



WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA PREVIEW

Cette maison

+ Q&A with director Miryam Charles

Miryam Charles on 'Cette maison'

Cette maison opens with the words of a heavy, exhausted, nostalgic heart, which dreams of being caught up by the sea, brought back to Haiti, 'because it is necessary to return'. And yet you immediately resume, then warn us with this determined proposal, that of 'an announcement of things to come' by a 'fluid journey in time and space'. One feels from the introduction two opposite forces, one turned towards the past, the history, their pain, and the other towards the perspective of a field of possibilities which would be to come, with its promises. And yet these two forces are complementary, at least because they have in common that they cannot stand the present. Which part did you write first? Or rather, is it a film that you wrote in the past, present or future tense?

As soon as I understood what death, loss and mourning could imply, I sought to deflect them. In my childish mind, where everything was possible, I saw myself confronted with finality. Terrified of dying before those I loved. At night, I would make rounds to make sure my parents, sisters and brother were still breathing. This may explain why I like filming the process of sleeping so much. This idea of eluding death and even time has remained with me. It lives in each of my films. I fiddle with time where the present, the past and the future, question each other, converse, oppose each other in order to unite. Always with the objective of unity. To unify the multiple threads of time.

Originally I wanted to pay tribute to my cousin who died more than ten years ago and to the resilience of her mother who continues to live on with such grace. With this film, I wanted to express a wound over time. Past, present and future. I understand that it will never fade but I also understand that I cannot stay in front of the wall. I have to move forward. It may be a bit naive to think like that, but it is with love that I move forward. Despite the pain of such a tragic death, love exists. It existed before and will exist long after us. If one refers to opposing forces, I would say that I oppose everything against love and then I let it exist in time. I don't have a definitive answer as to the outcome. A better, brighter future? I think we need to find brightness at all times.

And finally to answer the second part of the question: I make errant films. I wander in my head, in my heart, through a family history, the history of several countries, without knowing which way to go. When I started writing this film, I wanted it to end in Haiti and it didn't. I got a little lost in the process. I got a little lost along the way. But I am at peace with it.

Was Shelby Jean-Baptiste's portrayal of the murdered teenager, at an age she never knew, a way of stepping aside from the mimetic violence of representation? To try to transform her tragic memory through the poetry of an impossible story?

I think that at the beginning, it was a way to protect myself from the tragic dimension of a life broken too early. A part of me refused that reality. For me it

was impossible to grasp. The character of Tessa repeats it often throughout the film; everything is possible here. So I imagined an adult body, an improbable reunion between a mother and a daughter through different eras. Just for a moment. A moment of cinema. It's strange to say, but it's still difficult to imagine that this film could exist. For a long time, I denied the reality of this death. I don't know if it's a common thing, but when I learn of the death of someone I love, my first instinct is to refuse it. I refuse. In those few seconds when I both deny and realise the reality of it, I plead. I tell myself that in this short moment, if I refuse this reality and plead at the same time, my wish will be granted. Not to cancel death, but to take the place of the loved one who is no more. I remember pleading to take the place of my cousin.

Years later, I find myself making a film to pay tribute to her and hoping for the time of a film, softer moments in her adult body that never existed. By using this process, I protect myself and I feel I am protecting her at the same time. The fictional device also goes in the same way. Why tell this story using fiction? I staged memories, a hope of reuniting a mother and her child. Everything is possible during the film. Everything is built and deconstructed at the same time. What we can see on the screen is probably something that I have internalised over time. A way of understanding the world, the events of one's life. Stories have to be deconstructed. Even our own.

What is this island which returns punctually, and which ends up superimposed in transparency on the corpse?

It is a small point on the island of Dominica. It is an island in the Caribbean often confused with the Dominican Republic (perhaps because of the name). There is probably a double meaning to the opening narration of the film when I mention that my heart is heavy and that I need to go back to Haiti. This is the characters' quest, this return home, but it was also mine with this film. A quest that failed. I could not go to Haiti for the shooting for various reasons (pandemic, political instabilities). So I left with the executive producer, 16mm film and a Bolex camera to the islands. We wandered around for a few weeks with a few places in mind, but nothing too specific. I was looking for my home country through other places, other images. I'm not sure that a North American audience can automatically tell the difference, but I know that Haitians won't recognise their country. I think this adds to the melancholy of the landscapes and the sense of disorientation of the two characters with their map of the country. They do not recognise anything. The country is no longer the same as they remember it. The impression of being lost in one's own country was already in the original version of the script. The repetition of this island, that of another island, is a reminder to myself. I am calling out to myself with hope. I wanted so much to shoot my first feature film in the land of my ancestors. I will have to go back.

Tessa says that 'Time will not exist for us, because I know the end'. While we understand that she learns to exist in spite of this counted time, as in a memory inscribed outside of her tragic end, we notice that the interior rooms, the scenes of this intimate and familial house, also seem to exist outside of time. The house was first used to shelter from the bad weather, but does it also serve to cover itself from the passing time?

Indeed, the house has multiple uses throughout the film. The place where the tragedy took place, a refuge where we gather or an enchanted place where everyday scenes are mixed with moments of sadness. I think I can come back to the question of eluding time. And also to the way I conceive my films. I

think about the story I'm going to tell and I always start with the end. It can be something very concrete or just an intention. For *Cette maison*, I was thinking of something brighter that would remain. A celebration of life and the love of a mother for her daughter and vice versa. Like Tessa, I know the ending as a screenwriter. I allow myself to play with the temporality of the ending (to stretch it a bit). If we think of the end of our earthly history, it does not necessarily end with our death. Death is not the end of our time. This is what I dare to hope and that I try to translate through this film.

Production notes

CETTE MAISON (THIS HOUSE)

Director: Miryam Charles

Production Company: Embuscade Films

Producer: Félix Dufour-Laperrière

Line Producer: Nellie Carrier

Screenplay: Miryam Charles

Directors of Photography: Isabelle Stachtchenko, Miryam Charles

Production Design: Georges Michael Fanfan, Annick Marion

Editing: Xi Feng

Sound: Gordon Neil Allen, Olivier Calvert

Music: Romain Camiolo

This event is supported by the
Québec Government Office, London

Cast

Schelby Jean-Baptiste

Florence Blan Mbaye

Eve Duranceau

Matthew Rankin

Yardly Kavanagh

Mireille Métellus

Nadine Jean

Tracy Marcelin

Canada 2022

75 mins

Courtesy of T A P E Collective

Woman with a Movie Camera is generously supported by Jane Stanton

NEW RELEASES

Decision to Leave (Heojil Kyolshim)

From Mon 17 Oct

Triangle of Sadness

From Fri 28 Oct

The Greenaway Alphabet

From Fri 11 Nov

Aftersun

From Fri 18 Nov

What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?

(*Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?*)

From Fri 25 Nov

RE-RELEASES

The Others

From Mon 17 Oct

Poltergeist

From Fri 21 Oct

Nil by Mouth

From Fri 4 Nov (Preview on Thu 20 Oct 20:20; extended intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large on Fri 4 Nov 17:50; intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI Archive on Mon 7 Nov 18:00)

The Draughtsman's Contract

From Fri 11 Nov (+ intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI National Archive on Fri 11 Nov 17:50)

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