve.

I don't do many takes. I work on the principle that doing lots of takes is only interesting when you are, for example, Doillon: you go looking for something on the seventieth take which is borne out of exhaustion or going beyond what is written in the script. That's not what I was looking for. I love actors. When they are good, or even better, excellent, I don't see what you could get from the tenth or twentieth take that you couldn't get in the third or fourth, which are more spontaneous. I'm talking about this film specifically, I'm the first to want to try other ways of working when the film lends itself to it.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE HER MALE PARTNERS?

The casting director Stéphane Batut suggested the Spanish actor Quim Gutiérrez. At the screen test, he walked into the room, and I asked him to do a scene from *Kramer vs Kramer*, and when he came out we all looked at each other, we were impressed. I knew he was right for the role, but I had to wait to confirm it. He almost fell off his chair when I rang him two and a half years after the screen test, to say, "You've got the part!" He did a few more screen tests with Virginie, and she was as keen as we were.

As for the role of Melvil, I had worked with Bruno Salomone on an animated film that I wrote and for which I had directed the French dialogue because the director was English-speaking: I didn't know Bruno, and I discovered his generosity, his sense of rhythm, his pleasure in being there on set and putting forward ideas. I had kept his name in mind, he also wanted to broaden his range and he didn't disappoint me, he has a beautiful brokenness, which he knew how to use.

AND NADAV LAPID?

I'm a great admirer of his work and there's something about filming a filmmaker that I find very touching. I have filmed Kenneth Anger, Koji Wakamatsu, Bertrand Bonello, Barbet Schroeder, Valérie Donzelli, Nobuhiro Suwa, and so on. I have real affection for filmmakers: they are people who watch and observe, and so it becomes very moving when they, in turn, are being watched. They show a certain vulnerability and also great professionalism. Nadav Lapid turned out to be a very good actor and he has this physique, this voice, which is very impressive, the character needed that. I also like to create interesting dynamics: I liked the idea of Virginie and Nadav Lapid working together. Or Virginie and the great Swiss actor Jean-Quentin Châtelain, who plays the inspector, with his very particular diction. She liked him a lot. In France there is a plethora of non-naturalistic actors, I call them "musical" actors: Jeanne Balibar, Nicolas Maury, Fanny Ardant, Marc Fraize, etc... they are national treasures. People who say hello like they're from another planet, who bring a very specific atmosphere to a film.

I also liked that Judith is forced to descend to Kurt's level, into the darkest depths, leaving her social class far behind. This man is her "key", but he also holds up a mirror to her, he's a character who suffers from being perceived only by his lowly status.

JUDITH'S OTHER "KEY" ARE HER CHILDREN: JORIS AND THEN NINON FREE HER FROM HER LIE, AND ALSO FROM HER SUBORDINATION TO ABDEL AND MELVIL...

A lie is a collective undertaking. A lie is made with all those who take an active part in it, both the liars and those taken in by the lie, everyone sees the version of the truth that they want to see. Joris is a character that my producer and Héléna Klotz asked me to develop and include in the script, and, in fact, this character is me, it's as simple as that! Thomas Gioria, who is an incredible actor, made him come alive way beyond all my expectations.

WHAT IS THE SCENE AT THE OPERA ABOUT?

For Judith, it's mainly a matter of putting herself in an uncomfortable situation. She makes up stories. She's just lied on the phone, she gets caught out on the house story, she thought she was going back to Switzerland, but that's not possible. Her mother is awful. For her, this is normal, everyday life but it's so tiring... Through her power of self-delusion, Judith ends up believing that there really is something wrong with her. It draws parallels with what happens in the prologue.

MADELEINE COLLINS RECAPTURES THE POLISHED FORM OF CLASSIC THRILLERS WITH ITS RICH VISUALS. HOW DID YOU AND THE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ACHIEVE THIS?

I had already worked with Gordon Spooner in the past. He is curious and enthusiastic and always willing to help. A strong ally! We had established a fairly detailed visual mood board for the film. For example, we made reference to the look of *Kramer vs Kramer*. People think it's a naturalist film, but when I think of Nestor Almendros' photography, I think of Meryl Streep, of cinema mythology and not at all of realism. Her character does two incredible ground-breaking things, especially at the time it was made: she is a mother who abandons a child and then spends the whole film trying to get him back. And when she gets custody, she gives him back again. *Kramer vs Kramer* is one of those films with strong female characters like *Wanda* by Barbara Loden or *Opening Night*. I took inspiration from *Kramer vs Kramer*'s autumnal feel, something from the costumes, and the skin tones.

When Meryl Streep returns at the end of the film to say that she's leaving the child with her ex-husband, she is standing in front of a cool, marble wall. It is a very simple shot, but very beautiful. The emotion of that narrative moment is complex, unprecedented and universal. I thought of this scene when I chose the wall backdrop where Judith works in Switzerland, when she meets two of her colleagues: it is not in fact marble, but sprayed concrete.





HOW DID YOU CHOOSE ROMAIN TROUILLET TO COMPOSE THE MUSIC?

It was Martin Caraux, the music supervisor, who suggested him. Romain understood perfectly what I was looking for. I wanted to use instruments and sounds that were not necessarily obvious choices for expressing suspense or emotion, sounds made by tubas, horns, very dry strings, and also false notes. We worked with this in mind... The music he wrote for the car chase "delivers" in terms of suspense but without ever losing its underlying emotion. It's a beautiful balancing act for a scene of pure action.

WHY THE NAME, *MADELEINE COLLINS*?

I don't know. There's something romantic and timeless about the name, it could be the title of a 19th century English novel. Once again, to be a novelist is to lie and make up stories, perhaps I subconsciously wanted to emphasise that.

DOES THIS FILM CORRESPOND WITH YOUR DESIRE TO INTRODUCE YOUR FILM-MAKING TO A WIDER AUDIENCE?

I don't ask myself that question. It so happens that my films have been made in a certain order, but equally I could have started with *Madeleine Collins*, then gone on to make *Le Dos Rouge*. I also wrote a mainstream animated film a few years ago. People think I just did it for the money, but I really enjoyed making it. My idol is Barbet Schroeder. I love the eclectic nature of his career, his unrelenting curiosity, and the way he can put his heart and soul into a thriller starring Sandra Bullock as much as he is willing to put his career in danger by making a film about Amin Dada, or filming the story of his mother in Ibiza. He treats everything with the same commitment and enthusiasm.

Like him, I love film stars. Because a star comes with his or her own "past", his or her celluloid presence, his or her aura to manipulate the viewer, to soften or to agitate. And then sometimes, we don't believe in them. And I love that: I think that cinema has nothing to do with belief. I never believed that Greta Garbo was the Queen of Sweden: what I love is watching Greta Garbo pretending to be the Queen of Sweden. I enjoy the game, the lie, the artifice, the poetry, not the faith or piety or realism. In *Madeleine Collins*, Judith's persona is almost that of an actress, and we find ourselves in a landscape of double play that amuses me a lot.



INTERVIEW WITH VIRGINIE EFIRA

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE *MADELEINE COLLINS'* SCRIPT?

It's quite rare to be sent such a brilliantly written script, which contains something so tailor-made to a cinema genre: in an almost mathematical way, each scene adds a new piece to a mysterious personality whose complex nature gradually builds up, but whose elements don't necessarily seem to fit together. So, there was this thriller-like plot and then, on top of this, a line of questioning that runs all the way through the narrative: what is a person's true self? Is it only made up of the story of your life? How does one be oneself, etc.? One of my favourite films of recent years is David Fincher's *Gone Girl*: a thrilling plot, which reveals a broader and transgressive analysis of intimacy and the social representation of the couple. French cinema is sometimes cautious in its relationship with genre films, and this was perhaps the first script I received that tackled this head on.

DID YOU FIND THAT THE ROLE YOU WERE ASKED TO PLAY IN THIS FILM WAS A ROLE THAT YOU'D NEVER PLAYED BEFORE?

If something interests you, it's usually because it allows you to experiment with something new, or because it seems intriguing. But I also feel that all the characters I've played could get along with each other: the heroine of *Madeleine Collins'* has something in common with Sibyl. It's all subconscious though: you don't really think about characters that you have or haven't played before. Saying that, with this character I identified a theme that interests me: a multiple identity from which outer layers are gradually peeled away, and a character emerges who no longer knows exactly what she has left to offer, in what is a progressive paring back. Up until now, I've often played the opposite: women who break down, and then get back up and are stronger for it. Judith, however, starts off as a strong person and then gradually has the support she relies on taken away. She then has to find a new way of being Judith.

HOW DOES ONE PREPARE FOR A CHARACTER LIKE JUDITH?

I didn't want Judith to appear to be different or mysterious right from the outset. There is a form of intoxication surrounding her. An aesthetic and emotional intoxication, linked to the story she tells about herself: she has succeeded in hiding a secret, she can be proud of that, it's not what women do every day. At the beginning, there is a certain nonchalance about her. She has a loving relationship on the one side, and a loving relationship on the other, and she doesn't falter - yet. She takes the train, and works on the train, "*Oh sorry, was I talking too loud?*" And then, as events unfold, a vulnerability emerges. I had to conjure this all out of nowhere.

In a role like this, you also have to accept to be a bit out of your depth, so as to be totally open to ideas on set. Certain pieces of music became my signature style: there was a track by Daft Punk - I've forgotten the name - which gave the character energy, and forward momentum, like someone who could smash through walls. On a much grander scale, I remember listening to the Bernard Herrmann's soundtrack for the film *Vertigo*. I didn't listen to these pieces of music on set, I'm not the type of person to set myself apart when filming. I would arrive on set with all of this in my head: the pieces of music, memories of films, faces, emotions, forgotten thoughts. Then, it was just a case of trying to be open on set to whatever came my way, and open to my acting partners. You absorb something that you're not entirely sure what it is, and which doesn't come out exactly as you expected.

DID YOU TRY TO QUESTION WHAT WAS BEHIND JUDITH'S BEHAVIOUR? AN EMOTIONAL DEFICIENCY? A FORM OF MADNESS?

We see the relationship she has with her mother. Her mother isn't exactly very approving nor loving, she comes out with some quite nasty things when she speaks to Judith! Maybe Judith didn't have a happy childhood. In the illicit and transgressive relationship that Judith has with Abdel, there is also this idea of something that is growing, a secret that gets bigger and bigger and which makes her unable to bear her mother any longer. She never makes a big leap, but a series of small steps away, which lead to another and another, etc. They never speak about her relationship with Abdel being forbidden. They put it off until later, a very gradual shift gives a form of legitimacy to this relationship.





A psychiatrist would probably have things to say about Judith, and maybe even prescribe her treatment, but when I work on a character, I can't just look at them clinically. What interests me is imagining the character beyond just the story: how you broaden the path of your daily existence, how you avoid being limited by the confines of your life, the life of someone who has probably always been the perfect wife. Can you only be one person with one name, and does that name have to conform to how people have always seen you?

DO YOU FEEL SORRY FOR JUDITH? DO YOU ADMIRE HER?

You can feel both at the same time, right? But when I was playing her, I was inside her, so the answer is neither! And without making her out to be some great Machiavellian villain, she's someone who doesn't do too badly in managing her affairs, and whose actions give her some sense of empowerment.

JUDITH IS ALWAYS ON THE GO. DID YOU BASE YOUR PERFORMANCE ON THIS ENERGY AND DRIVE?

Yes, she's someone who is always in a hurry. She moves, there's always somewhere else to be. So she's pragmatic, she packs her suitcase, then she unpacks it when she arrives, she makes her sandwiches while she talks, and of course all this gives life to a scene. There is also a basic female element of always multi-tasking: someone who looks after a home - in fact two homes! - and who works at the same time; at one point, it's not surprising that she can no longer translate her texts! Her hyperactivity is also a mask, she can't face herself: the moment she sits still and is asked to look at herself, everything becomes blurred, like someone in a lake struggling to reach the shore.

WERE THERE SCENES THAT WERE MORE DIFFICULT THAN OTHERS TO ACT?

I had excellent acting partners who played my two spouses, as well as the young actor who plays Judith's elder son, he was amazing. Working together, there was something different going on with each actor. Antoine Barraud left us very free with this, he's a keen spectator and likes to wait and see what actors bring to a scene. He never outlines how he wants you to get from A to B. Some directors do. So, since there is no exact point B, even if you know what the scene is about, the way to get there was slightly different with each take. He allowed us the freedom of jumping into the unknown, and if your subconscious did things right or wrong, it didn't matter. Sometimes you have to let go of the idea of doing the right thing... The most demanding time for me was that in the scenes that required my anger and violence. I put a so much into these scenes when I played them, as if my life depended on it. A bit like how a teenager would react, and my body suffered. I should probably calm down a bit.

JUDITH IS EXACTLY WHAT ABDEL AND MELVIL WANT HER TO BE. IS THE JOURNEY SHE TAKES A JOURNEY OF EMANCIPATION, LIBERATION?

Perhaps, but in Judith's own creation of multiple personalities there's already a notion of freedom. Responding to multiple expectations always comes down to the same basic belief: I give what is expected of me. Perhaps she is mistaken about what is expected of her... In any case, when I was working on the character, I saw in her a notion of devotion: even if Judith lies, she is always totally present in the moment, and is genuinely concerned about others, whether it be for her husbands or her children.

ANTOINE BARRAUD SUGGESTS THAT JUDITH IS LIKE AN ACTRESS AS ACTING IS A LIE...

That reminds me of something Cocteau once said: "*The poet is a liar who always speaks the truth.*"

CAST & CREW

Judith Fauvet
Melvil Fauvet
Abdel Soriano
Ninon Soriano
Patty
Madeleine Reynal
Kurt
Joris Fauvet
Francis
Christine
Margot

VIRGINIE EFIRA
BRUNO SALOMONE
QUIM GUTIERREZ
LOÏSE BENGUEREL
JACQUELINE BISSET
VALÉRIE DONZELLI
NADAV LAPID
THOMAS GIORIA
FRANÇOIS ROSTAIN
NATHALIE BOUTEFU
MONA WALRAVENS

Director
Screenplay & Dialogue
In collaboration with
Original soundtrack
Executive producer
Co-producers

ANTOINE BARRAUD
ANTOINE BARRAUD
HÉLÉNA KLOTZ
ROMAIN TROUILLET
JUSTIN TAURAND
JEAN-YVES ROUBIN
CASSANDRE WARNAUTS
JOËLLE BERTOSSA
FLAVIA ZANON
PHILIPPE LOGIE
ARLETTE ZYLBERBERG
MATTIEU BLANCHARD
GORDON SPOONER
JÜRG LEMPEN
BENJAMIN BENOIT
EMMANUEL DE BOISSIEU

1st assistant director
Cinematographer
Sound

ANITA ROTH
KATIA WYSZKOP
CLAIRE DUBIEN
MARION COSTE
SARAH TEPPER
STÉPHANE BATUT

Editor
Production designer
Costumes
Script supervisor
Casting

BEATRIZ COUTROT
CÉCILE REMY-BOUTANG
ANNICK AUCANTE
ANTEZ GRACZYK

Children's casting
Production director
Production manager

EMILIE GUERET
MOISÉS MENDOZA
AMÉLIE BOUILLY
MATHIEU GUÉRAÇAGUE
NICOLAS BASSETO
ANNE-SOPHIE HENRY-CAVILLON
MARTIN CARAUX

Electrical Dept.
Camera and Electr. Dept.
Make-up artist
Hair
Post-production director

Music supervisor





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