



31 juin films  
présente

*les*  
*fraises*  
*des*  
*bois*

réalisé par  
Dominique Choisy



scénario et réalisation DOMINIQUE CHOISY avec JULIETTE DAMIENS . JULIEN LAMBERT . STÉPHANE LARA . JEAN-MICHEL NOIREY  
NATHALIE RICHARD assistant à la mise en scène YOHANN TURBEAU image LAURENT COLTELLONI . JULIEN ROUX . ALEXIS KAVYRCHINE  
son LUG LEBEL . ARTHUR CLUZEL costumes et décoration CÉLINE MOMBERT montage ISABELLE DEBRAYE production 31 JUIN FILMS  
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*31 Juin Films présente*

*les fraises  
des  
bois*

*Wild Strawberries*

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*Plus d'informations, photos du film et dossier de presse  
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## *Synopsis*

Violette lives in the heart of the French countryside with her parents, who are rich farm owners. Gabriel works at a supermarket checkout. These two inconspicuous characters may appear to have little history, but they are suffocating in their daily lives, and both hide dark secrets. From hesitant meetings to chance encounters, in the course of the seasons they will travel an unpredictable path as they seek to break free of their chains... and resort to radical solutions.



*“An unfolding story.”*

## *Interview with Dominique Choisy*

My initial concern was to bring a naturalist approach. The fairy-tale dimension only emerged when we began to work with the actors, Juliette Damiens and Julien Lambert. I had the idea of working with these two artists - who didn't know each other - and when I saw them together something happened that I really liked, something sort of playful and childlike. I realised it was possible to move towards something other than what I had imagined, to add an element of fantasy, to try to be a bit more like a tightrope walker balancing on a wire. Situations I'd thought of in the abstract suddenly took concrete form, and I wanted to go further than what I'd

written down in the script, to try to create an environment removed from reality where the focus would be much more on both of their bodies and on the décor; putting them in boxes where they would either be constrained or free. Ultimately, it was the décor which led me towards the fairy tale.

*If we think of classic fairy tales, like Perrault's "Hop-o'-My-Thumb" or "Hansel and Gretel" by the Brothers Grimm, they revolve around a difficult economic situation which leads to familial disruption. In "Les fraises des bois", these two things are not connected. We have Violette, a character from a rather affluent background, an "heiress", who shatters the family unit. On the other hand, we have Gabriel, a character living in relative poverty who tries to ring back his little sister and rebuild a family bond. Did you intend to subvert the conventions of the fairy tale?*

When "Hop-o'-My-Thumb", Gabriel, gets lost and takes refuge in a house, he is

confronted by the daughter of the ogre, without realising it. The daughter of the ogre would be Violette, who, we could say, is also entirely unaware of her status. Before we moved towards the fairy-tale aspect, for the character of the mother played by Nathalie Richard we had thought of costumes which were completely different from those she finally wears in the film. When she tried them on, in front of Julien and Juliette, it didn't work, the effect was much too naturalist, and that was when we thought of the character of the Queen Mother in Snow White, and we wanted to give her a hieratic feel, with turtle necks, black and white checked plaid - also a nod to the chess board in Alice in Wonderland. And in fairy tales it's also possible to express extremely brutal ideas while rendering them acceptable. If I had presented the film's occurrences in the literal and realist fashion, it wouldn't have been much fun, for one thing, and it would very quickly all have been a bit overwhelming. Instead, we allowed ourselves to explore the margins, which I find much more interesting. I was very keen for us to develop that side of things, that imagery, while trying to avoid making it too ostentatious.

*These two themes were already present in "Confort moderne": economic difficulties and family breakdown. In "Les fraises des bois", this is exacerbated, going as far as parricide. Ten years separate the films, but there are many echoes between them, they have many similarities.*

The two films are very similar and yet very dissimilar. I think the differences are found more in terms of form. We had tried to be rather clinical in "Confort moderne", favouring a very cold aesthetic, one of surgical precision. I'm interested in the real world, in everyday events, but I don't feel that realism is the best way to portray reality, perhaps all the more so in France. As a result, what the two films

have in common is a kind of aquaplaning. We start from situations which are very much anchored in reality, but with characters who go off at a tangent. What I hope is that we will all follow them, that none of the film's viewers will continue straight ahead while the characters turn off at a corner, because I think that's what interests me most of all. First giving the impression of characters who are on fixed tracks, for whom determinism and destiny are more than just empty words, and then suddenly making their routes branch off, to show that life is full of surprises, and that no path can ever be guaranteed to run smoothly for ever. When we consider our everyday lives, sometimes if we take a step back they can seem comical, bizarre, funny. In this case, it's true that the step Violette takes is rather brutal - she kills her mother and father - but it's only by entirely shifting her perspective that she realises there is no other solution but to eliminate them. In fact, that is above all what the two films have in common: the idea of going off the beaten track.

*Is this reflected in the structure of the film over three seasons? Drawing two parallel lines in winter, which then run along close to each other in spring, before meeting in the summer?*

Yes, that's the outline which enabled me to stick to a kind of restrained realism in winter, and then, in the spring, supported by the two actors, I was able to force openings, air holes in the atmosphere established at the beginning. In summer, when Violette and Gabriel are together, we are able to enter their world entirely, a world which floats and drifts. They "take to the water" we might say - so it's fitting that the film ends at the beach!

*Could it be said that this structure over three seasons responds to the recurring theme of folding?*

Yes, folding and camouflage, transformation. When Violette looks at her book with the anatomical charts, she only has to turn one page for the outside to become the inside, for the living body to becoming a skeleton, for everything to be utterly changed. Violette needs to transform her everyday life, otherwise it will be unliveable. She does other things with it: from a napkin, she creates table decorations. Folding hides and reveals at the same time. But this happened almost despite ourselves. There is a very important relationship with objects in the film. Objects, in their own quiet way, have things to say, they are there, disseminated in the image. If you see them, all the better, if you don't see them, it's no big deal. They are the pattern in the wallpaper.

***In folding, we find this idea of lines again, even lines of escape.***

The film folds up and unfolds again. At the start, a tightly compressed situation is set out, then the further the film progresses, the more this proposition unfolds and becomes more complex. Folds also play around the edge of the frame. It is at the edge, the periphery, that the unexpected, the surprising can be found. A way of refusing to accept that a story cannot be "unfolded", we might say.

***Does this relate to the fact that Gabriel is skilled as a tightrope walker, that he plays with the ideas of falling and tumbling, all the better to avoid them?***

Julien, the actor, has a circus background, and the acrobatic side of things evidently came from him. While we were looking for locations for the summer scenes, he took it upon himself to jump up onto the railing of a motorway service station in Baie de Somme. The wind was quite strong and it looked really beautiful, really spectacular. So when it comes to being on a wire, or

the edge of a fold, the idea of losing one's balance is never far behind. The film plays with that too. I really like the temptation of the absurd, the temptation of bad taste, taking the risk of walking on the wire, and perhaps falling off. Otherwise it's no fun! After all, we're not there simply to film a script, which is an object that can sometimes be regarded as sacred. It's only a working document, the basis for a story, a springboard. Compared to "Confort moderne" - where I tried to stick to the script, to be very rigid, even a little too rigid - with this film, ten years later, I wanted to be much more open to outside influences, to things not necessarily written down. I like the idea of my initial screenplay being like an aircraft carrier, that everyone can land on with their own baggage and then take off again. It is an open concept, and in this space there was total freedom.

***The prostitution which Gabriel is involved in tends to avoid the sordid aspect inherent in this kind of activity. In the film, there is complicity in it, even humour, much more in any case than there is in his gainful employment in the supermarket.***

The first customer, in my opinion, is genuinely in love, and the only way he can have access to Gabriel is to pay him. I wanted to create a protective relationship, which Gabriel willingly accepts. Gabriel has this desire to rebuild something which might resemble a family. There is nothing to oblige him to stay and have dinner at the table where he has had sex just a few minutes earlier. He stays because there is a kind of affection, a kind of recognition of what he is in that space. Something which the supermarket, where he is much more of an object, does not give him at all. That may be debatable, it may be a rather idealistic vision, but I wanted to create this bond between the two characters. The

film is obviously not a documentary about prostitution, that's not what interests me at all. I prefer to say something about Gabriel in relation to those kinds of situations, where he really wants to be nice, to do good, to try to win a kind of recognition that is sadly missing elsewhere.

***The characters never lapse into any kind of self-pity.***

No, because for me, if they were complaining they would not really be living. But they have come to terms with their existence: Gabriel has chosen to blur everything around him. He often emerges from a blur into sharp focus, or, inversely, drifts out of focus back to a blur. It's important for him that things are not too well defined, otherwise it would be unbearable. He has decided to look at his own situation in soft focus, as if to soften the blows. Violette, for her part, decides not to be in the image, she decides to be at the very border of the frame, always at the outer

limit, hanging on, "on the edge", in shot / out of shot. It is her way of saying, "I'm there but I'm not really there", and in this way, not fully being part of this dreadful family portrait, she can manage to deal with her situation.

***What type of equipment did you film with?***

The film was shot with the Canon 5D, but not for economic reasons. When the first head cameraman - Alexis Kavyrchine, who did Gabriel's winter scenes - asked me what image I had in mind, I kept telling him about wallpaper. I wanted the characters to appear as if they had come unstuck from a background both highly decorative and uniformly "patterned". The characters would slide around on this background, continuously rejected by it, not held by it. There should be something which spoke of solitude directly in the image, a décor so dense it would become flat. That was when Alexis thought of



the 5D, of using its limitations as an asset. So Gabriel found himself blurred, not being, like Violette, in a very well-lit environment. This reinforced the idea of wallpaper, Gabriel was able to spring from it, find his place, and then return to blend back into its patterns. Violette, on the other hand, slips into the image and is rejected by the house. It's a bit like those pop-ups in children's books.

*There is great precision of framing, particularly in wide shots. Despite its sparse and economical approach, the film offers undeniable visual richness.*

Not having much money does not prevent careful reflection on framing and lighting, on how shots are set up. We talked a lot about all that in advance. It's really a film which was put together before shooting, although naturally this didn't stop us abandoning some ideas as we went along and going in other directions. Objects - back to them again - played a key role in shot construction. We had a kind of treasure chest we could dip into

at leisure. Often, including a new object would give rise to an image or a situation not necessarily written down. Money or no money, I feel that the staging work is never affected by it. We often sought out equivalents: when things were not possible for economic reasons, we would try to find an alternative which gave a similar feel. The hardest thing is telling oneself that there are certain things you have to rule out in advance. But being rational doesn't mean having no imagination or no sense of fantasy. Sometimes you find things which can be more rewarding because they are less obvious.

*The film is almost entirely composed of static shots.*

I'm really fascinated by films which move all over the place, but I don't understand how it's possible, how they do that. I love seeing things done that way, I often find it very exciting, but it's not at all what I want to do. I need a frame in which to construct an image. There was more movement in "Confort moderne", but overall it was also

quite fixed. Again, what I like, is when the characters play with the edge of the frame and with depth. I love to see people coming in and out of shot. That's my kind of movement. The camera only moves on four occasions, each of which involves exceptional occurrences, and the rest of the film was devised entirely with static shots.

*On the subject of imagery; you referred to wallpaper. And yet, in terms of soundtrack, you seem firmly opposed to musical decoration. In your films, music is never extra-diegetic - with one exception, the final sequence of "Fraises des bois".*

I love cinema music in other people's films, in Almodovar for example. I find it wonderful, but in my own films I don't know how to use it, I don't hear it. With the sound editing, the aim was to lend the film a musical atmosphere, but with everyday sounds. Two pieces of music were planned in the original script: an extract from Ravel's "Concerto for the Left Hand", in a scene that was not shot in the end, and the "Humming Chorus" from Puccini's "Madama Butterfly", which was supposed to be used elsewhere in the film. But I soon lost interest in hearing it at that point, I found it absurd, because there was no diegetic music anywhere else. But Isabelle, the editor had a bit of an intuition and tried to place it somewhere else, where it didn't work much better... and then, as a last resort, she tried it at the end, the end being a kind of final bend, something unexpected in the kind of film this is. And there, to our great surprise, it worked... So even if it means changing things around, sometimes it's best to just go ahead and try things out. What's more, it's a piece of music, with its ethereal voices, which has a real fairy-tale feel to it. But other than that, I have to admit I'm a bit uptight about music, I'm always worried

it might seem as if I'm just trying to plug something. In that respect at least, I prefer to stick to the beaten track.

*Shooting in Amiens and Picardy once again, is that a way of sticking to the beaten track too?*

I'm a native of Savoie, and Savoie is so beautiful that I don't know if there are any more stories left to tell about it. Whereas in Picardy, I'm always surprised by the horizon, I never get used to it. To be able to see so far, without obstruction, to see the sky meeting the land, is really something which blows me away, I feel it physically. That region, the Baie de Somme, its limits and its borders, those moments where the landscape stops and gives way to the sea when you didn't expect it to be there, there are aspects of folding there too, yet again. The landscape folds into two parts: one part is the fields of sugarbeet, the other a majestic sky with, suddenly, a light like nothing ever seen before. Even after twenty years spent in that region, it still feels brand new to me. And the whole thing inspires fiction, it tells stories all the time. And since, in the end, bodies are what interest me most, Picardy has vast spaces where one can lose oneself, but which are also an extremely welcoming place for bodies.

*Interviewed in Paris, 16 January 2012*





## *Dominique Choisy*

Dominique Choisy is a former student of the French cinema school, l'IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques), which is now the FEMIS.

After directing 5 short films, he shot *Modern Comfort*, his first feature film in 1999, with Nathalie Richard, Jean-Michel Noirey et Stéphane Lara, each of them playing a part in *Les Fraises des bois*.

*Modern Comfort* won the Fipresci Prize at the Mar del Plata Festival (Argentina) in 2001.

D. Choisy is also an editor for the French TV channel France 3. He teaches writing and directing at the Université Picardie Jules Verne (UPJV) in Amiens where he lives, and is a member of the French association, l'ACID (Association du Cinéma Indépendant pour sa Diffusion), which supports and promotes independent movies from all over the world.



## *fiche technique*

Production : **31 Juin Films**  
Producteurs : **Agnès Vallée – Emmanuel Barraux**  
Directeur de production : **François Drouot**  
Assistant de production : **Jérémy Pradier**  
Scénario/Réalisation : **Dominique Choisy**  
Assistanat mise en scène : **Yohann Turbeau**  
Lumière : **Laurent Coltelloni / Julien Roux / Alexis Kavyrehine**  
Son : **Lug Lebel / Arthur Cluzel**  
Déco, costumes, accessoires : **Céline Mombert**  
Régie : **Véronique Lespérat-Héquet / Flora Pillon**  
Montage : **Isabelle Debraye**  
Mixage : **Régis Engrand**  
Etalonnage : **Benjamin Bouillot**

## *fiche artistique*

Violette : **Juliette Damiens**  
Gabriel : **Julien Lambert**  
Franck : **Stéphane Lara**  
La Mère : **Nathalie Richard**  
Le Père : **Jean-Michel Noirey**  
Armand : **Yannick Becquelin**  
La Vieille Dame : **Jacqueline Gautier**  
Le Client : **Jean-Louis Liget**  
Madame : **Hélène Cauët**  
Flora : **Clara-Lou Collart**  
Madame Pavillon : **Karine Dedeurwaerder**  
Monsieur Pavillon : **Stéphane Piasentin**  
L'amie De Violette : **Mylène Guériot**  
Le Premier Gendarme : **Dominique Herbert**  
Le Second Gendarme : **Emmanuel Jorand-Briquet**  
La Pharmacienne : **Sophie Matel**  
Le Jeune Commercial : **Ludovic Darras**  
L'aide Soignante : **Christine Maty**  
Le Jeune Homme Aux Béquilles : **Johnny Rasse**



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