



Drôles d'oiseaux

Strange Birds

Elise Girard

Producer Janja Kralj, Marc Simoncini. **Production companies** KinoElektron (Paris, France), Reborn Production (Paris, France).

Director Elise Girard. **Screenplay** Elise Girard, Anne-Louise Trivodic. **Director of photography** Renato Berta. **Editor** Thomas Glaser. **Music** Bertrand Burgalat. **Sound design** Olivier Dandre, Johan Nallet. **Sound** Emmanuelle Villard. **Production design** Caroline Leroy.

With Lolita Chammah (Mavie), Jean Sorel (Georges), Virginie Ledoyen (Felicia), Pascal Cervo (Roman).

Colour. 70 min. French.

Premiere October 7, 2016 Festival International du Film de Saint-Jean-de-Lutz

World sales MPM Film

Mavie is 27 years old and has just moved to the French capital from the provinces. She dreams of a future as a writer but is plagued by doubt and uncertainty. 76-year-old misanthrope Georges runs a bookshop in Paris – or has he merely been forced to take refuge there to escape his past? These are two peculiar creatures indeed. Georges is cynical and no longer expects much from life, while Mavie is still brimming with expectation. Yet something magical happens between them, until Georges' dark secret suddenly catches up with him – and Mavie is caught up in something very different...

Director Elise Girard succeeds in making a dreamlike film full of surprising absurdities. It's not just love that appears out of the blue for the two protagonists, but also some quite literal strange birds. Girard depicts love beyond the barriers of age in a way that is both unexpected and moving, romantic instead of physical, timeless instead of fashionable. The film reminds us of the multifaceted nature of love as well as how fleeting it can be, existing not yesterday or tomorrow but above all in the present.

Ansgar Vogt

Far from this world

When I started working as a press officer for Action cinémas, my bosses were 35 years older than me. My friends were saying how hell it must be to work with two old men. I didn't understand what they meant as I have always thought that age did not matter in getting along with someone. I wanted to talk about this, two persons who get along in spite of their age difference.

I also wanted to talk about something which fascinates me: people who change life, who disappear. I imagined a young woman who falls for a man with an obscure past. Thus adding some romanticism to an impossible love story.

Finally, the background idea of the film was to talk about growing into adulthood, the moment where we make the choice of what our life will be. Mavie is incredibly lonely. Georges "allows" her to be who she is and gives her the possibility of growing. He understands her, and it is the first time that she encounters someone who does.

The title

As we were about to shoot the first scene, I saw Lolita Chammah lift her leg up and scratch her knee, she instantly made me think of a bird. I thought then that the characters of the film were odd birds, in French: *Drôles d'oiseaux*, an expression which designates strange or original people. This was also reminiscent to me of classic American comedies such as Stanley Donen's *Funny Face*.

Mavie, the provincial

I generally enjoy in films when a character appears and the audience does not know instantly who he is and where he comes from but discovers it gradually. Mavie is a provincial; she isn't at all in the same state of mind than Parisians in their hometown. She knows nothing of the capital. The people, the environment, everything seems strange and surprising. She doesn't have the tools to apprehend the city. Without falling in a caricature, I wanted her to be quirky, to be different from girls today, neither in her clothes or her way of expressing herself.

She has something of the XIXth century. She reads constantly and will become a writer even if she ignores it at the beginning of the story. There is something romantic about her. It is that trait of personality that allows the love story with Georges. I wanted the intimate part of her, her secretive side, to appear in her external appearance. The way she appears to others, her style, her almost anachronism, her occupations: reading in cafes, writing, walking around, her interest for handwritten ads.

Filming Paris

We walked a lot around Paris with Renato Bara, the DOP. I was inventing things to do and asking him to join in. I mentioned one of Minnelli's films sets in Paris where the *Sacré-Cœur* seems like a painted set whereas it was shot on location. It is something Renato kept in mind during the shoot, an impression of sets when you discover the façades.

A touch of madness

The falling birds were part of my initial ideas. It is because I am scared of big birds when I walk in the streets. In the film, they don't attack but die. I thought funny that a girl who has read a lot of novels, triggers her imagination from there: she thinks they are committing suicide, that they are kamikazes, whereas before being in Paris, she probably thought that they hid to die.

I didn't want people around her to notice or react, except the young man she meets. No one apart from her sees them fall. She reads the newspapers and, indeed, the incident is noted but that's it. I also wished for her to get used to it gradually. I like the idea of absurd things occurring, and it amused me that she integrates this absurdity as an axiom, she doesn't pay that much attention. Fantasy also comes from the fact I do not speak about people or things that exist. To me, a film never pictures reality. Reality does not interest me in films, I endure it daily, that is enough. Cinema must bring me somewhere else. To show a character whom we know nothing about, whom we don't know the origins, who sees Paris not in its reality but through their own subjectivity, birds that fall, a very excited and sexually eager girl friend, all of which are clues that we are on fiction's territory. Mavie is a fictional character and everything around her, including Paris, is too. Nothing is true. The characters do and say things which don't exist. You do not get rid of a dead body as they do, it is obviously incredible. This delights me.

Georges' past

Georges was a long character to build. I researched ex-activists telling myself that I should not be too close to reality. But I got inspired by the Red Brigades' publisher, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, and I imagined a man who shares the traits of Burt Lancaster's character in *The Leopard*. In fact Georges bears his name in the film: Salina.

I asked myself where someone incredibly rich, who dedicates himself to publishing censored texts, would set up if he had to hide. I thought of the Quartier Latin since money is not a problem for him and he has a bookshop where he can hide behind his books. A messy, shabby bookshop. I found filming a mess very stimulating. I love boxes everywhere. I liked the idea of a place far from the world, timeless but in the center of Paris, the small shop around the corner that a distracted passer-by wouldn't notice.

Elise Girard



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Elise Girard was born in Thouars, France. She studied Applied Foreign Languages and, Techniques et Langage des Médias' (media techniques and language) at the Sorbonne in Paris before focussing on screenwriting, and subsequently writing her dissertation on *Cléo de 5 à 7* by Agnès Varda. From the late 1990s, she worked in public relations and programming for Cinémas Action, run by

Jean-Max Causse and Jean-Marie Rodon in Paris, which became the subject of her first documentary film. Since then, she has worked as a screenwriter and director. Following *Belleville Tokyo*, *Drôles d'oiseaux* is her second full-length feature film.

Films

2003: *Seuls sont les indomptés, l'aventure des cinémas Action* (52 min.). 2005: *Roger Diamantis ou la vraie vie* (55 min.). 2011: *Belleville Tokyo* (75 min.). 2016: *Drôles d'oiseaux / Strange Birds*.