



NEW-RELEASES

Titane

In *Titane* we meet Alexia (Agathe Rousselle), a showgirl who performs ferociously sexual dances at a motor show and who has a strange, erotic connection with cars following a traffic accident in her childhood, which led to her having a metal plate surgically fitted into her head. After a seemingly unexplained spree of violent killings, Alexia goes on the run and seizes a chance for a new identity when she sees an age-progressed image of a missing male named Adrien, whose father, a grieving fireman played by Vincent Lindon, has never given up hope that he will be reunited with his son. Alexia alters her physical appearance and ‘becomes’ Adrien.

It’s a film full of disorientating surprises. It has alarming scenes of violence, outrageous moments of pitch-black humour and, most shockingly of all, a tender core, revealed when Vincent enters the narrative and the confrontational spectacle of the earlier scenes is complemented with scenes of moving melodrama. *Titane* is the French word for titanium, evoking extreme strength as well as directly referring to Alexia’s metal plate. It also, Ducournau explains, channels Greek mythology, with the word suggesting a female titan. When I ask her about the film’s ricocheting mood swings, a trait it shares with her earlier works, Ducournau explains: ‘It’s something that I really love doing, that I know is very unsettling. I like to make you go through very, very different emotions on the way because that’s what humanity is, right? We are so full of these emotions, constantly.’

The film features two magnificent central performances. It marks the feature debut of Rousselle, who gives a fierce, commanding and occasionally terrifying performance as Alexia. When I ask Ducournau about casting Rousselle, she responds: ‘It came from a long process which lasted six months. I was looking for someone who had energy, potential and, more than anything else, was someone I wanted to film. And Agathe, when I saw her, I knew that her face could transform, very radically, according to where you put the camera and which light you used to film her. For me she was mesmerising.’

The casting of veteran actor Lindon was very different. As the character’s name suggests, Ducournau wrote Vincent with Lindon in mind. ‘For me Vincent was the only actor in France who could take on that part. The character of Vincent is the only person in the film to whom we can actually relate. We can understand his journey, we can understand his pain. As crazy as his fantasy is – and it is actually quite worrisome and crazy! – we understand that it comes from the fact that he can’t grieve for the loss of his child. This is something we can all understand. Vincent [Lindon] is fearless in the way he shows his emotions. He has no boundaries.’

Viewers of Ducournau’s previous films, the short *Junior* (2011) and her feature debut *Raw* (2016), both of which feature a female protagonist who goes through an astonishing transition, may recognise similarities with some of the

characters of her latest movie. *Titane* features Garance Marillier as Justine, one of Alexia's lovers – it is the third time she has played a character with this name in Ducournau's films. The name Adrien has appeared before in her work, while Alexia is the name of Justine's older sister in *Raw*, who shares some character traits with the protagonist of *Titane*. Ducournau also states that, although she is never named, the big sister in *Junior* can also be interpreted as an incarnation of Alexia. She explains, 'I think I have troubles with endings. And I do not want to completely move on from one film to the other. One film is not enough to explore everything I want to within these characters. I see my work as very continuous. I feel that in film after film – and I'm still very young in my career – I explore the same thing but go deeper and deeper. I see my characters as shedding skin and mutating from one film to another. But there is continuity, like characters in a multiverse. It's a way of creating bonds between my films.'

While *Titane* may have won the top prize at Cannes, surprisingly it did not win the Queer Palm, for which it was shortlisted (Catherine Corsini's drama *The Divide*, about a lesbian couple who await medical attention while protests and police violence erupt outside the hospital, won that prize). It's a truly radical, visionary film that looks beyond notions of gender and sexuality. 'This is a core of the film,' says Ducournau when I ask her about the rejection of these constructs. 'I wanted the audience to believe in the journey that Alexia/Adrien goes through without projecting anything. Because for me all that matters in the end is that there is love – not conditional love – and that [my main character] feels like themselves. It's part of my character's journey. It's the reason it was so important to me to work with a non-professional with an androgynous look. When casting the role, I looked at male and female actors for this part. It happened that we cast Agathe. In this work, I question gender and to try to make us see it as what I think it is: a social construct and nothing more. [Gender] is something that is incredibly limiting for my characters, and for us all.'

Alex Davidson, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2021-22

After the hit cannibal horror *Raw* (2016), expectations were high for Julia Ducournau's follow up. In *Titane*, she surpassed them. The film looks and sounds gorgeous, with Ruben Impens's Day-Glo cinematography giving way at times to something more naturalistic. Ducournau and fellow screenwriters Jacques Akchoti, Simonetta Greggio and Jean-Christophe Bouzy have created their own universe. Here, gender identity isn't so much fluid as oily. Inmost desires are acted out regardless of the cost. This is the film that David Cronenberg's version of J.G. Ballard's *Crash* should have been. It is funniest at its most murderous and unrelenting in stripping the fetishist love of cars of its garish bodywork, revealing truly unusual lusts under the hood.

And yet the most shocking aspect of *Titane* is how tender and perversely romantic it is. The relationship between Vincent and Alexia develops into something exquisitely human. Lindon is perfect, with his familiar face's soulful eyes and his battered body the colour of steak tartare. As he fumbles another injection into a bruised buttock, he tells Alexia he isn't sick, 'I'm old.' For her

part, Rousselle, in her first major film role, is astonishing. Her psycho-killer motorhead is at first all glares and angles but is gradually humanised by Vincent’s grief. Queerness fuels the film with its wit, and at one point in the macho firehouse Alexia stops the party with an aggressively sexual dance. Extreme French cinema has become a genre in itself but can all too often have the effect of a faulty smoke alarm: it might wake you up with a jerk, but for no real reason. *Titane*, in contrast, has plenty to say: about gender, sexuality, family, human relationships and fetishisation. It’ll shake you, and something is definitely on fire.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2021-22

TITANE

Directed by: Julia Ducournau
©: Kazak Productions, Arte France Cinéma, VOO, Frakas Production
Produced by: Kazak Productions
in co-production with: Frakas Productions, Arte France Cinéma, VOO, Be TV
With the participation of: Canal+, Ciné+, ARTE France
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In association with: Cinémage 15, Cofinova 17, Cinémage 13 développement
International Sales: Wild Bunch International
Produced by: Jean-Christophe Reymond
Unit Production Manager: Julien Linieres
Assistant Director: Claire Corbetta-Doll
Script Supervisor: Bénédicte Kermadec
Casting: Christine Baras, Constance Demontoy, Audrey Gatimel
Written by: Julia Ducournau
Director of Photography: Ruben Impens
Stills Photography: Carole Bethuel
Visual Effects: Mac Guff
Edited by: Jean-Christophe Bouzy
Production Design: Laurie Colson, Lise Péault
Costume Designer: Anne-Sophie Gledhill
Make-up Designer: Flore Masson

Special Effects Make-up Designer: Olivier Afonso
Hair Designer: Antoine Mancini
Opening Titles: Claire Allante
Original Music: Jim Williams
Production Sound Mixer: Fabrice Osinski
Sound: Fabrice Osinski, Séverin Favriau, Stéphane Thiébaut
Sound Mixer: Stéphane Thiébaut
Stunt Co-ordinator: Emmanuel Lanzi

Cast
Vincent Lindon (*Vincent*)
Agathe Rousselle (*Alexia/Adrien*)
Garance Marillier (*Justine*)
Laïs Salamah (*Rayane*)
Myriem Akheddiou (*Adrien’s mother*)
Mara Cissé (*Jeantet*)
Marin Judas (*Charrier*)
Diong-Kéba Tacu (*Sissoko*)
Thibault Cathalifaud (*the fan, tuning show*)
Bertrand Bonello (*Alexia’s father*)
Dominique Frot (*the Macarena lady*)

France/Belgium 2020©
108 mins

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