



SEEN & HEARD

# Water Lilies

## Céline Sciamma on 'Water Lilies'

Unfolding in an anonymous Parisian suburb over the course of a languid summer, Céline Sciamma's debut *Water Lilies* is a coming-of-age tale set within the world of synchronised swimming that captures the pleasure and pain as three 15-year-old girls explore their burgeoning sexuality.

Marie (Pauline Acquart) hopes to join her local synchronised swimming team, an ambition fuelled by her sexual attraction to popular captain Floriane (Adèle Haenel). Marie finds herself becoming an accomplice in a series of uncomfortable assignations with Floriane's boyfriend François, while her best friend Anne (Louise Blachère) also has François in her sights. As friendships fray, Sciamma sets the stage for a series of power struggles.

Tender but with flashes of humour, the film explores emotional territory previously mined by Catherine Breillat and Lucrecia Martel, while the spirit of Esther Williams lingers in the distinctive underwater scenes. Bold, visually assured and knowingly kitsch, this is a promising and impressive debut.

*What is it about synchronised swimming that captured your attention?*

When I was 15 I attended a synchronised swimming exhibition and I thought I'd missed my vocation! Those girls were so accomplished, so feminine when I was still so childish in appearance, part of a team when I felt alone. This absurd memory struck me as a great example of the confusion you feel at that time of life, when you often mistake your desires. Plus I think that synchronised swimming says a lot about the female condition. Synchronised swimmers are soldiers who look like dolls: on the surface they have to pretend they don't suffer, whereas underneath they struggle painfully. It reveals a lot about the job of being a girl.

*Was the depiction of how tough it is to be a girl one of your main aims?*

Even before I had the storyline I knew I wanted to depict what I call 'the difficult job of being a girl'. Cinema has been talking about women for a century now but most of the talking has been done by men. I wanted to go against the undying male fascination for teenage girls in cotton underwear. *Water Lilies* goes into girls' locker rooms not to fantasise but to portray the reality.

*The film is especially impressive in its portrait of the awakening of Marie's desires for Floriane.*

I like to think of homosexuality not as a subject but as a journey. So I wanted to observe a very small moment: the awakening of desire and the journey of that desire from the moment it is born in the stomach until it travels to Marie's consciousness. I wanted to capture the birth of desire rather than its affirmation, so *Water Lilies* ends where most films on homosexual desire begin.

*Why did you avoid placing the film in a specific time?*

I wanted to portray universal feelings and sensations rather than doing a generational movie that would be an inside view of the teenagers of 2006 or look nostalgically at the past.

*Equally striking is the lack of an adult perspective.*

I started writing scenes with the characters' parents in them but I quickly found it boring. The complex relationship between teenagers and adults lies at the heart of the French tradition of teen movies from Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* to Pialat's *A nos amours*. But I decided I'd rather not talk about it at all and so I dispensed with it after the first draft. I also wanted everyone to identify with a 15-year-old girl and adult characters would have allowed them to find refuge elsewhere.

**Interview by Jason Wood, *Sight & Sound*, April 2008**

### **Timeline: Céline Sciamma**

- Céline Sciamma is born in Pontoise, a suburb of Paris, in 1978.
- She studies French literature before enrolling at Paris's famous film school La Fémis.
- While at La Fémis, she writes her first script, *Water Lilies*, a coming-of-age tale about a 15-year-old girl and her growing attraction to the star of the local synchronised swimming team. She is encouraged by filmmaker Xavier Beauvois to direct it.
- *Water Lilies* (2007), starring Adèle Haenel, premieres in the Un Certain Regard sidebar at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival.
- She directs *Pauline* (2010) for a government-sponsored collection of five short films dealing with homophobia.
- Sciamma's second feature, *Tomboy* (2011), focuses on a ten-year-old girl who moves to a new neighbourhood and presents herself as a boy. Sciamma writes and shoots the film on a small budget in just three months.
- The last film in her coming-of-age trilogy, *Girlhood* (2014), premieres at Cannes. ' *Water Lilies* was about the beginning of teenage-hood; *Tomboy*, the end of childhood; and this one is about the end of teenage-hood,' she told *Sight & Sound* about her *banlieue*-set story about a black teenager who joins an all-girl gang. Sciamma shoots it in CinemaScope, finding her cast on the streets.
- Sciamma writes scripts for André Téchiné's *Being 17* (2016) and the French/Swiss stop-motion animation *My Life as a Courgette* (2016).
- In 2015 she becomes co-president of the French Society of Film Directors, and in 2018 is one of the organisers of the women's protest against inequality at the Cannes Film Festival.
- Her fourth feature *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* wins the Best Screenplay award at Cannes 2019.
- Sciamma's fifth feature *Petite maman* premieres at the Berlin Film Festival in March 2021.

***Sight & Sound*, March 2020**

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## WATER LILIES (NAISSANCE DES PIEUVRES)

*Un film de:* Céline Sciamma  
*©/Presented by:* Productions Balthazar  
*With the participation of:*  
Centre national de la cinématographie, Canal+  
*With the support of:* Région Île de France  
*With the participation of:* ARTE, Cofinova 3  
*Distributor:* Haut et Court Distribution  
*Produced by:* Bénédicte Couvreur, Jérôme Dopffer  
*Unit Production Manager:* Maud Quiffet  
*Unit Manager:* Bachir Sareh  
*Pre-/Post-production:* Emmanuel Barraux, Virginie Bonneau, Juliette Grandmont, Mani Mortazavi, Emilie Tisné  
*Administration/Financial Controller:* Cabinet Roy  
*Administration:* Rémi Roy  
*1st Assistant Director:* Delphine Daull  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Jérémie Steib  
*Script Supervisor:* Roselyne Bellec  
*Casting:* Christel Baras, Laure Cochener  
*Screenplay:* Céline Sciamma  
*Director of Photography:* Crystel Fournier  
*2nd Unit Director of Photography:* Richard Mercier  
*Underwater Photographer:* Philippe Venne  
*1st Assistant Camera:* François Chevreau  
*2nd Unit Assistant Camera:* Barbara Visser  
*Underwater Assistant Camera:* Jacques Ballard  
*2nd Assistant Camera:* Stéphane Raymond  
*Key Grip:* Jérémie Leloup  
*Gaffer:* Muriel Olivier  
*Editor:* Julien Lacheray  
*Assistant Editors:* Jean-Christophe Bouzy, Carole Borne  
*Art Director:* Gwendal Bescond  
*1st Assistant Art Director:* Pascal Leguellec  
*Set Decorator:* Géraldine Laferté  
*Properties:* Olivia Talan  
*Construction Manager:* Thierry Carini  
*Costumes:* Marine Chauveau  
*Wardrobe:* Dorine Simon  
*Key Make-up:* Marie Luiset

*Opening Titles:* Eric Delmotte  
*Closing Titles:* Ercidan  
*Colour Timer:* Christophe Bousquet  
*Stock:* Kodak Motion Picture Film  
*Laboratory:* GTC  
*Original Music:* Para One  
*Music Recordings:* Para One, Vincent Verdoux  
*Sound Recording:* Pierre André  
*Boom Operator:* Franck Duval  
*Sound Mixer:* Daniel Sobrino  
*Sound Editor:* Pierre André  
*Recordist ADR:* Gildas Mercier  
*Foley Artist:* Bertrand Boudaud  
*Foley Recordist:* Gildas Mercier  
*Subtitles:* L.V.T. (Paris)  
*Technical Adviser:* Delphine Gleize  
*Synchronised Swimming Coach:* Andréa Conti  
*Dialogue Coach:* Véronique Ruggia  
*Unit Publicists:* François Hassan Guerrar, Julie Tardit

### Cast

Pauline Acquart (*Marie*)  
Louise Blachère (*Anne*)  
Adèle Haenel (*Floriane*)  
Warren Jacquin (*François*)  
Christel Baras (*inspector*)  
Marie Gili Pierre (*cashier*)  
Alice de Lencquesaing (*cloakroom girl*)  
Claire Pierrat (*cloakroom girl 2*)  
Barbara Renard (*Natacha*)  
Esther Sironneau (*shop assistant*)  
Jérémie Steib (*masseur*)  
Yvonne Villemaire (*neighbour*)  
Christophe Vandeveld (*nightclub guy*)

France 2007©  
84 mins

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## SEEN & HEARD: DARING FEMALE COMING-OF-AGE FILMS

### Skate Kitchen

Tue 1 Mar 20:40; Sun 13 Mar 20:45

### Divines

Wed 2 Mar 20:50; Tue 15 Mar 20:50

### Jinn

Sat 5 Mar 17:45; Tue 8 Mar 21:00

### 37 Seconds (37 sekanzu)

Sat 5 Mar 20:30; Sat 12 Mar 20:45

### Water Lilies (Naissance des pieuvres)

Sun 6 Mar 18:45; Mon 14 Mar 20:50

### Marie Antoinette

Tue 8 Mar 18:10 (+ intro by Hannah Strong, Little White Lies Digital Editor and author of *Sofia Coppola: Forever Young*); Sun 13 Mar 18:00

### Somersault

Fri 11 Mar 20:50; Mon 14 Mar 18:10

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## IN THE EYES OF A SILENT STAR: THE FILMS OF ASTA NIELSEN

### In the Eyes of the Law (Nach dem Gesetz)

Tue 1 Mar 20:50; Mon 7 Mar 18:15

### Hamlet

Wed 2 Mar 18:15; Sat 5 Mar 17:00 (+ Intro by Prof Judith Buchanan)

### Earth Spirit (Erdgeist)

Sat 5 Mar 12:10 (+ intro by Season Curator Pamela Hutchinson); Wed 9 Mar 20:50

### The Decline (AKA Downfall) (Der Absturz)

Sat 5 Mar 14:30 (+ intro by season curator Pamela Hutchinson); Tue 15 Mar 18:20

### The Joyless Street (Die freudlose Gasse)

Sun 6 Mar 17:40 (+ intro by BFI Inclusion Team Coordinator, Miranda Gower-Qian); Wed 16 Mar 18:00

### Impossible Love (Unmögliche Liebe)

Wed 9 Mar 18:20; Tue 15 Mar 20:45

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