



— CONRAD & CRAB — IDIOTIC GEMS


OFFICIAL
SELECTION
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM
2006

A Film by Claude Schmitz

PRESSKIT



FRENCH

WED. FEB 4th, 9:30 AM @ Kino 1

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— SYNOPSIS

East of France. Today.

Alain Crab and Francis Conrad, two detectives from the Criminal Investigation Department, are transferred to the small town of Saint-Marie-aux-Mines. New to the area, they soon find themselves entangled in an investigation surrounding the theft of a priceless opal. Looking for the jewel, they might end up finding the true gem of all, love.



A CONVERSATION WITH CLAUDE SCHMITZ



These two cops, already at the center of *The Other Laurens*, return here as the main characters, but are relocated from Perpignan to Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines. Why was it important for you to “deterritorialize” them, and how did this geographical, cultural - and almost climatic - uprooting allow you to explore their cinematic potential differently, as well as the nature of their investigation into the stolen opal?

At first, the idea was to make a film built around a duo of characters from my previous film, born out of the unlikely encounter between Rodolphe Burger and Francis Soetens. There was a natural chemistry between them, as well as a shared approach to acting — and also to foolishness — which generated scenes that resonated deeply with my own path as a filmmaker. It evoked the classic buddy-cop duo of American and French films from the 1980s.

I wondered how I could play with this archetype, with these slightly ageing characters from another era. I was amused by the idea of confronting them with certain challenges and by realizing that this duo is also a couple. It is a couple that refuses to acknowledge itself and is constantly caught in a series of missed chances: when one of them is supposed to get married, the other, who is his best man, loses the ring. Everything seems to conspire so that they will never part.

After *The Other Laurens*, I immediately suggested to Rodolphe and Francis that we keep this duo alive, and I began searching for the best context in which to unfold it.

One day, Rodolphe invited me to his home, the family farm in Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, where he had set up his recording studio. This

was a year before the shoot; at the time, I had no idea I would end up making the film there. This is not the opulent Alsace of the Wine Route, but the neighboring valley, with a Twin Peaks-like atmosphere, marked by deindustrialization and genuine economic and social hardship.

I arrived during the mineral show, the second largest in the world after the one in Austin, Texas. I thought, “*Here is this singular territory, with this mineral fair at its very center — that’s an intriguing setting.*” I began to imagine a loose narrative thread, a kind of investigation that would allow us to move through the town and encounter its inhabitants. It was a way of reconnecting with what we had done in Braquer Poitiers: arriving somewhere and turning the camera toward a territory in order to capture something of its essence.

In *The Other Laurens*, these two cops appeared as slightly detached, humorous observers within a dark story. What interested you in bringing them back at the center of this new film, and how does their role change when they become protagonists rather than commentators?

What I particularly appreciated in these two was their sense of freedom and their relationship to improvisation. In *The Other Laurens*, Francis and Rodolphe effectively acted as commentators; all of their scenes were improvised. I wanted to extend that state of grace and the special bond they had developed during the shoot. This new film allows their range as actors to be expanded and the mechanics of this archetypal duo to be explored. There was, on my part, a genuine curiosity — the desire to follow them and to see how they would evolve as leading characters within a fiction created specifically for them.

The dynamic between them evokes classic comic duos like Laurel and Hardy or Abbott & Costello, yet placed in a contemporary police setting. How did you adapt this timeless comedic interplay to modern characters and situations, and what does it reveal about them as protagonists?

Indeed, their duo inevitably brings others to mind. But what is specific to Francis and Rodolphe is that they are not formally trained actors. There is therefore a very thin line between who they are and the characters they play. That is precisely where I felt there was something to explore, particularly by granting them a great deal of freedom in their approach to acting.

The physicality of these two men is very distinctive. Where Francis is grounded and earthy, Rodolphe is far more airy and talkative. Their dynamics are almost opposite. This is not a matter of character construction; it is simply the way they are in real life.

The idea, then, was to confront them with other people and to observe how this duo could continue to function, even when they are separated. I often thought of Hergé, and especially *The Castafiore Emerald*, an anti-narrative in which atmosphere and characters matter more than plot.

Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines is a small town, almost a character in itself, with its own rhythms and social quirks. How did this setting shape your satire of local life, and in what ways did it highlight the cultural and personal dislocation of the two cops?

As I spent more and more time in Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, I began to think of its topography as a character in its own right. The film clearly became a “territorial” film, in the sense that I tried to capture its essence, with everything that entails.

The idea was to convey something of this specific place, notably by meeting its inhabitants and allowing ourselves to be surprised by these encounters. This is why, in the end, almost all the characters in the film are played by local people. It was important for me because it gives the film a sense of truth and a strong identity. The film constantly rubs up against reality, creating a delicate balance between fiction and the real.

I’m not sure the film can be described as a satire. I would rather say that it seeks to reflect a geographical and social reality while avoiding folklore, placing it instead within a fictional framework that naturally includes its share of humor and offbeat moments.

The film’s depiction of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, its local events, and its inhabitants relies on an observational, socially aware approach, blending humor and irony with close attention to everyday life. How did this vision of small-town realism influence your filmmaking, and how did you balance this almost documentary-like observation with the fictional and burlesque story of the two cops?

For me, the idea was to embrace the particular rhythm of the town during the summer period. We therefore followed the real chronology of a summer in Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines. We began shooting during the mineral show, then followed its dismantling, and continued filming afterward, at a time when the town becomes almost empty again and a certain melancholy settles in. I believe we can feel this melancholy in the film. The film constantly embraced that reality, and I tried to let my characters evolve within it, observing how it might transform them and allow them to grow.



The film navigates between comedy, French comedic police films and dramatic reflection. How did you conceive this interplay of genres, and in what ways does blending these cinematic genres allow you to tackle themes such as identity, uprooting, and social observation?

I have always been drawn to hybridity and the blending of genres; it is something that deeply fascinates me. The frictions between reality and fiction, the play with codes, contradictions, and digressions are modes of storytelling that I find particularly compelling.

I am very interested in questions of dramaturgy, and it is probably what I enjoy most about my work — provided that things remain open. I like to move away from linear narrative structures and leave room for the unexpected, for surprise and chance. This attentiveness is an approach that seeks to step outside of control and to open up narratives, allowing them to offer unexpected tones and colors.

Behind the burlesque humor, the film seems to offer a gentle yet sharp critique of institutions, human behavior, and small-town life. How did you approach balancing comedy and social satire, and what did you want the audience to take away from this blend?

What particularly interests me with this film is showing territories and bodies that are rarely — if ever — seen in cinema. Not to mock them, quite the opposite, but to endow them with a poetic force that is, of course, not without a certain sense of humor.

Showing a town shaped by deindustrialization, and portraying people with singular life experiences who are not industry professionals, is a way of offering — within a fictional framework — a different perspective on these realities, which are most often presented through the frequently bleak lens of current affairs. It is a way of showing that there are communities living realities capable of generating stories.

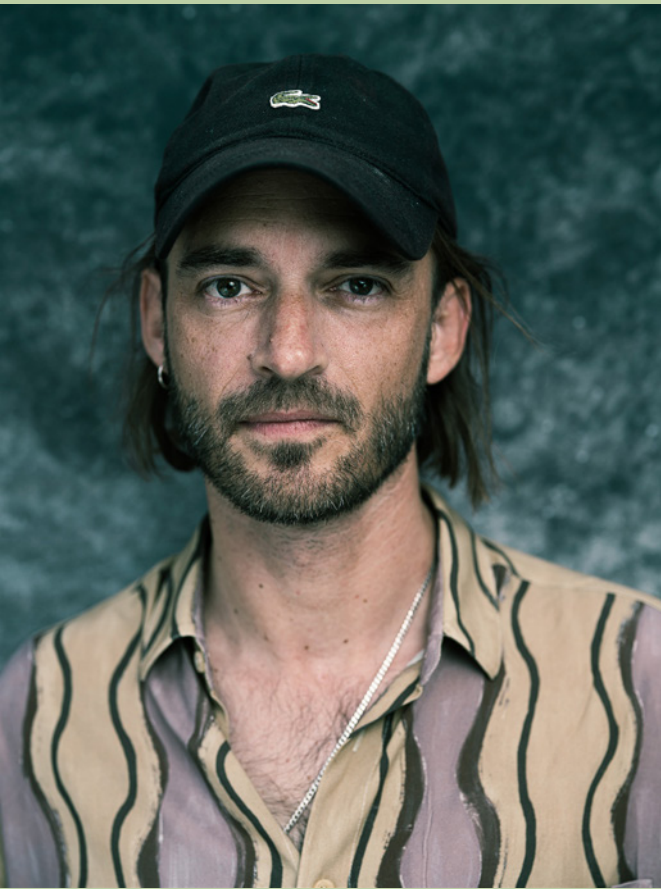
You are also a theatre director, and a certain theatricality can be felt in your films, whether in the staging, the dialogue, or the way characters occupy space. How do theatre and cinema coexist within your film-making practice?

Inevitably, my background in theater has influenced the way I approach cinema. I would say that what I have brought into my films is, above all, a particular relationship to time. I make extensive use of long takes and do very little cutting. I like to let the performers create the rhythm of a scene, rather than relying on excessive shot fragmentation or editing effects.

Letting things unfold is probably something inherent to theater, where everything is a matter of the here and now, and where temporality emerges from the performers and the way they inhabit time and space.



BIOGRAPHY CLAUDE SCHMITZ



Claude Schmitz is a Belgian film director and theatre director. A graduate of INSAS in Brussels, he has spent several years developing a unique body of work that spans both cinema and theatre. An associate artist at the Théâtre de Liège and the Comédie de Caen, he also teaches directing at INSAS.

His work is marked by a taste for hybrid forms, combining humour, dreamlike imagery and popular references, which he transposes both on stage and in his films. After several acclaimed short and medium-length films, including *‘Rien sauf l’été’* (2017) and *‘Braquer Poitiers’* (2019), he made his first feature film, *‘Lucie Loses Her Horse’* (2021), which was selected for the Locarno Film Festival. His second feature film, *‘The Other Laurens’* (2023), presented at the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes, confirms the originality of his universe and his talent for reinventing the codes of storytelling.

Based in Brussels, Claude Schmitz now pursues a career at the crossroads of theatre and cinema, freely exploring the margins of fiction and the possibilities of reality.

FILMOGRAPHY CLAUDE SCHMITZ

2023	<i>The Other Laurens</i> – Directors' Fortnight
2022	<i>Lucie Loses Her Horse</i> – IFFR Bright Future
2014	<i>The Cut</i> Short Film – Winner Best International Short Sundance Film Festival



CAST & CREW

Francis Conrad	Francis Soetens
Alain Crab	Rodolphe Burger
Jeanne Hartmann	Anne Suarez
Nour Zeroual	Samia Lemmiz
Louise Engelhardt	Chloé Legrand
Director	Claude Schmitz
Screenplay	Claude Schmitz
Director of Photography	Florian Berutti
Editing	Marie Beaune
Production Design	Melissa Bissessur
1st Assistant Director	Helene Karenzo
Original Music	Thomas Turine
Sound Design	Bruno Schweisguth
Production	Wrong Men, Chevaldeuxtrois
Producers	Benoît Roland, Jérémy Forni
Country	Belgium, France
French Distributor	JHR Films
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

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