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Baden Baden

Rachel Lang

Producer Joseph Rouschop, Jérémy Forni, Arlette Zylberg.
Production companies Tarantula Belgique (Liège, Belgium), ChevalDeuxTrois (Boulogne Billancourt, France), RTBF (Brussels, Belgium). **Written and directed by** Rachel Lang. **Director of photography** Fiona Brailon. **Editor** Sophie Verduyts.
Sound Aline Huber. **Production design** Jean-François Sturm.
Costumes Sandra Campisi.

With Salomé Richard (Ana), Claude Gensac (Grandmother), Lazare Gousseau (Grégoire), Swann Arlaud (Simon), Olivier Chantreau (Boris), Jorijn Vriesendorp (Mira), Noémie Rosset (Meriem), Zabou Breitman (Ana's mother).

DCP, colour. 95 min. French.

Premiere 28 January 2016, Premiers Plans Film Festival, Angers

World sales Jour2Fête

Ana drives the sports car with confidence. There's a famous actress on the backseat who she's driving to the film set – they're late and the producer is shouting at her. On a whim, Ana decides to quit her job and simply sets off in the rental car – into her own world. She drives to her grandmother's, to Strasbourg. The European border town is her home and the summer of 2015 pretty much belongs to her too. She wears the uniform of her generation – short jeans, tight tops, trainers. Over the course of the summer, the few visible insignia of her identity come together to form the personality of a young woman who is already an adult, but is intent on continuing the search – for who she'd like to be, for who she could be. Ana's encounters with the world function as snapshots of these possibilities, their complex plurality offering a contemporary alternative to the predestined fates of young women in the past. Her family, particularly her grandmother and her male relatives, play almost traditional roles, but for Ana genre-role models are strangely obsolete. As the star of the film, Ana is the only one bound to a present, a present on a permanent knife edge between comedy and melodrama.

Dorothee Wenner

“It’s complicated for our generation to find a place in the world”

You’ve framed a kind of chaos – Ana’s life in the first moments of the film, everything she’s going through – in a very architectural form. You chose a radical aesthetic for the opening scene: a four-minute long sequence shot of her profile while she’s behind the wheel of a car.

I wanted it to last; for us to understand that there is someone in the back seat without knowing who it is; that we’re headed somewhere without knowing where, and that we discover Ana in this state of stress, in the stranglehold of a job that doesn’t suit her and a world she doesn’t know, whose challenges and codes she doesn’t understand.

I work largely on intuition. When I’m writing a scene, a specific image immediately takes shape. I go for what is most simple, most effective, what seems obvious to me – not some radical stance. By opening the film with a ‘four-minute long sequence shot’, I am actually hoping to disappear. I’m not some tyrannical demiurge imposing a certain form on life. It’s life that has to take hold and develop within this framework, using this form.

Baden Baden is cadenced by very geometrical images – a lot of straight lines and parallels.

It’s the architecture that’s missing in Ana’s life. I’m creating a rigid frame in which she’ll be able to manoeuvre, be passive or tense, stay put or leave. It’s also the essence of her plan. For her, building a shower means learning how to establish order in the mess of life, find meaning, structure, a way to take steps forward, create pathways. From a cinematographic point of view, the form is treated a certain way to bring forward the deeper aspects of what the film can say. But I am not much of a theorist; it comes to me more from aesthetic instinct than the desire to assert a particular form. I draw from what has made me. My sister is an architect. When she was a student, we visited a lot of buildings as a family. My father is a painter and sculptor, so the framing, composition, relationships, proportions – that’s him. He trained our eyes on form. He taught us how to look.

A lot of things in the film work in the form of contrasts.

To be able to create this portrait of Ana, I rely on paradoxes – one thing and its opposite, geometry and chaos, very dense moments, others that are very diluted, a contrasting rhythm. I wanted to make a film about a state, one that we come out of with a sensation and not necessarily with a story. We spend a summer with this character who is being built by the people she meets. We come away with a certain sensation and the sense of a young woman being drawn in dotted lines. The management of time is key. In a script, we try to put something in place that works, that marches forward to the beat of a drum, a story that prevents the reader from becoming bored; yet in life, when you look for them, there are always moments that are more downbeat, others that are more upbeat – there are differences in rhythm and I wanted that to come through; I wanted all the blocks that make up the film to be untreated, so that their sum total takes us somewhere, at times with a punch in the face, sometimes with an absence, a small nothing, something anecdotal, the not-much-going-on mingled with the existential.

You said that Ana is being built by the people around her.

Yes. The secondary characters are not secondary at all – they are building the main character, Ana. It’s more a vision of the world than a vision of film. We are the result of the encounters we have. Not much else. We don’t exist alone. Brecht said that the smallest part of humanity is not one man, but two.

You play a lot with archetypes from society and film, especially feminine ones. There is an initiative to destroy the sex symbol in film.

Baden Baden is a contemporary film with people from 2015. It isn’t militant; it comes to me from life. I wanted Ana to be disorganised, slovenly, unsexy and badly dressed. Not a film star. Someone from real life. That’s my movie heroine.

Ana sleeps with the love of her life and also with her best friend. She burps, she says, ‘Give me your digits’ to Amar, whom she’s just met, she drives a Porsche...

It amuses me. There is a history of boundaries that is unacceptable for me. Men, women, it’s something that’s always made me sick. We are far more complex than what is imposed upon us by gender.

There are three major male figures around Ana.

With Boris, it’s passionate love. But he is toxic for her. Simon is her best friend, always there, attentive and loyal. As for Grégoire, he’s the one who’s mad for her but won’t show it for fear of being rejected. They are many possibilities. There’s also Amar, the one who’s hard to tame, who’s very secretive and who intrigues Ana. He’s made a radical choice and she admires his strength, which seems to be contagious. We leave Baden-Baden in the direction of Aubagne thanks to him. Amar is a furtive encounter, but one that will resonate with Ana for a long time. The three other men are developed archetypes, and I play with what they represent.

Ana has a special relationship with her friend Mira, the costume designer.

Mira doesn’t enter into the category of Ana and men, but it’s one more possibility that gravitates toward her. I wanted a sensual, radiant and joyful character – all that Ana is not – someone who can raise her up, a story of potential love or friendship.

The film has a very clearly feminist dimension.

In 2015, it shouldn’t be a topic anymore. I cannot stand the fact that being a woman prevents me from being or doing what I want.

Your father and mother are in the film. That’s another strong choice.

I am very grateful to them for the education and love that they gave me. I started by filming my father sculpting. My parents also had roles in my film *Les navets blancs empêchent de dormir*. This time, my parents, brother and sister are extras. Once you don’t live together, if you don’t have projects in common, you don’t do anything together anymore.

There are some of your father’s paintings in Boris’ apartment.

Yes. There are three paintings: Irises, Uncle Claude and A Field of Colza. There’s also a sculpture I like very much, a dog’s head.

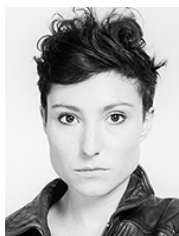
The transition from adolescence to adulthood is also one of the driving themes of the film. Do you think that the passage to adulthood happening in the film is a process from your life?

Yes. It's a moment that lasts longer and longer, I find. It's coming later and later, too. It's complicated for our generation to find a place in the world, to know who we are, why we're here and where we're going. It's a state that is likely to come back regularly, which is rich – with luck, we're searching and experimenting.

You like drawing comedy out of drama.

Comedy is never very far behind drama. Cinema is the tool that enables us to experience a dramatic situation almost live and see how we can defuse it. It's a narrative spring that enables us to avoid scattering, spreading out. We lack this tool in everyday life.

Interview: Denis Lachaud, 2015



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Rachel Lang was born in Strasbourg, France in 1984. She spent two years studying philosophy at the Université Marc Bloch in Strasbourg as well as dramatic arts at the Conservatoire de Strasbourg before studying film at the Institut des Arts de Diffusion in Louvain La Neuve in Belgium.

Baden Baden is Rachel Lang's first full-length feature film, and is the final part of a trilogy following two short films.

Films

2010: *Pour toi je ferai bataille/For You I Will Fight* (22 min.). 2011: *Les Navets blancs empêchent de dormir/White Turnips Make it Hard to Sleep* (29 min.). 2016: **Baden Baden**.