



GIORNATE
DEGLI
AUTORI

OPENING FILM



HONEY CIGAR

(CIGARE AU MIEL)

A film by Kamir Aïnouz

PRESSKIT



100 MIN

FRANCE

2020

1:1,85

DOLBY 5.1

A film by
Kamir Aïnouz

SCREENINGS IN VENICE

WED. 2,	5:15 PM	@ SALA PERLA (<i>WORLD PREMIERE</i>)
FRI. 4,	9:00 PM	@ CINEMA ROSSINI (<i>NOT ON LIDO</i>)
TUE. 8,	10:00 PM	@ CINEMA ASTRA 1
TUE. 8,	10:15 PM	@ CINEMA ASTRA 2

HONEY CIGAR (CIGARE AU MIEL)

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CIGARE AU MIEL

PRESSKIT



SYNOPSIS

Paris, 1993.

Selma, 17, lives in a bourgeois and secular Berber family. When she meets Julien, a provocative young man, she realizes for the first time how the heavy rules of patriarchy affect her intimacy.

As she faces her own fears to explore the power and dangers of her desire, her family crumbles and the terror of fundamentalism emerges in her country of origin. Selma must fight back to reclaim her body and become a free woman.



— INTERVIEW WITH KAMIR AINOUZ

Can you tell us about how you became a director?
About your journey toward directing?

K I remember being 8 years old and being already drawn to fictional worlds and especially movies. My mother used to go to the movies several times a week and she often took me with her. I was particularly moved by *Le palanquin des larmes* by Jacques Dorfmann. My mother and I sobbed together. I still remember this shared emotion, which led to my desire to create my own worlds. As it happens, the film was (already) about patriarchy. Without being able to express it clearly, the film resonated in me on an intimate and personal level. My desire of cinema was born out of these emotional shocks I experienced as a spectator. After graduation, I enrolled in a business school in Paris. I found a sense of belonging during my international business school years, it was a very cosmopolitan universe, as you can see in the movie.

But I wasn't fulfilled in this environment. It so happens that my half-brother, Karim Aïnouz, is a film director. I visited him in Rio and I met one of his young women producers who advised me to go to Los Angeles and enroll in a directing program at USC School of Cinematic Arts.

Since then, I have never looked back. I wrote shorts and started to learn about screenwriting. I stayed and lived in Los Angeles and when I began

shooting shorts, I knew that I wanted to tell stories in my own way. So I enrolled in screenwriting classes at UCLA. I became Laura Ziskin's intern (producer of *Spider-Man* and *Fight Club*) and then I worked at Wam Films, Alain Chabat's company in Los Angeles. Both experiences gave me the opportunity to understand the structure of a script. I quickly met Lisa Azuelos and became screenwriter on *LOL USA*. Then I started working on my own feature film, *Honey Cigar* and the script was selected at Rawi's Screenwriting Lab with the Sundance Institute.

How was *Honey Cigar* born?

K I felt the need to write my own stories, nurtured by everything I had heard at home, particularly about colonization and the Revolution. For instance, in my family, we never spoke about "The Algerian War" but about "The Revolution". There was a gap between what I heard at home and what I saw on television or in the movies. This diverging point of view is what gave me the urge to write my own stories. For *Honey Cigar*, it all began with an image I had in mind, of a girl laying on a bed. She was half naked and I could feel she had suffered. I knew I was putting myself out there but it was already somebody else's story. I thought to myself that



she was so torn between her two cultures, Algerian and French that her body didn't belong to her anymore. Therefore anybody could do anything to that body. She could even hurt herself. This violence is shown in the film, for example, through the cucumber scene when Selma takes her own virginity. Her virginity seems so paramount to the people around her that she decides to get rid of it herself, in order to move on. This social pressure comes from her family and from her school friends. The choice of accessory could be laughable, if the violence Selma inflicts herself wasn't so insane. I'm not only talking about physical violence. I mean, choosing to rip out her own flesh, just to feel "normal". I am not so much interested in the struggle against domination, which, by the way, echoes the history of colonization. I am more interested in the struggle against one's own submissiveness.

Is taking her own virginity a way for your heroine to own her body again, and to reclaim an intimacy she is denied?

K Exactly. It is an act of liberation, filmed factually, with seemingly no emotion. But I doubt there will be no emotional scars. It is both a hurtful and liberating act.

A lot of your personal background seems to echo in the film, does it mean it is an autobiographical movie?

K I wouldn't say that. We could say it is semi-autobiographical. The opposition

to a liberal education and yet, coercive on the subject of sexuality when it comes to the girls of the family, is indeed autobiographical. Selma has loving and modern parents who want to protect their daughter at all costs, yet the exact opposite happens. And it goes the other way too: by setting herself free, Selma also hurts the people she loves the most, namely her parents. To exist as a free woman, I too, had to suffer and inflict pain around me. This aspect is autobiographical. I don't want to go further into the subject of what was inspired from my own life and what wasn't. That's a private matter. Of course, I used personal experiences to create this film but what really matters is what I have made out of it. It is this transformation that is relevant.

Why did you choose to tell the story from Selma's point of view, often filmed with the use of close shots?

K It is a form of revenge. When I was growing up in France, as a teenager, I never saw myself on the screen, whether in the movies or on television. I never felt I was being represented, neither as a woman nor as an Algerian. It also comes from a more intimate feeling because, growing up, even though my female cousins and I spoke and laughed very loudly during family dinners, our family did not quite listen to us the way they heard the boys and the men in the family. So I wanted to show a point of view that was not seen or heard the way I thought it should have been. I knew that if I wanted to make a point, I had to show this young woman's point of view only, as



she is trying to connect to her body. I wanted to follow her every move. She is present in every single scene.

Which were your directing choices when it came to filming your heroine?

K We worked with two cameras. One was "alive", in movement, for the close-ups, and the other one was steady, for ensemble shots. We prepared a lot with the actors but I wanted to be able to catch their spontaneity, no matter what happened on set. You can prepare a shooting all you want, sometimes, the most interesting and even magical things that happen on a set, are actually not prepared. I wanted the camera to adapt to the actors, not the opposite. Jeanne Lapoirie, the director of photography, and I, adapted ourselves to the places we shot and to the movements of the actors, so they felt free while filming.

Three worlds coexist in your film: the parents' apartment in Neuilly (a chic suburb of Paris), Algeria and the school, each of them corresponding to a different side of your chameleon-heroine's personality. How did you envision the circulation between these different places?

K These three worlds were already pre-existing in the early stages of the script. There is the parents' world, a warm cocoon, in which Selma feels protected but oppressed as well, since she cannot come and go as she pleases. We worked on the sound to give a quiet feeling, as if cut-off from the outside. At the end of the film, we open sound to the outside world; we hear birds, children's laughter as they come out of school: all of these sounds circulate like Selma, who is starting to live in the outside world. Sound perception is from Selma's perspective as well. At school, on the other hand, it is a new and harsh experience for Selma: I wanted the audience to feel stimulated by the colors and the sound, just like she is. And then, there is Kabylia. I wanted the arrival in this nature to be wild and visceral. This is Selma's roots. She, and we as an audience, are overwhelmed by all



these sensual sounds and this bright light. To me, this is the origin of her desire. We see her eating honey cigars with her mother and the women in her family. I wanted her desire to stem from this sensuous, luminous Algerian universe. In Algeria, we shot almost all the scenes in natural light. It created contrast with the scenes shot in France, which are more oppressive. There is a visual opposition between the green of Algeria's nature and the honey-colored look of her parents' cocoon in Neuilly. When it comes to the business school, colors are much colder, bluer. Selma's character is the connection between these three worlds. This is what we worked on with Zoé Adjani: Selma's goal is to harmonize all these contradictory influences, within herself. The same goes for Julie Roué's music which mixes piano, voice and electronic music: in the end, all these textures find a harmony, with a few dissonant notes: it is Selma's harmony.

The heroine defines herself as double because of her nationality. How did you translate that feeling into the movie?

K By actually blending in her two cultures, whether Selma is in France or in Algeria, in image, sound and music. For instance, in her parents' apartment in France, we hear news from Algeria on the radio or TV. The vibration of music is also key to this duality. Very often, when Selma is in France, Algerian tones will come to mind and the other way around. In Kabylia, there's electronic music, which is usually more associated with Western music. I wanted to go beyond this Oriental/Western opposition and music helped. We worked with Tanina Cheriet, the daughter of late Algerian singer, Idir. She has a crystalline voice. It feels like Selma's inner voice sings throughout the film. We hear it during the opening credits and again at the end. We also hear it when Selma is masturbating while reading *The Egyptian* by Gilbert Sinoué in Neuilly. To me, it perfectly embodies the desire that inhabits an Algerian young woman living in an apartment in France. Both cultures reconcile within Selma.

The film draws a parallel between two battlefields: Algeria, two years after the beginning of the civil war and the heroine's body, desired, wanted and assaulted, as well as a subject of transaction. Is this how you wanted to structure your film?

K Yes. The film draws a parallel between two adolescences: Selma's who is fighting an intimate battle to reclaim her body and Algeria's, which is fighting an inner battle to become itself, because it is still in its teenage years. Algeria became independent in 1962. The film is set in 1993. On the scale of a nation, 30 years is very young. To me, Algeria is going through the violence of an adolescent being assaulted by a powerful outside force: religious terrorism didn't come from inner Algeria. It came from Afghanistan where extremists were trained, as it is mentioned in the film. I included archive footage, which translates the dangerous reality of the times.

Why this title, an oriental pastry, loaded with a sexual symbol?

K I love this pastry and its symbolism has always made me smile. It is visible in the film that Selma's relationship to food is significant. The film opens on a bulimia of honey cigars. The pleasure she feels is obviously a compensation for something else. Later in the film, after a traumatic episode, she stops eating. This excessive relationship to food, in cultures where sexuality is repressed, has always struck me.

How did you choose Zoé Adjani? How did you work with her?

K I saw her in Jérôme Enrico's movie, *Cerise*, after its release. I thought she was a natural, so I kept her name in the back of my mind. I met her for *Honey Cigar* and she talked about the script in a very smart way. She had seen in Selma's character aspects and feelings that I had not experienced in the same way. She related to the story on a personal level. Zoe is a bright and sensitive young woman. I asked her to do some screen tests alone, and then with her partner,



Louis Peres. She was spot-on, touching, moving. I knew right away that she was the one. On set, Zoé is generous, hard working and full of life.

Can you tell us why you picked Amira Casar, whose character liberates herself throughout the film?

K Amira is cosmopolitan, smart and classy and I was looking for these qualities on screen for Selma's mother. She is hypersensitive, which I needed for this character who suffers and never shows it. I wanted the audience to feel that she is boiling inside. Amira has that ability to convey inner feelings. I wanted her to be strong and at the same time to feel a visceral love for her daughter. Amira can seem icy cold and still be this very sensuous and loving person. This duality is also at play in the film and was necessary because Selma couldn't free herself without the incentive of her strong-willed mother. Mother and daughter liberate each other. It's a tenuous and unbreakable dynamic. Amira is very bright and explores with great depth and sensitivity her character's interiority. She goes into fantastic ad-lib on set.





She brought a lot to the film and to her character. I wanted to show her as we had never been seen before, with that 90's haircut. Amira loved her look.

Why did you choose Lyes Salem to be the father? Did he share a little of his director's experience with you?

K I was looking for an excellent actor to embody the duality of being head of such a family: both naturally commanding but also a loving father, doting on his daughter. To play Selma's parents, I needed two strong actors, to ground the picture. They had to be two walls Selma crashes onto but who also structure her. When Lyes Salem enters a room and sits down, everyone calms down. He's an instinctive actor, he goes straight to the point, and like his character, he's into action. He gives everything, but in a very structured and professional way. He also brings a lot on set as a person, with his warmth and generosity. I worked with an actor, not a director. He wears two hats but on my set, he was 100% an actor bringing his talent to the film.

— INTERVIEW WITH ZOE ADJANI



You have already starred in two films at age 21, both times as a main character. How did you come to cinema? Was it your calling?

Z I thought of my work differently when I did *Cerise* (by Jérôme Enrico in 2015), since I was 15 at the time. I went through this experience as if it were a game. I didn't know yet that cinema was what I really wanted to do. I had always attended theater classes, took dancing lessons and also circus classes, so I expressed myself through art. My aunt and the rest of the family introduced me to the world of movies. My mother was a documentary producer, my stepfather a cameraman. I was used to hanging around movie sets and felt comfortable.

The film was shot during summer; I was in high school, so it took place during the summer break. We went to Bulgaria and it was fantastic. Of course, I felt this was what I wanted to do with my life, that every part of me wanted it and that I would learn by working. When I was 18, I traveled around a lot for a year and a half and when I came home, I joined Frédérique Moinon's Talent agency. One day, I received a call from my agent who told me Kamir Aïnouz was shooting her first feature-film and wanted to meet me. We met in a café at La Bastille and talked a lot about the film and the shooting took place one year later. Our meeting was at first two women talking. It was a conversation from woman to woman, before we started working on the characters and she told me what she wanted from the actors.

Zoe vous demande svp de bien vouloir retourner à la formulation de départ pour la première question « je n'ai pas abordé ni reçu le travail de la même manière [...] jusqu'à je l'ai vécu comme un jeu » car elle trouve que cela dénature le sens de son propos, la résonance n'est plus la même.

What was it that attracted you when you read the script of *Honey Cigar*? Did it feel familiar to you?

Z I was very touched by *Selma*. She is very vulnerable and yet remains proud and strong. This duality can often be disconcerting, since you never know how she is going to react when facing problems. You wonder when everything she is holding back is going to explode. I felt very close to her. Also, Kamir Aïnouz and I are very much alike when it comes to our capacity to laugh about anything, our sarcastic behavior towards life as well as this strength we share in overcoming every obstacle that comes our way. These aspects made me feel closer to her and to her film.

How was the shooting in Algeria? Was it like coming home for you?

B I am French, both my parents were born on French soil. But my grandfather, on my father's side, was Algerian, from Constantine. I obviously have a strong, but also private, connection to Algeria. A part of my personal background was opening up to me. Since I was



a child, I had always wanted to go there. But I couldn't because of political and cultural reasons, which are explained in the film. To me, Algeria was surrounded by this big mystery. Discovering Algeria while shooting the film and also with Kamir, who introduced me to Kabylia, was a true initiation journey for my character and for me. Now that I have visited the country, I need to come back alone to have my own experience of Algeria. This discovery has completely served the film and fed my character. Seeing these places and meeting all these people has been very meaningful to me.

How did you prepare yourself for the part?

Z I recreated Selma's personal history, from her early childhood to the moment you penetrate the movie's chore. I asked a lot of questions and imagined a whole part of her life in order to explain her relationship to other people and towards the subject of filiation. Kamir gave me books by Algerian writers, such as Kateb Yacine and Mouloud Feraoun. I read a lot and impregnated myself with all the events of the time, to understand this very heavy context since I knew nothing about its stakes and extent. So, I did historical research and, on a more personal level, I, of course, connected Selma to some of my personal life experiences.

In the movie, your capacity to change your appearance whenever your character enters a new environment, is striking...

Z Selma tests herself in every

situation. She acts as a chameleon when she is with Julien and his friends because she wants to belong. But she is also very afraid to be a disappointment to her parents, so she forgets herself. Which explains the inconsistency between what she seems to be and what people believe she feels. She tries to hide this black hole of hers wherever she goes. Therefore it can be tricky for her to carry all her sorrows and traumas. Even at the end, Selma has not realized what she has endured. Even though she is strong, what will happen when her strength disappears? Her sensitivity is her main asset and will make her independent. She is also strong-willed, despite the labels people want to put on her. I do think that in the end, we all remain alone with our feelings. But perhaps, Selma more than others. She struggles through out the film.

Do you identify with Selma regarding her relationship to her body and her sexuality?

Z Sexuality is related to another person and it is how you discover it. You learn about yourself by discovering pleasure as a woman, in the eyes and the touch of your partner. Later, you discover what you prefer. I feel close to Selma in the way she owns everything that she is: whether it is her virginity or her desire, however strong it can be. I see myself in all of that. In the fear of being judged for your looks and sexual desires. No woman should ever force herself for a man. It reminds me of the cucumber scene. It's an act of liberation because Selma will now be able to feel whole, with regards to what she told

everybody. But it is not really who she is and how she wants to live. The same goes when she makes love for the first time with Julien. She finally feels ready. Not because she did not want him before but because she was not ready to have sex. I also see myself in this duality woman often face: "Do I love myself?" or "Do I love my reflection in another's eyes?" "What do I desire?"

How did you approach the intimate scenes, while knowing the director would not show nudity on screen and refused to objectify bodies?

Z It is precisely why I was so trustful on the set and how I really let go of myself during these scenes. Showing nudity on screen can be a choice perfectly understandable in some cases. But in this film, there is a sort of physical modesty easy to understand. We are with Selma but we cannot be attracted to her since we never see her body. However, we feel everything through her gaze. We are as close as it gets to her intimacy. We are in her mouth, in her breathing, in the way she bends her back, in the way she feels her partner. We were able to do that with Kamir because I trusted her. I wasn't paying attention to myself, nor judging my body, since I knew it would not be shown on screen, this enabled me to free myself.

How did you build the relationship with your fictional parents, Amira Casar and Lyes Salem?

Z All the scenes taking place in the family apartment were shot back-to-back during two weeks, putting us in the everyday atmosphere of this family surrounded by their pains and frustrations. It allowed me to feel right away this connection with my fictional parents, which I also felt with the actors. Thanks to our conversations with Kamir Aïnouz, we all knew what to do. In this apartment, where the characters live so close to one another, with this verbal violence, always staying under control. Even during the second diner, when Selma spits her truth in the face of everyone, her anger stays under control. It was hard and at the same time it felt like fire under water. But actually we managed to have this chemistry between us pretty easily. Our trio became quite natural, thanks to Kamir's casting choices, who had sensed that the three of us could get along well.

What are your future plans?

Z I meet directors, read a lot of scripts and I also write. Seeing Kamir Aïnouz accomplishing her wildest dreams and achieving her goals, encouraged the young woman I am, to believe that I deserved it too, that I had it in me. These projects won't happen over night but I want to nurture them so, perhaps, one day, I can make them real. I have a lot of ideas!



— BIOGRAPHY KAMIR AÏNOUZ



Born in Paris of Algerian parents, **Kamir Aïnouz** lived seven years in Los Angeles where she studied film writing at UCLA and participated in various filmmaking workshops at USC-School of Cinematic Arts. Sister of renowned Brazilian-Algerian director Karim Aïnouz, Kamir has been developing original content inspired by her dual Algerian and French culture. She has also worked as a screenwriter for cinema and television, notably on “Lol USA” by Lisa Azuelos. « Honey Cigar » is her directorial debut. Her original script was selected at the Rawi Screenwriters Lab with the Sundance Institute and awarded the Fondation Beaumarchais-SACD cinema grant.

— ELIPH PRODUCTIONS

Christine Rouxel began her career as an assistant director and technical director for popular theater companies. She worked in some of the best theater places in France and in Avignon’s Festival. Then she turned to audiovisuel. After working as an artistic director for TF1 Films Production, Christine Rouxel joined Chez Wam as a producer alongside Alain Chabat. Together they produced eight feature films. Especially “I do : how to get married and stay single” by Eric Lartigau, “Nothing in my pockets” by Marion Vernoux, winner of Duo TV Films Français and nominated in Emmy Awards, “Babies” by Thomas Balmes (out of World Focus Pictures) and “On the trail of Marsupilami” by Alain Chabat. She then founded Eliph Productions.

Eliph’s first production is Bryan Marciano’s generational series “Twenty-Five”, broadcast on OCS, which receives the prize for interpretation at the Festival Série Mania for the performance of its lead actor, Bryan Marciano.

Setting high production standards as a core value, both in themes addressed by its films and the originality of the director’s vision, Eliph Productions developed and produced Kamir Aïnouz’s first movie, « Honey Cigar ».

Concomitantly, Eliph Productions is currently in pre-production for David Oelhoffen’s “The Fourth Wall”, a powerful feature film that portrays the journey of a man who decides to set up up Anouilh’s Antigone in Beirut during the Lebanese war, adapted from the bestseller and Goncourt’s winner Sorj Chalandon, and “Noah’s Ark”, first feature film by Bryan Marciano, who questions the role of caregivers in an association dealing with young homosexuals rejected by their families and society.



— WILLOW FILMS



Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar began her career as a journalist in Los Angeles after completing a BA in journalism in Paris. She worked at The Hollywood Reporter in Los Angeles first with the Special Issues and then as the Associate International Editor.

She then became a film consultant in LA for different French producers, the National Film Board of Canada as well as one of Columbia Pictures producer. She moved back to France and produced films at Trinacra Films before founding her own production companies LOMA NASHA and VENDREDI FILMS with Pierre Kubel in 2001.

Together, they produced 14 feature films.

In 2008, Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar wrote her first screenplay with Lucien Jean-Baptiste, LA PREMIERE ETOILE. Following its box office success, she wrote and directed her first film MA PREMIERE FOIS, then she directed 2 more films BOWLING and ONCE IN A LIFETIME.

IN 2015, Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar founded a new production company, WILLOW FILMS where she has produced and co-produced five films. HEAVEN CAN WAIT (Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar) COBY (Christian Sonderegger), ALL ABOUT MOTHERS (Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar), HONEY CIGAR (Kamir Ainouz), A GOOD MAN - Cannes Film Festival Label 2020 (Marie-Catille Mention-Schaar).



CAST

Selma	Zoé Adjani
The Mother	Amira Casar
The Father	Lyes Salem
Julien	Louis Peres
Luka	Idir Chender
William	Axel Grandberger
Sélim	Jud Bengana
Hafida Benslimane	Rym Takoucht
The Father Benslimane	Samir El Hakim



CREW

Director	Kamir Aïnouz
Screenplay	Kamir Aïnouz
Director of photography	Jeanne Lapoirie
Editor	Albertine Lastera
Production designer	Angelo Zamparutti
Costume designer	Isabelle Pannetier
Sound on set	Laurent Benaïm
Sound designer	Melissa Petitjean
Musique	Julie Roué
Make up artist	Natali Tabareau
Hair stylist	Milou Sanner
Producers	Christine Rouxel, Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar

Production Company	Eliph Productions, Willow Films
Countries of production	France, Algeria, Belgium
In co-production with	Les films du Fleuve, Les Productions du Ch'timi, Les Films du Mirakle, M.D. Ciné

French Distributor	Paname Distribution
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

NON CONTRACTUAL CREDITS



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