

FLANDERS

A film by Bruno Dumont



Released in the UK by Soda Pictures

Winner of the Grand Prix, Cannes International Film Festival 2006

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SYNOPSIS

The film tells the story of a group of young men, including local farmer Demester who go to fight in an unnamed war with brutal consequences. Juxtaposing rural images of their home village against the often savage and unrelenting landscape of war, the film charts familiar Dumont territory by offering a unique vision against a backdrop of an unconventional love story between Demester and his fragile sometime girlfriend Barbe.

LONGER SYNOPSIS

By Jonathan Romney for London Film Festival

One of the most controversial figures in current French cinema, Bruno Dumont made a dazzling debut with his 1997 film *The Life of Jesus* (which won the Sutherland Trophy at that year's Festival) and divided audiences with his metaphysically charged *Humanity*. Following his American road nightmare *Twentynine Palms*, *Flanders* goes back to his roots: it's at once a return to the introspective register of *Jesus...* and, like it, a contemplation of his home territory. The characters are a group of young men and women from the Northern French countryside, including farmer Demester (Boidin) and his none-too-exclusive girlfriend Barbe (Leroux). One day, Demester and his comrades are conscripted into a war out east, where they brutalise, and are brutalised. Not every viewer will find it easy to subscribe to Dumont's picture of a bestial humanity, toiling and rutting in harsh proximity with the earth. But the film's economical style makes its extremity all the more trenchant, its war sequences suggesting a Samuel Fuller-like concision. With its gestures at Iraq and North Africa underpinned by allusions to the local scars of World War One, *Flanders* is a savage, confrontational work.

BRUNO DUMONT TALKS ABOUT FLANDERS

SUBJECT Explaining the process that sets a film in motion remains a mystery. For "Twentynine Palms ", it was a sensation. The very furtive character of the police inspector in "Life of Jesus" made me want to do "Humanity". If I'm asked: Why? How? I can't answer. What is important for me is describing a story with images and sounds. The director's job is like a painter's. Matisse wrote that what matters in a painting is not the subject, but the way things are placed around the subject, their proportion. Flanders, for example, is a mystery to me. I was born there. My relation to it is visceral, sensitive, in other words, not guided by reason. The camera becomes a microscope or a lens held over the subject... I need the land to film human beings. In being filmed, Flanders renders an aspect of human existence. I need a story because stories are the natural movement of our lives, in which we connect with others. Making the film is like weaving. The "Flanders" war is the expression of the struggle of our desires.

LANDSCAPES When you film a landscape, it represents the character's interior climate. I do not film "Flanders", I film what the character has inside. When you have a subjective shot of Demester looking at the landscape in front of his farm, we are inside Demester. I do not film landscapes like a documentary maker. I do not make social films. Everything is mental and internal. When I made "Life of Jesus", I emptied the streets and the town of Bailleul. I took out the people and the cars to attain a sort of abstraction. I need to eliminate. I spend my time taking away but I don't add anything.

CHARACTERS My characters never contemplate what they are doing. They do, they act, they never think about who they are. When I film a face, I want the viewer to feel what the character is experiencing. Nothing is expressed in words. The face is expression. The camera becomes a probe. On the screen, there is a sort of alchemy between the viewer and the hero. The viewer is directly connected to his brain and his raw emotions. When my characters speak, they only say what is necessary. At the risk of exaggerating, when an actor says, "Okay, I'm leaving", it is useful. If he left without saying goodbye, it wouldn't be polite.

NON-PROFESSIONAL ACTORS Non-professional actors are actors, not performers. They give what they are in the heat of the action. Initially, I choose them because they correspond to the characters as they are written. Then my job is to reach the inner truth specific to each person. They do not read the screenplay. They act in retaining part of themselves, the truth that belongs to them and that I want access to. They are unpredictable. I adjust to them. They adjust to me. Together, we give up or keep going. For the role of Barbe, Adélaïde's photogenic nature imposes itself immediately. I got rid of the Barbe of the screenplay and I 'initiated' myself into Adélaïde's sensibility to make it fit the action. But Adélaïde is not Barbe. The actors are at the heart of the film. I carry them and complete the story depending on what they give.

SEX I'm criticized for the crudeness of the sex scenes. But sex does not interest me in itself. I am very modest, not at all perverse. If I film sexuality, it is because I see it as an expression. When I see bodies like that, exposed, I find it tragic. It is the blend of a sort of infinite love and the impossibility of two people becoming one. They are powerless to penetrate the other. Love is uniting but we cannot unite. There is something tragic in sex that reveals our immense solitude.

TECHNIQUE I'm more interested in the tonal values of the shots than in where I put the camera. What counts is the continuity, because continuity is pacing. Images can make rhythm. And the camera position is secondary to rhythm. I often discover possibilities when editing. When I prepare my film, I am not aware of the different stages. Everything comes together during editing. When I'm shooting and editing, I work at getting back the sentiment, at breaking down the screenplay, which remains purely theoretical.

REALITY AND THE VIEWER I do not want to build. I destroy and deform. In this deformation, expression occurs. If I did not deform, the viewer would see reality as it is but this reality wouldn't teach him anything. The filmmaker has to twist reality to deform it; when you twist it, the viewer is squeezed and challenged. I try to keep what could be called an element of reality, an appearance: the naturalism of the sets, the sounds and the actors, but everything else is fake, which gives a sense of something incongruous.

DOUBTS When I make a film, something happens that is completely beyond my control. I make it and that's all. Maybe that's why I am curious about viewers' reactions. Some tell me about things they saw that I hadn't seen. I love that. People say to me, you film

people from above. Filming from above is telling people things, imposing a vision or a story or an end on the viewer and giving him archetypes. I do my job as a filmmaker. The viewer does his job as a viewer. It is a balance. We are equal.

FILMOGRAPHY

“LIFE OF JESUS”

- Gan Foundation Prize, 1996
- Jean Vigo Prize, 1997
- Special Mention Caméra d'Or, Cannes Film Festival, 1997
- César nomination for best first work of fiction, 1998
- European Discovery of the Year, Fassbinder Prize, European Film Awards, 1997
- Critics' Prize FIPRESCI, Chicago Film Festival, 1997
- Best male actor for D. Douche, Taormina Festival 1997
- Michel Simon Prize for M. Cottreel, “Acteurs à l'Ecran” Festival, 1998

“HUMANITY”

- Grand Jury Prize, Cannes Film Festival, 1999
- Best male actor, Cannes Film Festival, 1999
- Best female actress, Cannes Film Festival, 1999

“ TWENTYNINE PALMS”

- Official selection, Venice Film Festival, 2003

CAST & CREW

Adelaïde LEROUX
Samuel BOIDIN
Jean-Marie BRUVEART
David POULAIN
Patrice VENANT
David LEGAY
Inge DECAESTEKER

Barbe
Blondel
Briche
Leclercq
Mordac
Lieutenant
France R

Director
Screenplay
Executive Producers
Production Manager
Line Producer
Line Producer Tunisia
Director of photography
Sound engineer
Editor
Sound mixer
Sound editor
Casting
Make-up
Costumes
Digital special effects
Production France

Bruno DUMONT
Bruno DUMONT
Jean BREHAT & Rachid BOUCHAREB
Muriel MERLIN
Michèle GRIMAUD
Abdellaziz Ben MLOUKA (CTV)
Yves CAPE AFC
Philippe LECOEUR
Guy LECORNE
Emmanuel CROZET
Pierre CHOUKROUN
Claude DEBONNET
Nathalie RIGAUT
Cédric GRENAPIN & Alexandra CHARLES
EXCALIBUR
3B PRODUCTIONS

Coproduction

ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA
CRRAV NORD PAS DE CALAIS
LE FRESNOY, Studio National des Arts Contemporains

Avec les soutiens du CNCTechnologies numériques et effets spéciaux réalisés
avec le Soutien du CNC(Digital technology and special effects)

Avec la participation de CINECINEMAS CONTACT FILMS (Pays Bas)

En association avec COFINOVA 2 SOFICINEMA