



WOMAN AT SEA

a film by **Dinara Drukarova**

—
slot machine



Donostia Zinemaldia
Festival de San Sebastián
NEW DIRECTORS

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Technical Data

Title Woman at sea

Original Title Grand Marin

Inspired by the novel of Catherine Poulain «Woman at Sea»

Lenght 84 min

Type of film Drama

Nationality of the film French, Icelandic, Belgian

Shooting place Iceland

Director Dinara Drukarova

Producers Marianne Slot and Carine Leblanc - Slot machine

Co-producers

Julie Gayet, Antoun Senhaoui, Nadia Turincev, Julien Naveau - Rouge International

Olivier Père, Remi Burah - ARTE France Cinéma

Benedikt Erlingsson - Gulldrengurinn

Davíð Óskar Ólafsson - Mystery Productions

Geneviève Lemal - Scope Pictures

Sergey Selyanov - CTB Film Company

Anton Malyshev - Kinoprime Foundation

Jean Michel Rey - Rezo Productions

Year of production 2022

Cast Dinara Drukarova, Sam Louwyck, Björn Hlynur Haraldsson, Hjörtur Jóhann Jónsson, Dylan Robert, Antonyhasan Jesusthasan, Magne Havard Brekke

Script Dinara Drukarova, Raphaëlle Desplechin, Léa Fehner, Gilles Taurand

Director of photography Timo Salminen, FSC

Original music Jean-Benoit Dunckel

Editing Valérie Loiseleux, Anita Roth

Sound Yvan Dumas, Frederik Van de Moortel, Nicolas Dambroise, Philippe Charbonnel

Festivals Festivals World Premiere at San Sebastian Festival - New directors

Distributor France Rezo Films

International sales LOCO FILMS

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Visa d'exploitation N°149.597

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Synopsis

Pitchline

Lili left everything behind to travel to the edge of the earth and accomplish her dream, fishing the Northern seas. She persuades Ian, the captain of a trawler by the name of Rebel, to give her a chance and let her join the crew. Lili will conquer her right to live differently, free.

Synopsis

Lili left everything behind to travel to the edge of the earth and accomplish her dream, fishing the Northern seas. She persuades Ian, the captain of a trawler by the name of Rebel, to give her a chance and let her join the crew. The only woman on board, they call her sparrow. Hidden behind a frail appearance is a will of steel, and her courage and determination ultimately win over their respect. Adopted into this world of often unfortunate individuals, Lili will conquer her right to live differently, free.

Director's note

When I first read *Le Grand Marin*, a sense of urgency emerged within me.

I felt a strange sense of déjà vu. I saw within it, a depiction of myself.

“One day, I left” writes Catherine Poulain. I too left at the age of twenty. I left Russia to come to France, alone and without knowing the language. I had to leave; it was of vital necessity. I was afraid, of course, but I went anyway.

When she embarks on “Le Rebel”, Lili feels she is meeting her destiny. It is with these men, these sailors, that she must go to the end of the world, or to the end of herself, it's all the same. To forget the past that encumbers her, the boredom, the misfortune. We will never know; it is a mystery.

She shares with these men the work, the fear, the alcohol. They are like brothers... She feels like one of them, even if most of them lurk around her, as if her own femininity was always an obstacle. In this adventure Lili never loses sight of the course she has set for herself: to defend her freedom, against all odds, even when Jude becomes more than a fishing buddy.

This film is an Ode to “free freedom” of which Rimbaud speaks and a feminine vision of a world most often looked at by men. It mixes metaphysical aspirations with terribly concrete situations.

It may also be this: an experience of the extreme.

Dinara Drukarova

Interview with Dinara Drukarova

by Emily Barnett

Your first feature film is inspired by the book *Woman at Sea* by Catherine Poulain. Why did you want to adapt it?

When I read the book, an autobiographical story about her years of fishing in Alaska, I immediately felt that behind this personal story, was a universal narrative of a person trying to escape from a previous life to go towards the unknown. For me, it was the perfect illustration of the expression “casting off” and setting sail. To set sail, is to confront oneself, to know one’s limits, to go as far as possible from oneself. And for a woman, to enter this world of men, this fishing world, to make a place for herself, to gain the respect of others, and the respect of oneself.

The film tells the story of Lili, the heroine, who joins a trawler and lives among the fishermen. How did you “infiltrate” this world?

I started with fishing courses. It’s a difficult world to enter, the door to get in is very small, because the fishermen don’t want “tourists” on their boat. It is a closed world; their work is risky and very physical. Finally, it is a world of men; with few exceptions, women are very rare. A friend, a shipowner, introduced me to the captain of a trawler in Boulogne-sur-Mer to go on a sea trip with French fishermen. I spent five days in a storm, seasick, thinking I was going to die... I had my period, I couldn’t wash... Nothing in this world is adapted to women. For three whole days, I stayed in the hold, lying down, miserable... And then one day, the captain came to get me. He took me out on deck, gave me cold rice to eat. I asked him why he had not come earlier. He answered: «You wanted to see how it goes, there you are, you saw!»

Why did you choose to shoot in Iceland?

After this first calamitous sea trip, I did not let myself be discouraged, and so I embarked on many others! I went on board trawlers in Belgium, France, Iceland, Canada... At the beginning, Julie Gayet and I had chosen to shoot in a village in Quebec, but then Covid arrived, and our locations closed to foreigners... At the same time, Julie put her production company on hold for economic reasons and I was forced to find a new structure to produce my film.

My new producers, Marianne Slot and Carine Leblanc, who had contacts in Iceland, came up with the idea of “moving” the shooting there. I was very pleased with this choice. The Icelandic landscapes give a strong feeling of escape - with its small fishing ports at the end of the world and its infinite sea - but I would say that it is more than that... These landscapes speak to our unconscious. They allow us to unlock our thoughts and our inner movement. I thought a lot about the paintings of J. M. W. Turner. When I am in front of his works, it is not the sea that I am looking at, but rather at my inner self. The first shot of the film shows my heroine from behind, contemplating a calm and hypnotic sea that resonates within her like the call of the sirens in the Odyssey... It is the infinite, the unknown, but it also refers to her inner state: a feeling of loneliness, and at the same time a magnificent desire to escape.

At the beginning of the film, a fisherman jokingly tells Lili that he has no job to offer her, unless she is looking for a “ nanny” job. Is Grand Marin a film about female survival in an exclusively male environment?

My attraction to Catherine Poulain’s book was precisely based on her relationship with men. The film constantly questions the way she positions herself in relation to this environment. The way she looks at men, and the way they look at her. This look evolves throughout the story. At one point, past the little sexist jokes, and the mistrust, the crew accept her for what she is and for her work force. Lili doesn’t feel obliged to overplay her virility, she simply has a strong personality and asks to be respected. This film is a plea to not let ourselves be assigned to labels or sexist clichés; to try to overcome the male/female role playing that society and our culture too often impose on us. Lili will gradually make her place.

Your heroine is quite secretive. We know almost nothing about her. Why such silence about her past and even her thoughts?

This mystery and this silence, already present in the book, allowed me to project myself into the character. I think it’s better not to condition the reader/spectator, not to “prepare” them for the heroine’s actions. We don’t know of a particular event that pushes Lili to leave. It was important for me to get out of the traditional narratives that are sometimes very locked. In my opinion, there are several “Lilis” and several possible stories that made her decide to leave everything, to leave for the unknown and to confront herself. Lili does not only depict Catherine Poulain or myself, she represents the many women who are fighting to exist. I know the symbolic «oceans» that women must cross as a mother, as a lover or as an artist... I want to offer the spectators the possibility to project themselves in this trajectory and to accomplish a very personal journey.

How did you manage to combine acting and directing?

First, thanks to the trust that my producers have given me because it takes courage to go shooting during the middle of Covid in Iceland! But also, it is necessary to have a good partner. I chose to work with the director of photography Timo Salminen (collaborator of Aki Kaurismaki films, editor's note) with whom I shot my short film. Our complicity was built at that time. Between us there is a kind of evidence, we understand each other sometimes through a simple glance. It's very intuitive. Timo is «mute», he hardly speaks; he expresses himself through his images. Everything he films is of extreme beauty. For me he is a poet of the image - and poetry in cinema is what matters most to me. I am interested in emotion, in questioning, in beauty and in simplicity.

There are boat sequences that seem almost documentary-like...

The fishing sequences had to transpire the truth. The sea does not forgive mistakes, we had to be very precise in the way we captured and filmed the gestures. Shooting at sea is very complex, both for insurance reasons and because of the number of people authorized to be on the boat. On the other hand, you cannot ask the actors to execute the precise gestures of the fishermen because the danger on the bridge is omnipresent. We went fishing with the technical team and real fishermen. All the fishing sequences are authentic. The directing operates constantly between this ballet of real scenes and the fictional sequences with the actors.

Around Lili gravitates a troupe of endearing characters. Among them are actors we know, such as Antonyhasan Jesuthasan, revealed by Dheepan, Dylan Robert, the main role in Scheherazade... How did you choose them?

The choice of actors was very important, because I knew that I had to act and direct them at the same time. I had to be extremely precise in choosing my partners. I wanted them to have an accent to create a feeling of the end of the world. Behind an accent, there is always a story, a past that takes us elsewhere. Several accents mixed in the same place is like being in the kingdom of lost souls!

The visual and sound universe of the film is both very coherent and harmonious. How did you shape it with the other members of the team?

My cinematographer Timo Salminen and I chose to shoot in «Scope» format to capture the sea in a more natural way and because trawler cabins are also too small to sometimes fit 7 characters in the frame. And secondly because Icelandic landscapes are more beautiful in this format, and it captures the beautiful colours of the houses and boats.

With the set designer Heimir Sverrisson, we designed and found the sets that brought to life the world I was dreaming of; the bar, the harbor, the hangar, by imagining a dilapidated aesthetic which does not look like an Icelandic postcard.

For the music, with the composer Jean Benoit Dunckel (co-founder of the group «Air»), we looked for sounds that didn't resonate like typical "film music". This music is rather a voice of the film, something organic that does not underline an emotion but penetrates the unconscious, by mixing with the wind and the noises of the boat... We imagined an almost industrial style of music and textures between noise and sound, unfinished and unresolved chords to catalyze the emotion of life at sea on a fishing boat. We looked for raw and soaring sounds, soft and disturbing, dreamlike and hydraulic, to accompany Lili's way of life.

How did the editing go?

I first worked with an editor, Anita Roth. We did a first edit that followed the narrative of the script, but it didn't work. Everything was very beautiful, but the film was devoid of emotion. There was a distance with Lili, I felt far away from her. It's a bit of a mystery how the writing changes, from script to film. This was done with the collaboration of a new eye, that of Valerie Loiseleux. We worked on removing some of the sequences or dialogues that said too much, while still making sure this information remained through gestures and looks, in the smallest things that speak as much as words. It's not going against the script but on the contrary, finding what the script has inspired in the actors' bodies. In Grand Marin we had to deal with actors with very different personalities, some had a very internalized way of expressing things, others on the contrary were more generous, it was a formidable palette that we had in our hands. Lili in the middle, is the one who had to say "I". We worked to put her in the center, so that she takes her place on the boat as well as in our mind, without her saying too much. The idea was to accept her with her mystery. We also added documentary elements that I shot during the location scouting with my iPhone. It gave a certain violence and energy. A boat is dangerous, it rocks. It has its own law, which forces humans to surpass themselves. We really had to feel that the boat is a character.

Lili is a free electron, without attachment. At the end, she even refuses to commit herself to a relationship that would tie her to the land. Is Grand Marin the film of a woman who prefers her freedom to everything else?

Yes. I know the power of attachments in life. How much it can hold us back, as a woman, a lover, a mother... These are powerful ties, but they can immobilize us. Through the character of Lili, I wanted to break all these ties to show the experience of being freed from them. To see this heroine free is to be free yourself at the moment you watch her live. It is to experience, even fleetingly, one's own freedom. In my life, I have known and broken ties. This film is a moment of dream and projection. A fantasy.

Lili, is that you?

I tell my story through that of Catherine Poulain. My departure from Russia at the age of twenty, my relationship with life, with men, and my desire to cross all these spaces to prove something. The shooting was very hard. Physically, emotionally, and psychologically. It was a trance, a state of intense concentration. The stakes for me were immense. The great crossing of doubts, fears, and solitude.

Could we consider this first open-air feature film as a sequel, and even a response, to your 2018 short film *Ma branche toute fine*, which was more of a funereal huis-clos?

Completely. The “mother” who leaves and the “sea” that welcomes. It’s a continuity. It’s like a one and only film. My short film was a last goodbye to a loved one. The washing of the dead mother - that frightening moment - became a last gesture of love and farewell. I made this short because I couldn’t breathe. It allowed me to overcome a mourning. Grand Marin is more a film of survival. It is a test, a confrontation, to know oneself, to go to the end of oneself. I wanted to know if I could go to the end of this shooting. Now I know.

Director's CV

Born in Saint Petersburg, Russia, **Dinara Drukarova** made her acting debut at the age of 12 with Vitali Kanevski's film «*Freeze Die Come to Life*». The film won the Camera d'Or at Cannes Film Festival in 1990. She followed with performance in film by Russian director Alexei Balabanov «*Of Freaks And Men*» that earned her nomination for «*Best Actress*» in European Film Academy award. In parallel to her work in the film world, Dinara Drukarova began studying Human Sciences at the University of Saint Petersburg. In 2000, she decided to leave Russia and settle in France, where she pursued her career as an actress. In 2003, her lead role in «*Since Otar Left*» by Julie Bertuccelli earned her a César nomination for «*Most promising actress*». In 2018 she made her debut as a director with the short film «*My Branch So Thin*» and in 2021 directed her first feature film «*Grand Marin*». She is the 2020 Laureate of the Gan Foundation for Cinema for this film.

Selected Filmography:

1989 «*Freeze Die Come to Life*» Vitali Kanevski
1993 «*Angels In Paradise*» Evgueni Loungine
1998 «*Of Freaks And Men*» d'Alekseï Balabanov
2003 «*Since Otar Left*» Julie Bertuccelli
2006 «*To Get To Heaven, First You Have To Die*» Djamshed Usmonov
2009 «*Silent Voices*» Léa Fehner
2010 «*Gainsbourg: A Heroic Life*» Joann Sfar
2012 «*360*» Fernando Meirelles
2012 «*Amour*» Michael Haneke
2015 «*My Golden Days*» Arnaud Desplechin
2018 à 2020 «*The Bureau*» Eric Rochant
2021 «*Compartment No. 6*» Juho Kuosmanen

Director:

2018 «*My Branch So Thin*» (short film)
2021 «*Grand Marin*» (feature film)

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SLOT MACHINE is a Paris based production company founded in 1993 by Marianne Slot and joined by Carine Leblanc in 2014. Since its creation Slot Machine has produced major artists such as Lars von Trier, Lucrecia Martel, Bent Hamer, Malgoska Szumowska, Paz Encina, Lisandro Alonso, Emma Dante, Marian Crisan, Juliette Garcias, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Sergei Loznitsa, Naomi Kawase and Benedikt Erlingsson.

“Slot Machine depends on writers, directors and artists. We remain competitive because we have been committed to our filmmakers and well connected internationally since 1993, working with institutions, producers, distribution companies and sales agents with whom we have established relations based on trust and respect over many years and many films. It’s this amazing network that enables us to continue to produce art-house films in a coherent manner.”

Marianne Slot and Carine Leblanc

Filmography

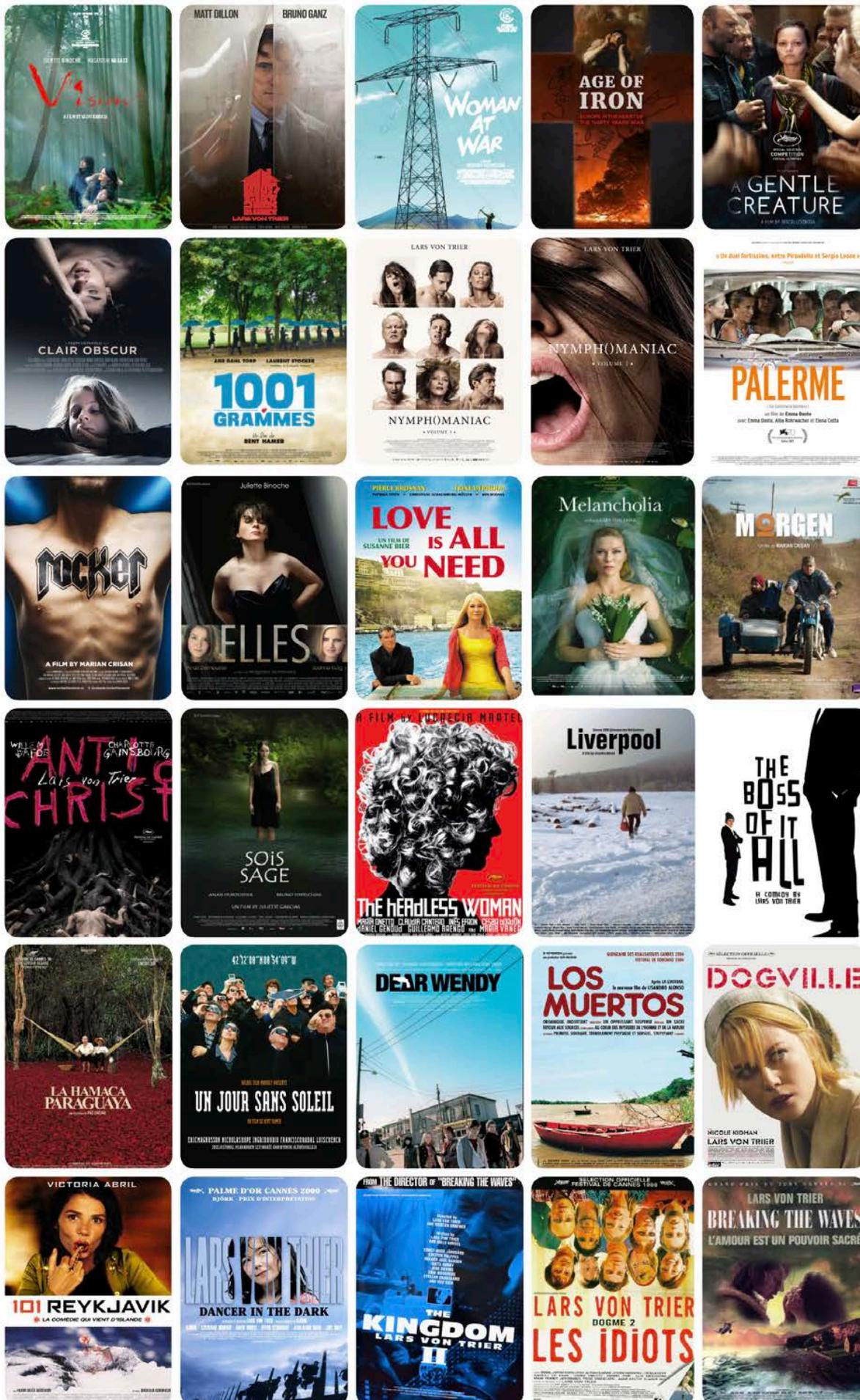






Photo links, trailer and extracts

woman at sea by Dinara Drukarova

Photos

Trailer

Extract 1

Extract 2

Extract 3