

Festival de Cannes 2011 – Directors' Fortnight



Charlotte Vincent - AURORA FILMS presents

# IRIS IN BLOOM

**(Original title : En Ville)**

A Film by *Valérie Mréjen* and *Bertrand Schefer*

With *Lola Créton*, *Stanislas Merhar*

75 minutes – 35 mm – 1,85 – Dolby SR – France – 2011

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“Victor Hugo says: ‘The grass must grow and children die.’ I say that the cruel law of art is that beings die and that we ourselves must die after we have exhausted suffering so that the grass, not of oblivion but of eternal life, should grow, fertilized by works upon which generations to come will gaily picnic without care of those who sleep beneath it...” Proust, *Time Regained*.

# Synopsis

Sixteen-year-old Iris is living the last years of her adolescence in a small provincial town when she accidentally meets Jean, a forty-year-old Parisian photographer. As they get to know each other, their relationship evolves into a love friendship that profoundly transforms their lives.

# Interview with Valérie Mréjen and Bertrand Schefer

A two-headed brain

**First of all, how did you end up writing and directing a film together?**

**Valérie Mréjen:** I had already made videos, shorts and documentaries and I had wanted to write a feature film for a long time. As it was, I won a prize with my first short, *La Défaite du rouge-gorge*, at the Pantin film festival, and this prize included financial support to write. This corresponded with a moment when Bertrand and I wanted to write together...

**Bertrand Schefer:** And early on, the desire to write a screenplay became the desire to direct together as well. After working on the translation and editing of texts, I had started my first novel, yet I knew I wanted to write and direct for the cinema. I worked as a reader for Arte's fiction department, and then I also developed screenplays for producers. I also recently wrote a screenplay with Philippe Grandieux. I thus came around slowly, step by step, towards directing.

**You are both quite active in the field of literature, visual arts and films that are more likely to be shown in galleries and museums than theaters. What makes this a film for cinema?**

**B. S.:** For us, it was very clear from the start that for this project we didn't want to dismiss our experience in visual arts and literature; we wanted, however, to re-shuffle the cards. The idea, for us, was not to shift completely, but to think from the very beginning in terms of filmmaking, to go towards cinema.

**V. M.:** It wasn't all that easy for me at first to make the transition from shorts – a format I extensively experimented with – to feature films. I had to learn to construct scenes that didn't contain their own resolution or ending, I had to learn to think of a different narrative length, to present ideas without fully disclosing intentions, since they could be developed later in the movie. It is a learning process that we shared and followed together, by watching a lot of films as well.

**Among the themes tackled in the film, there is teenage love, life in a provincial**

**town, the life path and career of an artist... Were these themes included from the start?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** We were interested in youth, as well as provincial life. That's where we started, but we went through many stages of which there are only remote traces left in the film we are presenting today. The characters we had imagined at first are of different ages and had different jobs. What remains are the names, and two or three scenes that were always there, like stable islands on which we could anchor. The family lunch scene, for instance, or the encounter in the car. Then there were many versions, we wandered away, followed other paths... The subject became solid very late; the film became closer to us, to our own personal stories.

**During the actual writing process, how did you work together?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** It would be difficult to say who wrote what, who came up with this or that line, who thought of one situation or another. In the end, it was the screenplay's unity that truly mattered... What we were certain of from the start was that the narrative point of view would follow two people. There was the girl and the man involved in artistic work; we were going to go from one to the other and back, and they would meet. There would be a mutual initiation. Yet the idea was not to impose alternating storylines with a systematic coming and going from one character to the other. Our true interest was more focused on the way we were going to tell the story than the story itself.

**Do you think there is a part of you to be found in the main characters?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** Probably, but not in a particularly distinct manner. There is a bit of both of us in each character. Also, the characters changed a lot as we were writing. There was a teenage girl, whose quest involves experimenting. Iris doesn't speak much but she watches and listens. She's at that moment in her life when many choices are possible, many different paths can be followed. She has to find her place in her family; she has to define herself in relation to her choice of studies and, of course, in relation to love. As for Jean, the photographer, he's someone looking for deserted places, sort of non-places that allow him to reflect upon his own interior journey. At first, Iris was younger and Jean older. The age difference finally became smaller. Iris is closer to us and what we remember our teenage loves to be like, while Jean is the age we are now.

**Jean is an artist. His work is not entirely unlike yours...**

**V. M. and B. S.:** We drew up Jean's character and his artistic work with Nicolas Moulin in mind. Nicolas is a French artist who lives in Berlin; he is particularly interested in industrial and utopian architecture. Valérie and he studied at the Cergy Beaux Arts together and he's a friend. We used Nicolas' photos in the film. Yet Jean is entirely fictional. During the film he undergoes a complete transformation that will show in his work. His encounter with Iris will lead him to the representation of human figures, something he has never considered before. He makes a portrait of Iris, which he puts in perspective by placing it in the heart of the port area where he first met the young woman while scouting for places.

**Did you take the project's budgeting into account while writing?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** It's literally impossible to work otherwise. From the beginning, we had the support of our producer, Charlotte Vincent, who had faith in the project even though we were having a hard time finding financial backing. Meanwhile, there were other projects, some involving writing and directing. There was a period as artist-in-residence at the Villa Medici for Bertrand, then another for both of us in Japan. Obviously, writing *Iris in Bloom* was less intense in those periods of time. Yet we never lost the thread, and never considered not making this film. Quite the opposite, actually. Every time we came back to the project, we noticed that it had found a new maturity, that some elements had become more remote, sometimes to the point of disappearing, that we were heading for what would eventually become the true essence of the screenplay's final version. The film was shot over a very short period of time. This forced us to simplify, trim, downsize our sets or rethink a few scenes.

**Did the places where you'd planned to film have an influence on the project?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** The film is supposed to take place in a small port town, but in reality we created a composite using three different towns: Nantes, St Nazaire and Limoges. The latter mostly for inside filming, for the railroad and the gas station.

**As far as the visual aspect of the film is concerned, there are truly powerful technical and esthetic choices...**

**V. M. and B. S.:** We chose to film in 16 mm. It's not just an esthetic decision, it's a pragmatic one: paradoxically, we realized it would cost less to have a beautiful visual aspect by using actual film rather than video, for which acceptable quality requires a higher

budget, especially as far as lighting is concerned. And then, there's also a connection between the way we shot and Jean's work, since the character of the photographer prefers working with analogue cameras. Like him, we wanted to remain within a certain budget, and, rather than increase the number of takes indefinitely, to place our 16 mm camera on a tripod and organize the crew's work around this tool, which places the importance of the frame in the forefront. The entire staging of a scene is thought in relation to its visual aspect. The way we worked with our director of photography, Claire Mathon, was essential in order to follow this intuition and find the way to bring it to life.

### **How did you choose the actors?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** We had spotted Lola Créton in *Blue Beard* by Catherine Breillat. We had a few reading sessions with her and it was immediately a perfect fit with the character of Iris. She was Iris. She is a true actress and she instantly knew how to grasp the role to transform it, making it hers. Stanislas Mehrar has played for Chantal Akerman, in *The Captive*, as well as for Benoît Jacquot and Jean-Claude Brisseau. We had implicitly thought about him very early on, in the first few versions of the screenplay, in particular. He has this cinematographic charisma, a presence on screen that sweeps you away with its strength but also with its melancholy restraint, its fragility. We've known him a long time... He is Bertrand's cousin. This is the reason why, by the way, Bertrand plays Jean's brother, as a little in-joke. Adèle Haenel played in Céline Sciamma's *Water Lilies*, in which she embodied to a tee the free and carefree nature of her character. There is also Antoine Chappey, who is incredible and with whom it's pure bliss to work. Finally, we also have Valérie Donzelli, Marilyne Canto and Michèle Moretti, who had already played several times in Valérie's videos.

### **What about the young people in Iris' world?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** All along the casting process, which we conducted ourselves, we met a lot of young people. Seeing them, having them read some of the dialogue, plunged us back into the teenage characters that we had imagined. Each had a very well-defined personality. Some of them have a lot of lines while others express themselves mostly through their presence. For instance, Ferdinand Régent, who plays the character of Alexandre, had never acted before, but we were immediately convinced when we saw him. Barthélémy Guillemard fleshed out, with his own very particular tone, the character of the confidant friend. Even though we slightly adjusted the texts after casting the actors, there was no improvisation at all while filming.

**In the film, there are also “non-professional” actors...**

**V. M. and B. S.:** Yes, some people in our circle naturally became obvious in our minds. These are the writers Thomas Clerc, Stéphane Bouquet and Gaëlle Obiégly... Gaëlle is quite a revelation, don't you think?

**While filming, how did you share and organize the directing process?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** When we starting shooting, we had thought, in order to be efficient and for the crew to know whom to talk to for one question or another, that Valérie would be on the actor's side while Bertrand would focus more on the visual aspect. The truth is, as of the first few days of shooting, we understood it wouldn't work that way. Since we weren't a large group, everyone started following the same impetus. And we started doing the same work together, both focusing on images and the actors. The recurring joke, on set, was to nickname us the “two-headed brain”...

**Directing actors... Did you spend time explaining to the actors the frame of mind there were supposed to be in? Did you give them psychological pointers?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** No, not really. We don't think that a director knows better than an actor how to play a specific role. The directing process, as we see it, consist in defining a particular tone, a frame of mind, and the actors' work is to understand this frame of mind. The movie's mind frame instilled itself when we started the reading sessions. From the very first day, the actors knew where to stand.

**To wrap up this interview, if you had to define your film's genre, which would it be? A comedy drama, a comedy of manners?**

**V. M. and B. S.:** It's difficult for us to classify our film in a category. It isn't a social drama, we're sure of that. It isn't a comedy either. It is more like a tale. We should always be able to invent new categories...

# Valérie Mréjen

Valérie Mréjen was born in Paris in 1969. A visual artist, she filmed several videos and shorts (*La Défaite du rouge-gorge*, 2001; *Chamonix*, 2003; *French Courvoisier*, 2009). In 2008, the Jeu de Paume organized an exhibition dedicated to her work.

Her first documentary, *Pork and Milk*, was released in theaters in 2004. Her second documentary, *Valvert*, was shown in theaters in 2010.

Allia published three of her stories *Mon Grand-père* (1999), *L'Agrume* (2001) and *Eau sauvage* (2004).

*Iris in Bloom* is her first fiction feature film.

## Bibliography – Filmography

### FILMS

*Iris in Bloom*, written and directed with Bertrand Schefer, 2011

*French Courvoisier*, 2009 (short). Unifrance Grand Prize – Cannes, 2010

*Valvert*, 2008

*Pork and milk*, 2004. Creation Prize and Messa in onda Prize – Syracuse International Film Festival, 2005

*Chamonix*, 2003, (short). Jameson Prize – International Short Film Festival, Clermont-Ferrand, 2003

*La Défaite du rouge-gorge*, 2001 (short). Members of the Press Jury Prize – Pantin Short Film Festival, 2001

### BOOKS

*Ping-Pong*, book & DVD, Ed. Allia, 2008

*Pork and milk*, livre DVD, Ed. Allia, 2006

*Eau sauvage*, Ed. Allia, 2004

*L'Agrume*, Ed. Allia, 2001

*Mon grand-père*, Ed. Allia, 1999

### EXHIBITIONS

#### Single artist Exhibitions

The French Institute of Tokyo, 2011

*Ils respirent*, Screening, Philadelphia, 2010

*La Virreina*, Barcelona, 2009

*¡ Cuenta ! ¡ cuenta !* Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico, 2008

*Passengers*, Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, CCA, San Francisco, 2008

*La place de la concorde*, Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2008

...

#### Group Exhibitions

*Blockbuster*, Museo de Arte de Sinaola, Mexico, 2011

*Entre-Temps*, MIS, São Paulo, 2009

*Airs de Paris*, Pompidou Center, Paris, 2007

*Media Burn*, Tate Modern, London, 2007

...

## ***Bertrand Schefer***

Bertrand Schefer was born in Paris in 1972. After studying philosophy, he devoted his first works to the rediscovery of the Italian Renaissance founding scriptures on the origins of visual arts, and dedicated himself to the translation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's and Giacomo Leopardi's works. While working as a reader for Arte's fiction department, he co-wrote screenplays and published his first novel, *L'Âge d'or*, with the publishing company Allia. In 2009-2010, he was a writer in residence at the Villa Medici, then at the Villa Kujoyama, in Japan. Also in Japan, in Tokyo, he later co-filmed a documentary about Shibuya Girls with Valérie Mréjen.

*Iris in Bloom* is his first feature film.

### **Bibliography – Filmography**

#### **FILMS**

*Iris in Bloom*, written and directed with Valérie Mréjen, 2011

*Fièvre*, co-written with Philippe Grandrieux (in preparation)

*French Courvoisier*, co-written with Valérie Mréjen, 2009 (short) Unifrance Grand Prize – Cannes, 2010

#### **BOOKS**

*L'Âge d'or*, novel, Ed. Allia, 2008

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, translated from Italian, annotated and commentated, Ed Allia, 2003. Prix Italiques and Prix Laure Bataillon classique.

Giulio Camillo, *Le Théâtre de la mémoire [Theater of Memory]*, *Zibaldone*, translated from Italian, annotated and commentated, Ed Allia, 2001

Eugenio Garin, *Hermétisme et Renaissance [Hermeticism and the Renaissance]*, introduction and translation from Italian, Ed. Allia, 2001

*Les Platonismes à la Renaissance*, collective works, Ed. Vrin, 2001

Pico della Mirandola, *Neuf cents conclusions philosophiques [nine hundred conclusions]*, first French edition, Latin text edited, annotated, translated and commentated, ED. Allia, 1999.

Giacomo Leopardi, *Tout est rien [Thoughts]*, translated from Italian, Ed. Allia, 1998

Marsile Ficin, *Quid sit lumen*, introduction, translated from Latin and commentated, Ed. Allia, 1998.

# Lola Créton (Iris)

## Filmography

- 2010        **Goodbye, First Love** by Mia Hansen-Løve  
              **Iris in Bloom** by Valérie Mréjen and Bertrand Schefer
- 2009        **Blue Beard** by Catherine Breillat  
              **Malban** by Elodie Bouedec (short)  
              **Milou et les vénusiens** by Nicolas Bilder (short)  
              **Arrête** by Françoise Escobar (short)  
              **Imago** by Aline Ahon (medium-length film)
- 2008        **Trouble at Timpetill** by Nicolas Bary
- 2007        **Chamber of Death** by Alfred Lot

# **Stanislas Merhar (Jean)**

## **Cinema**

- 2010 **La Folie Almayer** by Chantal Akerman  
**Iris in Bloom** by Valérie Mréjen and Bertrand Schefer  
**The Art of Love** by Emmanuel Mouret
- 2009 **Notre ami Chopin** by Xavier Beauvois
- 2006 **Legacy** by Temur Babluani, Gela Babluani  
**Müetter** by Dominique Lienhard
- 2005 **Code 68** by Jean-Henri Roger
- 2004 **Un fil à la patte** by Michel Deville
- 2003 **L'Enfance de Catherine** by Anne Baudry
- 2002 **Adolphe** by Benoît Jacquot  
**Almost Peaceful** by Michel Deville  
**Merci Docteur Rey** by Andrew Litvack
- 2001 **Nobel** by Fabio Carpi  
**The Knights of the Quest** by Pupi Avati
- 2000 **The Captive** by Chantal Akerman  
*Directors' Fortnight, International Film Festival, Cannes 2000*  
**Franck Spadone** by Richard Bean
- 1999 **Furia** by Alexandre Aja  
**The Letter** by Manuel de Oliveira
- 1998 **Workers for the Good Lord** by Jean-Claude Brisseau
- 1997 **Dry Cleaning** by Anne Fontaine  
*César 1998 for Best Budding Male Actor*  
*Spectators' Prize at the Actors on Screen Festival in Saint-Denis*

## **Theater**

- 2007 **L'Autre** by Florian Zeller - Msc. : Florian Zeller

## **Television**

- 2010 **Climats** by Caroline Huppert
- 2008 **Dans le lac** by Jean-Pierre Mocky  
**The Chalk Circle Man** by Josée Dayan
- 2004 **Milady** by Josée Dayan
- 2000 **Zaide** by Josée Dayan
- 1998 **The Count of Monte Cristo** by Josée Dayan

## **Novels**

- Petits poisons** published by Ed. Fayard  
*Won the Prix littéraire Livres & Musiques in Deauville*

# Cast

Iris	Lola Créton
Jean	Stanislas Merhar
Isabelle	Adèle Haenel
Monika	Valérie Donzelli
Alexandre	Ferdinand Régent
Friend-confidant	Barthélémy Guillemard
Night Barman	Antoine Chappey
Alexandre's Mother	Marilyne Canto
Iris' Father	Serge Renko
Alexandre's Father	Frédéric Pierrot
Passing Friend	Pascal Cervo
Jean's Mother	Michèle Moretti
The Teacher	Stéphane Bouquet
Female Guest	Gaëlle Obiégly
Male Guest	Thomas Clerc
Dandy	Christophe Wavelet
Woman at the Bar	Françoise Cousin
Female Train conductor	Katia Beaudufe
Jérémie	Bertrand Schefer
Gérald, the Actor	Gilles Geenen
German woman	Alessa Elisa Hildebrandt
High School students	Anthony Bertaud
	Adrien Charrier
	Jean Dalin
	Antonin Gerson
	Marie Ghiringhelli
	Emilie Havard

## Crew

Direction, screenplay, dialogues Valérie Mréjen and Bertrand Schefer  
Photography Claire Mathon  
1st assistant director Jean-Baptiste Germain  
Sound Philippe Deschamps  
Production manager Ludovic Leiba  
Script Virginie Cheval  
Sets Aurore Casalis  
Costumes Sophie Lifshitz  
Editing Thomas Marchand  
Sound editing Mikaël Barre  
Mixing Gilles Benardeau  
Original film score Jean Claude Vannier  
Post-production manager Mylène Guichoux  
Production Charlotte Vincent, Aurora Films  
In coproduction with Fresnoy, studio national des arts contemporains  
With the participation of the Pays de la Loire and  
Limousin regions  
In partnership with the Centre National du Cinéma et de  
l'Image Animée  
The Ile-de-France region  
The Seine-Saint-Denis department  
PROCIREP and ANGOA-AGICOA  
Dévelopimage 2  
With the support of Centre national des arts plastiques (Image/mouvement),  
Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication  
In association with CINEMAGE 5  
Sales Films Boutique