



On the occasion of the release of *Mascarade* in the Netherlands, we had the opportunity to talk with the director, Nicolas Bedos. The film, presented out of competition at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival, tells the story of the encounter between a young gigolo and a stunning con artist, both willing to do anything to indulge in a dream life under the scorching sun of the French Riviera.

What was the initial thought process behind this film?

I wanted to create a film noir with a cruel atmosphere, incorporating snippets of images from the environment I had observed. In *Mascarade*, we witness a clash of cultures, where the characters are thrown into this world.

The Côte d'Azur, with its unique atmosphere, plays a significant role in your film. How important is it? Does it serve as both criticism and ode?

The Côte d'Azur holds a mythical, brilliant, and beautiful aura with its near-constant sunshine. However, despite the endearing characters, the atmosphere is heavy and rather gloomy. It is this paradox that I aimed to highlight—a dangerous situation where aesthetics, such as landscapes, characters, and their attire - , are entwined with drugs and money. "The French Riviera is a sunny place for shady people" (dixit the novelist Somerset Maugham ed.), a chimera filled with illusions, betrayals, and dangers.

INTERVIEW WITH NICOLAS BEDOS

BY THE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
AMSTERDAM

PHowever, we notice a certain fondness for your initially unsympathetic characters. Was it important for you to be non-judgmental? What is the underlying moral?

If there is a moral, it would be that living like them is not worthwhile! Although I condemn them morally, these kinds of characters exist. They are often intelligent, inventive, and courageous. Nevertheless, my primary intention was to unveil how this environment functions. The inspiration comes from a true story or rather a multitude of existing situations. I find myself relating to the swashbuckling adventure tales. However, nowadays, the principle of identification is segmented as we strive to find our place.

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You present a society in perpetual conflict. Could you provide more insight into it?

I draw many references from Scorsese, particularly *Goodfellas* (1990 ed.). I embrace the voyeuristic aspect of it, revealing a world unknown to us. Reflection can be seen in all the stories we tell.

"I constantly feel tenderness for everyone, including the bastards."

Cinema should depict reality but also liberate us from it. I crafted a film that I personally would have liked to see in the theaters. I unveil carnal desire—I've encountered individuals similar to Margot (portrayed by the sublime Marine Vacth, ed.) and witnessed echoes of François Cluzet (Simon in the film, ed.)! Reflections can be found in all the stories we tell. Once again, this is a world that exists. Margots can be found in Cannes, Paris, or on Instagram. Look at the rap scene with its inclination towards comfort and money. I constantly feel tenderness for everyone, including the bastards. That's the enjoyable part of this business. I'm on a mission to discover the human side in unpleasant individuals.



Are you attempting to convey something about the current state of cinema?

Yes, I'm apprehensive about this era. We tend to applaud virtue and good feelings. I've always endeavored to salvage condemnable characters like Simon (François Cluzet). However, it is not corrosive satire. I aspire to bring together different cinematic styles. We must cease tearing ourselves apart! Increasingly, radicalism comes at the expense of tolerance. There are possible bridges between auteur cinema and films with a more commercial inclination. We are becoming more politicized. Additionally, I assure you that protest cinema receives ample support. It is regrettable that within the relationship between the media and the press, we seek to compartmentalize genres. A popular cast does not equate to producing trash! I remain convinced that there is a voice for popular auteur cinema.

Can you discuss the line between fiction and biography, which appears to be quite blurred in your film, especially regarding the character of Isabelle Adjani?

I position myself between these two realms. My films carry a highly personal touch, with an approach that borders on autobiography. I make my voice heard through my work. Having been raised by elderly parents and entering this profession later in life, I pay homage to certain films. My dream would be to travel back in time. Many people excel at portraying reality, but my uniqueness lies in a different domain. One can appreciate the works of James Ivory without feeling like betraying Barry Lyndon or the Dardenne brothers. Love, betrayal, desire—these are the superficial, bourgeois notions of a world that intimidates me. *Mascarade* aims to evoke the desire to dance, make love, and suffer, all simultaneously! In a way, it's a tale.

"Mascarade aims to evoke the desire to dance, make love, and suffer."

Don't we all modify our identities to some extent based on whom we are interacting with?

Certainly! I often depict mythomaniacs in my films, drawing inspiration from Beaumarchais, Marivaux, and others.

We play with our characters like dolls.

We get the impression that your film has a nostalgic tone, a theme we also find in "La belle époque," for example. Does this reflect your state of mind?

What I strive to defend is the eclecticism between manufactured productions and arthouse cinema, which is often perceived as esoteric. As Molière said,

"I tend to seek an escape from the present."

"*There is no shame in pleasing.*" I aim to genuinely please the audience by loving my characters. Cinema is often judged solely on its purpose, but a film is more than just its subject. Certain films have moved me for inexplicable

reasons, perhaps due to the power of their imagery and music.

Am I nostalgic? Yes, but it's not a militant nostalgia! I am sensitive to works of art, such as Picasso's *Guernica*. It's my personal neurosis. I tend to seek an escape from the present. The audience follows my approach to immerse themselves in temporal bubbles. It's an alternative temporality, deeply personal. In my world, you can't determine if it's a contemporary apartment because everything harks back to the 1930s.

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