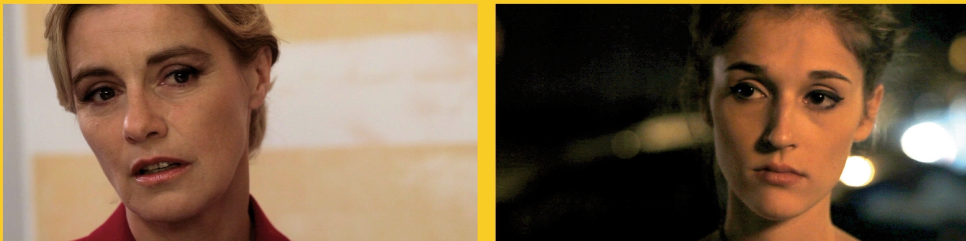




SWIM LITTLE FISH SWIM

A FILM BY LOLA BESSIS & RUBEN AMAR



LES FILMS DE LA FUSEE PRESENTS A FILM BY LOLA BESSIS / RUBEN AMAR FILM BY DUSTIN GUY DEFA / LOLA BESSIS / BROOKE BLOOM / OLIVIA DURLING COSTELLO
ANNE CONSIGNY MUSIC BY BRETT JUTKIEWICZ EDITOR YVETTE GRANATA COSTUME DESIGNER THOMAS MARCHAND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ARNAUD MARTEN PRODUCED BY THE TOYS AND TINY
INSTRUMENTS / CANDACE LEE / PENN SULTAN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LOLA BESSIS / RUBEN AMAR EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY LOLA BESSIS / RUBEN AMAR

A film by Lola Bessis & Ruben Amar

Starring

Dustin Guy Defa, Lola Bessis, Brooke Bloom, Anne Consigny

Rotterdam '14 : European Premiere

SXSW '13 : Competition

GenArt Film Festival '13 : Best Film, Best Actor, Best Direction

Mostra Sao Paulo '13

France/USA, 96 minutes, Image: 1.85, Sound : 5.1

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SYNOPSIS



In a small New York apartment he shares with his wife, Leeward, an unusual and talented musician, composes songs with instruments he makes from his three year old daughter's toys.

Lilas, a young French video maker, drags her suitcase from artists' squats to hip galleries, hoping to break into the selective contemporary art scene.

Their meeting could be the very thing that drives them to make their dreams come true.



INTERVIEW

1/ When did you start working together?

Ruben: We never officially decided to work together, but when I started writing *Checkpoint* – my last short film, which was a commission from a French national institution — Lola instantly came up with a lot of ideas. We started brainstorming and Lola naturally took up writing the script with me.

Lola: Working together on *Swim Little Fish Swim* also happened quite naturally. We had moved to New York, we were both in the middle of developing feature film screenplays, whose production required time and hard work. In parallel, as we were both fascinated by the city, we started making a kind of film diary in the form of short scenes which we called “snippets”. A common desire to capture the energy that surrounded us and make a film out of it quickly emerged: it was the perfect opportunity for us to direct a film together for the first time.

2/ You’re both French. What is it about New York that attracted you as artists?

Lola : We’ve always been very attracted by this city which we knew mainly through the work of powerful independent New York filmmakers including Woody Allen, Jim Jarmusch, John Cassavetes and Spike Lee. This explosive and intense independent cinema has always fascinated us, and I think that we unconsciously associated it with New York. So we wrote screenplays that took place in New York, in order to have a good reason to go to there!

Ruben : So we shot several shorts in New York, separately. We were immediately struck by the city’s energy, the almost magical atmosphere emanating from it and its undeniable cinematographic potential. A few months later, when we met, we decided to move to New York because we thought it would be the perfect place for inspiration and imagination.

3/ What was the inspiration for the story?

Lola : The story was initially very simple, a kind of docu-drama inspired by an autobiographical situation: a girl whose visa is about to expire and who does everything she can to stay. It was supposed to be just the two of us. Ruben would hold the camera and I would interact with real people in a hidden camera scenario.

There was one scene where the character sets up dates with people she meets on a dating website with the intention of proposing a marriage of convenience!

Ruben: It was supposed to be for fun and not lose our touch! But we soon realized that the situation lacked direction so we dropped the project and started to write an actual full-length screenplay. The story of the young French girl remained but we added several characters and plotlines. Some of the elements are drawn from our personal lives; Leeward’s Jewish, Communist family closely resembles my own, for example, but slightly more romantic. Other elements came from our imagination and observations. One night in a bar in Brooklyn, we happened to see this eccentric musician playing on strange machines that looked like they’d come straight out of his imagination. His wife was in the audience. Little by little, we started imagining what their life might be like. Based on elements both seen and observed, our imagination led us to wander toward the creation of a real story.

Lola : The screenplay depicts the intertwined story of three characters, all at turning points in their lives. It deals with the difficulties of achieving personal and artistic fulfillment and the desire to be accepted and recognized for what we are; a theme we feel close to as filmmakers. The main idea was to get these characters to live together in order to observe them closely, using the camera as a microscope. We wanted to create a situation that would favor experimentation. We wanted to observe how their proximity could trigger a synchronized epiphany that would enable the characters to move forward.

4/ You used a very specific acting method – what was the role of the actors in the writing?

Ruben: Striving to avoid giving in to sensationalism, we aimed at depicting a moment in the lives of these lost souls, "captured live". This thirst for realism led us to place the actors at the heart of the creative process. Meeting Dustin Guy Defa – the actor who plays Leeward – was a determining factor in this decision and set the course for what came next. Captivated by the prosody, physicality and personality of this groundbreaking director from the indie scene, we felt we had to exploit this to fullest extent.

Lola : We wanted to include Dustin and the other actors joining this adventure – Brooke Bloom, Anne Consigny – in the creative process so that they might breathe their own essence into the characters rather than have us impose any attitudes, words or intonations that weren't their own. As such, the first draft of our script included a very precise narrative framework but almost no dialogue whatsoever or any direction for acting or movement. Almost all of the dialogues were developed with the actors. We set up a filmed workshop and placed them in very precise situations where they were asked to role-play, reverse roles... I even got involved. It was a real experiment; we had no idea what it might produce.

Ruben: Every evening, we would dive into the rushes shot that day and then build onto the script from there. At a certain point, we became so imbued with the voices and personalities of the actors that we were able to use them to write additional dialogues that hadn't necessarily been rehearsed. This process proved to be very productive and gave way to intense and realistic performances that we'd have never gotten otherwise.

5/ Lola, you also play one of the three main roles. How did you divide the responsibilities when you were on camera?

Lola: All too aware of the fact that co-directing might prove to be a difficult task in and of itself and even more so since a large portion of my time would be spent on camera, an important element of our work was trying our best to foresee any potential problems and resolve them beforehand. Given the tight schedule, I didn't have the luxury of watching my own scenes and so had to place my complete trust in Ruben, especially since it was my first time in front of the camera!

Ruben : Our complicity allowed us to quickly understand one another. If we didn't agree on something, we were able to find common ground where we could agree, thereby joining forces without making concessions. Bolstered by our mutual trust, we decided that it would mainly be Lola who took charge of the scenes in which she didn't act in order to maintain a balance.

6/ The film's aesthetic is both rich and singular. How did you make your directorial choices?

Lola: Once the writing phase was complete, we organized the shoot very quickly so as not to lose any of the energy and spontaneity of the work done with the actors. As such, the directing style soon emerged automatically by itself because we had already developed a natural ease with the way of filming the actors during the Workshop. In line with the energy of the acting and the dialogues, the camera is often moving, following the action of the characters rather than preceding it, and the rhythm is rather quick in a “fly-on-the-wall” style inspired by Cassavetes. But for certain scenes, we also wanted to break it up by developing a slower, almost wandering feel.

Ruben: Our initial wish was to shoot in 16mm, like the independent filmmakers of the 1970s, but in light of our tendency to do multiple takes and the obvious financial constraints, we finally decided on digital.

Nevertheless, we – along with Brett Jutkiewicz, our director of photography – did extensive research with the objective of obtaining a picture quality resembling that of film. To that end, we used special lenses and filters. We were also fortunate to work with Nat Jencks, Michel Gondry and Steven Soderbergh's preferred colorist, who helped us further enhance the image and colors to obtain the acidulous and aged palette we were going for.

Lola: We wanted to create a universe in which the viewers could project themselves and escape, realistic with a dash of surrealism and fantasy. We therefore gave particular attention to the costumes and décor that are somewhat timeless and childlike, like in dreams. In the same vein, we were very demanding when it came to the characters' respective artistic universes: Lilas' projects – sort of introspective, fantasy sequences captured on a Super8 camera possessing almost magical powers – and the songs composed by Leeward, a wild musician and mad inventor who makes bizarre instruments from various bits and pieces as well as his daughter's toys. We carefully selected very gifted young artists to create these.

7/ On the subject of music, how was your collaboration with the film's musician born? Did their music influence the tone of the film?

Ruben : During a casting call for musician extras to be used in a scene involving an evening with friends, a group walked in whose name stopped us in our tracks: The Toys and Tiny Instruments. Our character makes instruments that play by themselves using his daughter's toys, so it had to be a sign! When they started to sing and strum on a ukulele, it was obvious; they couldn't just play Leeward's musician friends – they had to write the music! They managed to create the character's musical universe in perfect harmony with his marginal, madcap personality. Incidentally, Colin Summer, the group's singer, has become Leeward's official “voice”.

Lola : And Candace Lee, a young singer not yet 16 years old, came to us like a miracle! A musician who was supposed to act in the bar concert scene backed out the day before the shoot; without much hope, we put up an urgent listing on a casting website to replace her. There, among hundreds of insignificant applications, was Candace! We let out a cry of joy that woke up all the neighbors! Candace plays two of her songs during the concert scene. One year later, during post-production, she sent us her latest material. And another miracle occurred.

When “Jack and Avery” came out over the speakers, we had chills; that would be our film's closing song.

8/ Right now, there is a bona fide independent film community present in New York – do you consider yourselves a part of it?

Lola: We were fortunate in New York to be welcomed by this young, talented, kind of contemporary “New Wave” film family. We met its main protagonists while attending film festivals to promote *Checkpoint* and going to small art houses. The spontaneity of their filmmaking that takes full advantage of the revolution in filming technique seduced us immediately.

Ruben: This “community” has influenced us heavily. It was in discovering films like the ones made by the Safdie brothers (*Lenny and the Kids*) or Lena Dunham (*Tiny Furniture, Girls*) that we decided to join in the adventure!

9/ Is there a similar phenomenon occurring in French cinema?

Lola : This independent scene is particular to New York! Something similar has been up and coming in France recently; I’m talking about *Donoma, Rengaine*, the films of Sophie Letourneur or Guillaume Brac. But there isn’t yet this notion of community, of mutual support.

Ruben: Making films in these kinds of conditions is more complicated in France. The public aid system dedicated to culture and film is one of the most developed in the world, but directors are obliged to enter certain processes in order to benefit from it. That can take a long time and, as such, you lose spontaneity.



THE DIRECTORS

LOLA BESSIS and **RUBEN AMAR** are French filmmakers living between NYC and Paris. They form a couple in real life as well as behind the camera.

Their short films have been screened and acclaimed at more than 150 international film festivals.

Swim Little Fish Swim is their feature film debut. Lola Bessis, who was 21 years old at the time of filming, also makes her first appearance as Lilas.

Swim Little Fish Swim premiered at SXSW'13 and will screen at other prestigious festivals such as Rotterdam'14 and the Sao Paulo Mostra'13. It will be released in France in the spring 2014.

Ruben and Lola are now developing several feature screenplays.

RUBEN AMAR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2013 – *Swim Little Fish Swim* – 95mn
2012 – *Don't let the sun blast your shadow* – 7mn
2011 – *Checkpoint* – 20mn
2010 – *A girl like you with a boy like me* – 10mn
2007 – *L'absente* – 15mn
2006 – *Des mots silencieux* – 13mn
2006 – *Objet Perdu(e)* – 6mn

LOLA BESSIS' FILMOGRAPHY

2013 – *Swim Little Fish Swim* – 95mn
2011 – *Checkpoint* – 20mn
2011 – *Just a romantic afternoon* - 10mn
2011 – *Paper boat* - 5mn
2010 – *A Face in Black and White* – 3mn
2010 – *Time Remains Time* – 3mn
2010 – *Chased* – 3mn
2010 – *Chinatown Portrait* – 3mn





CAST

DUSTIN GUY DEFA / LEEWARD



Dustin is a talented American director and actor. Defa's feature film *Bad Fever* premiered at SXSW '11 and his short film *Family Nightmare* played at Sundance '12 and SXSW '12. As an actor, Dustin has recently appeared in Alex Karpovsky's *Red Flag*. The role of Leeward – a fringe musician – is his first leading role.

LOLA BESSIS / LILAS



Lola is a French screenwriter, director, producer and actress. She co-directed *Swim Little Fish Swim* and stars in it as Lilas, a Young French artist. She has directed several narrative and experimental short films. Only aged of 21, *Swim Little Fish Swim* is her acting début.

ANNE CONSIGNY / FRANCOISE



Anne Consigny is a French film actress who has worked with many renowned filmmakers, including Julian Schnabel (*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*); Arnaud Desplechin (*A Christmas Tale*); Alain Resnais (*You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet!*); Manoel de Oliveira (*The Satin Slipper*); Stéphane Brizé (*Not Here to Be Loved*) among others. She received three César Awards nominations for Best Actress. She plays Françoise, a world-famous French painter.

BROOKE BLOOM / MARY



Brooke has appeared in over 25 television shows, including a recurring role on "CSI:Miami". Her film credits include *He's Just Not That Into You*; Oscar nominated *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Berlin '12); *Ceremony* (TIFF '12) and the independent gem *Gabi on the Roof in July*. She's also appeared in numerous theater productions that brought her several awards. She plays Mary, a hardworking nurse.



CREW

BRETT JUTKIEWITZ

Director of photography

Brett is a New York-based director of photography who has worked on the Safdie Brothers' movies *The Pleasure of Being Robbed* (Cannes '08) and *Daddy Longlegs* (Cannes '09; Sundance '10). His other cinematography work includes Lena Dunham's *Creative Non Fiction* (SXSW '09), Matt Creed's *Lily* (Tribeca '13 ; Deauville '13) ; over a dozen short films, music videos, and commercials.

NAT JENCKS

Colorist – VFX artist

Nat is a Colorist and VFX artist based in New York City. For the past 10 years he has worked with a number of prominent directors including Steven Soderbergh, Michel Gondry, Spike Jonze and Todd Haynes.

THOMAS MARCHAND

Editor

Thomas is a film editor based in Paris. He began his career as an assistant to renowned editor Yann Dedet, who worked on the films of François Truffaut and Maurice Pialat. His recent work includes Katell Quillévéré's *Love Like Poison* (Berlin'12; Rotterdam '11; BFI '10 ; Cannes '10 - Jean Vigo Award) ; Bertrand Schefer's *Iris in Bloom* (Cannes '11); Olivier Babinet's *Robert Mitchum is Dead* (Cannes '10) among other great movies.

YVETTE GRANATA

Production designer

Yvette is a New York-based production designer. The first feature film that she designed, *Northeast*, premiered at the Tribeca film festival in 2011. Her feature film credits also include Sean Durkin's *Martha Marcy May Marlene* (Cannes '11; Sundance '11— Best director; Spirit Awards '11); *Please Give* (Sundance '10; Berlin '10) and *Newlyweeds* (Sundance '13). She recently led the art direction for the New York scenes in the forthcoming *The Art of Losing* by Academy Award nominated director Bruno Barreto.



ART AND MUSIC

THE TOYS AND TINY INSTRUMENTS

Original music

Toys and Tiny Instruments is a Brooklyn-based psych-pop band formed in late 2009 by Colin Summers and Alec. Toys specialize in rhythmically complex and whimsical sounds and they've performed at a number of New York venues. They define their music as "a world of narrators, crickets, Mikhail Gorbachev, love and paranoia". Toys wrote and performed poetic and crazy music for *Swim Little Fish Swim*, in which they also appear as musicians.

PENN SULTAN

Original music

Last Good Tooth frontman **Penn Sultan** lives is a singer-songwriter from Providence. His country-folk inspiration comes from the Appalachian mountains where his grandparents live mixed with his love and hate of New York City. When he is not composing or performing music, he is making woodcuts and drawings.

CANDACE LEE

Original music

Candace Lee is a 17 year-old folk and soul singer-songwriter from Queens. Her songs are full of peps and poetry. When she was 15, she applied on craigslist for a small part in *Swim Little Fish Swim* as an open-mic singer. In addition to playing that part, she ended up writing, composing and performing three of her original songs in *Swim Little Fish*. Candace's debut album is set for release in 2013.

NATHAN PUNWAR

Experimental artist

Nathan is a writer, director and visual artist residing in Brooklyn. His 2011 experimental short film, *Prologue to a Cyclops*, screened at the Sarasota film festival. Nathan recently completed his third short film, *Loves of a Cyclops*, an expansion of his *Prologue to a Cyclops*.