

PARAISO PRODUCTION  
POMME HURLANTE FILMS  
& AUDIMAGE PRÉSENTENT



# ISOLA

YILIN YANG YASSINE FADEL ENRICO ROCCAFORTE  
UN FILM DE **FABIANNY DESCHAMPS**

ALESSIO BARONE  
DIMITRI SANI  
IMAGE HAZEM BERRABAH  
SON ALEXANDRE HECKER  
MONTAGE GILLES VOLTA  
MUSIQUE OLAF HUND  
MIXAGE JEAN-GUY VERAN  
CÉCOP FILIPPO PECORAINO  
INGÉNIEUR SON LETIZIA GULLO  
DOCUMENTATION MARTA BELLINGRERI  
SCÉNARIO FABIANNY DESCHAMPS  
PRODUCTION NATHALIE TRAFFORD / EVA CHILLÓN  
JULIEN HECKER / ALEXANDRE HECKER / YANN BROLLI

PARAISO POMME HURLANTE FILMS audimage magnolia Mactan RÉGION NORMANDIE



# ISOLA

**A film by Fabianny Deschamps**

90 min

France / Tunisia

mandarin / arabic / italian

**with Yilin Yang, Yassine Fadel & Enrico Roccaforte**

## **Sales France**

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A Paraíso Production (France), Pomme Hurlante Films (France), Audimage (Tunisia) production



## SYNOPSIS

On an island lost between two worlds, Dai, a young Chinese woman, survives alone in a cave, waiting for the baby that swells her womb day after day. By the harbour which, every day, flurries with the arrival of hundreds of migrants, she searches tirelessly the face of the man she loves, her husband. One night her wish is to be fulfilled...



*« Isola est avant tout un film symbolique à la limite de la métaphysique sur les relations entre les hommes et les femmes, le déni de réalité et la survie lorsque toutes les illusions sont mortes. Et, de ce point de vue, c'est une grande réussite. »*

ECRAN LARGE

*« La fiction et le documentaire cohabitent avec grâce pour rendre compte très pertinemment d'un certain état du monde. »*

CRITIKAT



# INTERVIEW

## FABIANNY DESCHAMPS

### CRITIKAT

#### How did you manage to produce «Isola» and what was your time frame?

The film is in a foreign language which made funding it very complicated. It was almost entirely funded by equity. Making a film in these conditions, quickly, was really a political choice. Because of its subject matter the film could have found funding, but there was an urgency to be able to show the arrival of these migrants. We had to move quickly to be able to film what was happening. Two years ago we were in Cannes with «New Territories», straight after that I wrote «Isola» in two weeks, then four months later we began shooting. By working in the moment, with current events, and just our emotions and intuitions, I tried to find the spontaneous side of the artistic gesture, complete with its imperfections and fragility. Thinking about a project during five years has an inevitable impact on it. There aren't only the external pressures to find funding but also your internal journey and desires. «Isola» was made in two years, incredibly quickly. It wouldn't have made sense for me to have dragged it out over years.

#### Did you write the film for Yilin Yang? Who is this actress?

She is a wonderful actress. When I met her on «New Territories» I knew straight away that it was her. It was like a romantic encounter, love at first sight, it was just so obvious. In my first draft, her character had a child because she herself had one in real life. But she then told me that she wanted to have another and asked when I thought it would be possible regarding the time frame of the shoot. I told her "Either right away or in two years". A couple of weeks later, she was pregnant. It was a priceless gift. I then rewrote the script with this new angle, the unborn child, the promise of a world that he'll be born into. Yilin is a brave and determined woman, a real warrior! The idea of childhood was central from the beginning, I wanted to construct a fable. I thought a lot about «Peter Pan», about the imaginary Neverland where there are lost boys and this woman who is both mother and child. The pregnancy contains the whole idea of the film: what sort of world are we leaving to this unborn child?



### **How did you film the documentary scenes?**

It was impossible to shoot fiction in the military areas and the retention centres so we had to be cunning. Thanks to some contacts we were able to gain some fake press passes. We pretended we were a French television crew and that's how we gained access to the administrative authorities. A lot of things were shot without authorisation, just brazenly! The arrival that we see at the end was an emergency arrival, a commercial ship that had saved a boat. 500 people died that night. We didn't have any authorisation to film but we made the most of the surrounding chaos. We filmed with a photo camera, less aggressive than a video camera, and Yilin Yang improvised with a hidden lapel microphone. We were determined to show previously unseen images, for example the identification scenes at the end, which generally take place inside military boats, behind closed doors, because they're shocking and can bring to mind other indefensible images from the past.

### **In this last arrival scene, through whose eyes do we see it?**

The character of Dai carries the film and symbolises all the migrants. Everything is told through her individual experience of being a displaced person, lost on this island, this tower of Babel where people can't communicate. "Isola" means island in Italian but it also means "alone". Dai's solitude is that of all the migrants. But I didn't only want to speak about them but also to draw attention to a more worrying general climate, of the world in motion. I asked myself why these images that we see each day on television, these arrivals, these dramatic shipwrecks, why they don't have more impact. I wanted fiction to teach us how to look at reality again. She has a naivety that borders on madness but it's not her own, it's the naivety of the whole world. What I hope is that by seeing the plight of the migrants through her eyes, like Voltaire's *Candide*, we manage to see the real violence of these events and that the migrants aren't just a displaced mass but actual people. Simply people. In the last arrival scene, Dai is literally their mirror, the flash photos taken of them are reflected on her. The scene's point of view isn't that of the director or the protagonist but that of the people. They are looking at us. The sequence is shot head on, with the reverse angle of Dai who looks at the camera and who looks at us. In that moment fiction and the violence of reality meet and we discover this phantasmagorical catastrophe, this end of the world which animates Dai throughout the film. In this scene it's humanity and humanity alone that interests me.

The first arrival is almost treated like a science fiction film, as though the most unbelievable thing isn't fiction (here treated with surrealism) but reality. Eight hundred people who flow out of the boat are recovered by police, classified, put in order, locked up, it's not possible that we find ourselves in this situation.



### **We have the feeling that when faced with this violence in the world, the characters only have religion to turn to, or their imaginations**

Yes, in response to this violence, Dai hides herself in her cave where she recreates a little world full of eastern mysticism, of magical thoughts. For others, their refuge is through devout beliefs, a moral or nihilistic search for the power of the imaginary. In this scene Dai can be a symbol of the pagan beliefs of artists and their creations. The two western characters, Dai's two clients, also epitomise two types of alienation. Salvatore (Enrico Roccaforte), the Italian worker, covers his eyes with his hands so as not to see (when he takes Dai back to her cave, as a game she makes him cover his eyes so he doesn't know where she lives). Vitor (Dimitri Sani), a sort of junkie who lives in a big family home, uses drugs to hide his spirits in a cloud of smoke. We could say that they are cowards but we are all like them. We can't face every battle, so in order to live, we cover our eyes with our hands and hide our spirits in a cloud of smoke.

### **The world around Dai is also sometimes benevolent, for example her exchanges with Salvatore or the young people in the scuola verde.**

I showed things through her terrified eyes, but there are also a lot of people who are very kind to the migrants. The scuola verde is an example. They're militant teachers who occupy it. The character of Salvatore is another benevolent figure. He can't solve Dai's problems but he does what he can. He does it with humanity although that also contains something rather disturbing, because she prostitutes herself with him. I think that a lot of people live in that sort of ambivalence. The film is littered throughout with meetings, with the idea that in spite of everything, humanity is bound by a common mythology.

### **Did the long interruption between the two shoots generate any big changes to the project?**

For the first part of the shoot there were only four of us which helped when trying to get information about the arrivals of the boats. It's at that point that I shot all of the documentary parts – a year later, it would have been impossible because the restrictions on journalistic access were strongly enforced. For these scenes we had to rehearse with Yilin Yang, we imagined which situations reality could throw at her so that she could react in character. It was a guided improvisation because Yilin had to be prepared for the emotional impact. It was an incredible exercise, particularly when you're four months pregnant! To find yourself face to face with migrants arriving, with police that wanted to take our rushes... The scenes were written when we left for the shoot. I didn't have to edit a lot between the two shoots, I waited for the money to be found and for Yilin to have her baby.



### **What has your practical and theoretic experience with theatre brought to your filmmaking?**

For me, theatre is a fundamental art form in that, when we watch a play, it places the spectator directly in the active process. It's my artistic education, and I accept that there is a fake aspect to my films. I don't hide the artificiality, notably through elliptical writing that doesn't resolve anything and gives the spectator the responsibility to resolve things for themselves. The two films that had the most fundamental effect on me, and they never change, are «Last Year at Marienbad» and «Hiroshima mon amour» by Alain Resnais: the relationship between memory, the space between two worlds, death, artificiality, denial, the refuge into neuroses as a resistance, haunted spaces, obsessions, this incredible language of Duras and Robbe-Grillet... these are things that have conditioned my ideas of cinema.

### **You worked again with Olaf Hund, who had already composed the music for «New Territories».**

Before my last short film, I had a phobia of music in films, and there wasn't any. I didn't prompt the collaboration with Olaf Hund (who isn't a composer of film music but a rounded musician). We met strongly on an artistic level and it was obvious that we would work together. Otherwise, there wouldn't have been any music in my films. It came about through this meeting, and not because of a need for musical etiquette.

### **The crew was overall rather international...**

It may have been wishful thinking but we were carried by symbols, I wanted the film's crew to be made up of people from both sides of the Mediterranean, in keeping with the film's subject matter which depicts the Mediterranean as a frontier, a marine graveyard. So the crew came from Tunisia, France, Italy and Spain.



# YILIN YANG

A native of Taiwan, Yilin arrived in France in 2002 for her studies. At the University of Paris III, the director Richard Demarcy chose and hired her in his company, and since then, Yilin does not want to leave the stage.

Alongside touring with Demarcy, Yilin was formed at the «Ecole Claude Mathieu». On stage she acted under the direction of Jean-Claude Berutti, Thierry Delhomme and Malik Rumeau, among others.

On TV, she was one of the main characters in the series «La Chanson du Dimanche» (Comedy + / Canal +). In her cinema career, she was directed by Pierre Salvadori, Zoltan Mayer, Katia Lewkovicz, Pascale Pouzadoux and of course, Fabianny Deschamps, with whom she made her finest cinematic encounters in «New Territories» and «Isola».



# YASSINE FADEL

Actor autodidact, his thirst for discovery led him to explore the artistic sector.

In 2012, he met Philipp Stölzl, the director of «The Expatriate», who gave him his first movie role. Since then, shootings led him to a lot of travels : to Canada with «Diego Star» to Belgium with «La Part Wild», to the Netherlands with «Freddy Heineken Kidnapping» to France with «The Conquerors», to England with the series «the Missing», and recently to Italy for «Ustica» and the French feature film «Isola» in which he plays the lead male role.



# FABIANNY DESCHAMPS

After studying theater and visual arts, Fabianny Deschamps focused on filmmaking in 2000. She directed six short films broadcasted and awarded in festivals. Her first feature film «New Territories», shot between Hong Kong and southern China, selected at Cannes - ACID, was released in France in December 2015. «Isola» is her second feature film

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 ISOLA (feature film)
- 2014 NEW TERRITORIES (feature film)
- 2009 THE EDGE (short film) for the collection CYPRINE
- 2007 PASCOA (short film)
- 2006 THE DEEP END (fiction short film)
- 2004 IN MY BREAST (fiction short film)
- 2002 STORIES OF BONSAI (fiction short film)
- 2000 ANIMAL IS A MAN WHO SPEAKS (fiction short film)



## ON CAMERA

Dai  
Hichem  
Salvatore  
L'homme au scooter  
Le client de Dai

Yilin Yang  
Yassine Fadel  
Enrico Roccaforte  
Alessio Barone  
Dimitri Sani

## BEHIND THE CAMERA

Script and direction  
D.O.P  
Editing  
Music  
Sound  
Set Design  
First assistant  
Documentation  
Producers  
Coproducers

Fabianny Deschamps  
Hazem Berrabah  
Gilles Volta  
Olaf Hund  
Letizia Gullo, Alexandre Hecker and Jean-Guy Veran  
Filippo Pecoraino  
Letizia Gullo  
Martha Bellingreri  
Nathalie Trafford (Paraíso Production) & Eva Chillón (Pomme Hurlante)  
Alexandre and Julien Hecker (Audimage), Yann Brolli (Magnolias Films) & Jean-Guy Veran (Mactari)