

Agat Films & Cie presents

Adolescentes

A film by Sébastien Lifshitz



Festival del film Locarno
Official selection



Emma and Anaïs are best friends and yet everything in their life seems to oppose them, their social background but also their personality. From the age of 13 to 18, *Adolescentes* follows the two teenagers during these years where radical transformations and first times punctuate daily life. Through their personal stories, the film offers a rare portrayal of France and its recent history.

synopsis



Where did the idea of making *Adolescentes* come from?

After the adventure of *The Invisibles*, I wanted to make something different from hyperlink cinema by focusing on one person and covering a span of several years. Recording the passing of time and the transformations it makes on the life of a person. Just like many filmmakers, I was always fascinated by the period of adolescence. One just needs to watch two of my films, *Presque Rien* or *Les Corps Ouverts* in which I foccused on two vulnerable boys in their coming of age. Adolescence is the age of change, a sort of molting, the shedding of one's cocoon. I found the idea of witnessing this change very exciting. And I knew that in filming over a relatively long period of time I would also witness the shocks and changes in French society that would leave its mark on this new generation.

How did you choose Emma and Anaïs?

Before making any choices, I first had to find the ideal city. I didn't want to film the suburbs area, where a plethora of television films on the subject of adolescence already existed. I was looking for a medium-size city where social inequalities were not too pronounced, a neutral terrain, so to speak. I quickly settled on Brive-la-Gaillarde, a city of 50,000 inhabitants in the southwest region of France, where children from the surrounding rural areas attend middle school and high school, a city brimming with youth in consequence.

I naturally focussed on a boy for the casting, thinking that a girl would not be at ease being filmed by a man. But the directors of all the middle and high schools in Brive told me the same thing: "You should choose a girl because

interview
WITH SÉBASTIEN LIFSHITZ



they're more interesting at that age and because they have changed considerably. A boy of today is practically the same as a boy of 20 years ago, whereas girls have made giant steps in independence and self-assertion." I followed their advice, set up a casting for both boys and girls and met Emma and Anaïs. Many adolescents came to try out, but these two had something more. The problem was I couldn't choose between them. They were so different, everything opposed them. Then I discovered that they attended the same middle school and that they were best friends. It was obvious that I had to film them both, film their friendship over the test of time.

How did the shooting go?

It was a new experience for me, very powerful, because I filmed without stopping for more than five years, one shooting session each month. I had access to everything: the school, the classroom, life at home, their time spent with their boys and girls friend. At the end of five years, I had 500 hours of rushes. The writing and directing of the film changed, of course, over a period this long. In the beginning we were terrorized at the thought of moving the camera, whatever the situation. We wanted to be as discreet as possible. We kept our distance, often

recording in one long take. We didn't know each other very well yet. But with time, a bond was created with the girls who quickly became used to the camera. And we loosened up too, and started to move about during the various situations we were filming. Our goal was to be close to them. The focal lengths thus became longer and instead of bothering them, the camera's presence amused them. It was so surprising to see how quickly Emma and Anaïs were able to account for the restrictions inherent in a shoot of this type. We really had the feeling at times that they had completely forgotten us, and at others that they were actually using the camera to engage us as witnesses.

The film is at once the story of Emma and Anaïs and also that of France's recent History. How did you approach the difficult times of the terrorist attacks?

The years of the attacks were tough years. We were all traumatized; the entire film crew lived in Paris. But the shock was just as strong in Brive. The adolescents were stunned, they couldn't understand how so young kamikazes could commit such acts. The television went on and on commenting these events without ever really allowing any young people to speak. But the ongoing shoot provided an exceptional opportunity for listening

to their testimonies, allowing them to express their fears and ask their questions. The attacks have left their mark on this generation. They will be the children of January 7th and November 13th, of the massacre of July 14th in Nice, and also that of Macron and the gilets jaunes. I tried to show what they understood of the world in general, and of politics. But their daily lives and occupations were so completely apart from these considerations. These youth are in general highly protected. Their parents are afraid for them and the media play their part in feeding this anxiety. The adolescents are not prepared to understand such violence, which very certainly creates tenacious anxiety in regard to the future. Not to mention global warming, unemployment, the financial crises. They know that what's waiting for them is no picnic. They don't have the right to be carefree.

Has everyone seen the film?

Emma and Anaïs saw it not long ago. They have been very patient because I spent a year in the editing room with film editor Tina Baz. The first rough cut was 12 hours long! It took months to little by little shorten the film to 2 hours. When the girls saw the film, they laughed a lot at first and then became very focussed, especially during the most intimate moments where they are the

most exposed. I think that Anaïs was happy to discover that the film mirrors a positive image of her life despite all the stumbling blocks and dramatic incidents that she was forced to confront. Emma's reaction was more mixed because it was hard for her to accept what is a more painful image of her adolescence. She most likely saw herself as being more flamboyant and funny, whereas the film is, I think, much more faithful to how she really was. But it takes time to truly see the narrative as it really is. The film will always be an incredibly powerful experience for me. I loved accompanying Emma and Anaïs over those five years. Having to leave them at the age of their majority broke my heart! When you get right down to it, I think I felt what all fathers feel when their daughters leave home, but the film shoot had to end one day.



After studying art history at the Ecole du Louvre, Sébastien Lifshitz started working in the 90s in the field of contemporary art, either as assistant to Bernard Blistène, the curator of the Centre Georges Pompidou, or as assistant to the photographer and visual artist Suzanne Lafont. In 1994, he turned to filmmaking and shot his first short, *Il faut que je l'aime* (*I must love her*).

In 1995, he made a documentary on the filmmaker Claire Denis (*Claire Denis, the Vagabond*), and in 1998 a medium-length documentary, *Les Corps Ouverts* (*Open Bodies*). Hailed in many international festivals, including Cannes and Clermont-Ferrand, *Les Corps Ouverts* won the Jean Vigo and Kodak Awards for best short film. In 1999, he shot a television film for ARTE, *Les Terres Froides* (*Cold Lands*) for the Gauche-Droite series, which was selected by the Mostra, the Venice International Film Festival.

In 2000, he shot his first feature film, *Presque Rien* (*Come Undone*), and in 2001, *La Traversée* (*The Crossing*), a road movie documentary selected by the Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes film festival. He shot *Wild Side* in 2004. Selected by many international film festivals, the film has been awarded many prizes, including the Teddy Award at the Berlinale. He made *Plein Sud* (*Going South*) in 2008, which was presented at the Berlinale 2010. Then in 2012 he shot *Les Invisibles* (*The Invisibles*), a documentary



film presented as an official selection (not in competition) at the Cannes film festival. The film received the César Award for Best Documentary Film in 2013. That same year, Sébastien Lifshitz finished his documentary film *Bambi*, which was presented at the Berlinale where it won the Teddy Award. The following year, the filmmaker was made Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters). In 2016, he shot *Les Vies de Thérèse* (*The Lives of Thérèse*), which was selected by the Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival where it was awarded the Queer Palm. That same year, Sébastien Lifshitz curated the exhibition *Mauvais Genre, Les travestis à travers un siècle*

de photographies amateurs (*Under Cover, A Secret History of Cross-Dressers*). Based on his collection, the exhibition was shown at the Rencontres d'Arles in 2016, and then in Paris, at the Agnès B Galerie du Jour. Editions Textuel published a book of these photographs on this occasion. In 2018, the exhibition began an international tour commencing at the Photographer's Gallery in London from where it will travel to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Ryerson Gallery in Toronto in 2020. In parallel, the German publisher, Gerhard Steidl, published a boxed set of four books entitled *Amateur*, consisting of the filmmaker's collection of amateur photographs. In 2019, on the occasion of the showing of his new film, *Adolescentes*, the Centre Pompidou will organize a retrospective of his films accompanied by an exhibition.

biography

filmography

- 2019 ADOLESCENTES Documentary
- 2016 LES VIES DE THERESE Documentary
- 2013 BAMBI Documentary
- 2012 LES INVISIBLES Documentary
- 2009 PLEIN SUD
- 2008 JOUR ET NUIT Short Film
- 2006 LES TEMOINS Documentary
- 2004 WILD SIDE
- 2001 LA TRAVERSEE Documentary
- 2000 PRESQUE RIEN
- 1999 LES TERRES FROIDES TV Film
- 1998 LES CORPS OUVERTS Short Film
- 1995 CLAIRE DENIS LA VAGABONDE Documentary
- 1995 IL FAUT QUE JE L'AIME Short Film

bibliography

- 2019 L'INVENTAIRE INFINI Editions Xavier Barral
- 2016 AMATEUR Editions Steidl
- 2016 MAUVAIS GENRE Editions Textuel
- 2014 THE INVISIBLES Editions Rizzoli
- 2013 LES INVISIBLES Editions Hoebeke
- 1999 LES TERRES FROIDES Editions 00h00

exhibitions

- 2020 MAUVAIS GENRE Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
- 2019 L'INVENTAIRE INFINI Centre Pompidou, Paris
- 2018 LES INVISIBLES Quinzaine Photographique, Nantes
- 2018 UNDER COVER Photographers Gallery, Londres
- 2016 MAUVAIS GENRE, LES TRAVESTIS À TRAVERS UN SIÈCLE DE PHOTOGRAPHIES AMATEURS The Rencontres D'Arles
- 2012 NOUVEAU FESTIVAL Centre Pompidou, Paris



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Sound Mixing OLIVIER GOINARD
Editing TINA BAZ
Music TINDERSTICKS

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