

DAISY DAY FILMS AND THE PARTY FILM SALES PRESENT

A dive into the daily life of the sex-workers of the Bois de Boulogne.



LADIES *of the* WOOD

A FILM BY
CLAUS DREXEL

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VISUAL EFFECTS GUILLAUME NOUËT SOUND EFFECTS CHRISTOPHE BOURREAU PRODUCERS FLORENT LAZARÉ AND CÉLINE FARMACHIN A DAISY DAY FILMS PRODUCTION INTERNATIONAL SALES THE PARTY FILM SALES FRENCH DISTRIBUTION NOÛR FILMS

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LADIES *of the* WOOD

A FILM BY
CLAUS DREXEL

90' - FRANCE - 2021

INTERNATIONAL SALES
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the party
FILM SALES



S Y N O P S I S

Bois de Boulogne, Paris. In this green lung bordering the city, between dusk and dawn wandering among joggers and dog walkers, you may come across queer mystical souls. They all share their life story paced by the clients who come and go. Those are the LADIES OF THE WOOD.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

CLAUS DREXEL

DIRECTOR

The Bois de Boulogne

What do we know about the Bois de Boulogne? Nothing, if not its international reputation as a place of prostitution. It's a curiosity, a truly Parisian frivolity much like the Moulin Rouge or the back alleys of Pigalle. It is folklore. But, beyond the stereotype, in the more distant past, far deeper in memory, this place was the stage of countless crimes, births, weddings, battles, dirty tricks, brilliant feats... so many nights in the heart of the woods, so many hung, so much of everything...

The legendary Bois de Boulogne is all but nonexistent – and that is precisely what piques our curiosity. In this piece, we're looking for a legend. It's a choice, an approach, a risk taken by shifting away from the flat, purely psychological, biographical approach, you might say. This choice may seem surprising because, at first glance, you'd probably expect a seedy universe for a film about trans sex-workers and sexuality; but this subject contains elements that resonate uncannily with the basic components of fairytales and legends: forest, family, sexuality, metamorphosis, human duality, shadow and light...

As such, the Bois de Boulogne is one of the film's characters in its own right. We detect the presence of the city surrounding it – but we never step outside of it. Quite the contrary: all of the life that inhabits it – the trees, the flowers, the birds, the insects and mushrooms are woven into the narration. There is a striking parallel between the innocence of the human soul imprisoned by the facts of life, and this island of nature imprisoned in a megalopolis of concrete and steel.

I treated LADIES OF THE WOOD like a poetic investigation, questioning the beings that inhabit these woods. Not approaching the transgenders with the usual questions and reducing them to what we think we know about them, but instead considering them as guides, or guardians of a memory – that is the angle I wanted to take.

I want them to be the actors of an unwritten fiction rather than the extras in a seedy biography that's been sold a hundred times in documentaries where voyeurism competes with sentimentalism.

We therefore took every precaution when approaching these “creatures” of the night who walk through the darkness until morning, always in costume and make-up. We avoided getting caught up in this penchant because we respect the mask they wanted to wear.

Fantasy resides in the cracks of the real, never imposing itself, but always showing up... Jean Ray wrote, “I'm still searching for that back alley outside of time and space...” We've made that profession of faith our own.



The characters

They've gone through life overcoming appearances. Playing with the foregone conclusion of genres, they know the meaning of the word alchemy. In questioning them as one would an oracle, we take the time for our own transformation by awakening to the other and their secret. It's child's play in a way, because it involves momentarily allowing yourself to believe that this world still holds wonders, and that behind the differences we invariably find the same quest, the common desire to dream and to escape a sordid, cold reality. Because this film isn't militant, it doesn't try to extract what we want to hear from these strange butterflies who have no fear of headlights and who were chrysalids at the time when their private empire, that of childhood, was as vast as the forests of Brazil.

It's through fantasy, dreams, and narrative invention that their truth surfaces in the heart of the nights spent in the woods. Taking inspiration from what they know about the place, their fears, their moments of doubt, and their long struggles, they allow themselves to talk.

The crux of my approach is to capture the viewers' interest in order to put them in a listening position where they will be able to feel empathy for the people being filmed. In fact, I'd like them to forget that they're watching people who are sex workers.

This "fictionalization" prior to an interview, this decision to choose the Bois de Boulogne in its dreamlike dimension as a meeting place, is a way of involving people whose life choices have contributed to their dehumanization in the eyes of those who encounter them after dark.

I tried to make this film a fictionalization of reality by starting out with the search for a forgotten legend in order to reach the reality of these beings. The starting point is the act of forgetting, whether it be identity or gender. What matters is the journey through memories, even if they are the fruit of a passionate imagination.

The photography

Photographer Sylvain Leser's talent contributes largely to the film's poetic dimension. He knows just how to create a universe that spontaneously evokes fairytale iconography with contrasting images and saturated colors.

But more than this, Sylvain's art lies in the way he films people: with elegance, dignity and delicacy, and always at a distance that avoids voyeurism and underscores their humanity.

We were careful not to film passersby in the aim to create the illusion that the transgenders sex workers are the only humans inhabiting this forest.

When I make a film, I always aspire to offer spectators a beautiful piece of work. But first and foremost, I hope to introduce them to human beings who are more complex and interesting than the category in which society tries to classify them.



STATEMENT OF INTENT

SYLVAIN LESER

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Since 2009, I've worked to bring attention to urban misery in Paris through my documentaries MERDE IN FRANCE and LES CLOCHES DES MONUMENTS. I photograph people who have been scarred and tormented by life. In 2013, Florent Lacaze and Claus Drexel became interested in my work and asked me to work on the film AU BORD DU MONDE - an experience that provided the voice and movement that were lacking in the testimonials. Claus' gracious, respectful and candid quest was deeply inspiring to me.

When Claus told me about his new project, LADIES OF THE WOOD, I was moved by his desire to continue this work on the subject of marginalization. His desire to incorporate it into a triptych gives our shared work another dimension. I enjoy accompanying him in this mysterious place where the forest hides mankind.

This film echoes a time in my life when I worked as a Master Woodcutter. Returning to the Bois de Boulogne to accompany Claus Drexel's curious eye and going to meet these sex workers is a bold project. I found Claus' decision to treat the film like a fairytale deeply inspiring. The forest is full of interesting stories: a traditional home for fairies, a hideout for bandits, a sanctuary for... The true lungs of the capital, the Bois de Boulogne perpetuates these legendary tales and protects mysterious creatures.



CLAUS DREXEL

Claus Drexel was born in 1968. Originally from Bavaria, he has mostly lived and worked in France. His films have been nominated for the *Prix Louis-Delluc* and the *César for Best Documentary Film*.

Following a less than stellar academic career in the international section marked by repeated school years and expulsions, a stint as the lead singer of a hard rock group that was never produced, and a French champion's title in 2nd division American football, Claus Drexel discovered he had a burning passion for film. With that, he left Grenoble, the city where he grew up, and moved to Paris.

He directed several short films including *LA DIVINE INSPIRATION* (2000), starring Keir Dullea (the lead actor in Stanley Kubrick's 2001 – A SPACE ODYSSEY).

His first feature-length film, *AFFAIRE DE FAMILLE*, starring André Dussolier and Miou-Miou, was released in theaters in 2008. The screenplay, co-written with Claude Scasso, won at the CNC's *Trophées du premier Scénario*.

In 2012, he directed the staging of Bach's *Passion According to Saint Matthew* at the Cirque d'Hiver in Paris, with Didier Sandre in the role of the evangelist.

AU BORD DU MONDE, a documentary about Paris' homeless population, was presented in the ACID selection at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. It won the 2014 *Prix "La Croix"* for best documentary and was later nominated for the *Prix Louis-Delluc*. The *Télérama* editorial staff also selected the documentary in its festival for the top fifteen films of 2014.

In the autumn of 2016, Claus Drexel settled in a small, isolated town in Arizona to film *AMERICA*, a documentary about the American presidential election. Graced with an original soundtrack by Ibrahim Maalouf, the film premiered at the Festival *Télérama* before being distributed in movie theaters by Diaphana. It was nominated for Best Documentary Film at the 2019 *César* awards.

In 2019, Claus Drexel shot *SOUS LES ÉTOILES DE PARIS*, a feature-length film starring Catherine Frot. The film's release was postponed several times due to the Covid-19 crisis, was finally released on October 28, 2020, but only stayed in theaters for two days before the second confinement. The film won three awards at the 35th Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival in the USA (*Best International Film*, *Audience Award*, *Best Actress*) and *Télérama* has ranked it among the "15 best films of 2020".

His latest film, *LADIES OF THE WOOD*, a documentary about mainly transgender prostitution in the Bois de Boulogne, is scheduled for theater release in 2021.



C R E W

Director **Claus Drexel**
Director of photography **Sylvain Leser**
Editor **Anne Souriau**
Original Music **Valentin Hadjadj**
Sound **Nicolas Basselin, Thierry Blandin**
Sound Editor **Sébastien Noiré**
Sound Mixer **Anne-Laure François**
Color Grading **Natacha Louis**
Visual Effects **Guillaume Niquet**
Sound Effects **Christophe Bourreau**
Writing Advisor **Samir Bouadi**
Assistant Cinematographer **Antoine Valay**
Assistant Editor **Cyril Polinacci**

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