

Independents' Day



Independent French and American filmmakers love **Élodie Bouchez** – not just for her obvious talent and good looks but for her dedication to decent scripts and strong vision

Élodie Bouchez in Happy Few

DURING the opening shot of the film, I'm naked. Right away, no credits, nothing. Just me. Naked. If the scene serves what we are talking about, and if it serves the narrative, and if it makes sense to me when I first read the script, then nudity is fine. It just makes sense in the film *The Imperialists Are Still Alive!* It tells the viewer something important about this story and my character. She is engrossed in her art, doing a self-portrait photoshoot, wearing nothing but a muslin scarf and smoking a cigarette. Right away the tone that's set is provocative, and the personality of this girl is established.

It was funny because the night I got the script from Zeina Durra, the director, I was thinking about the fact that I was committed to this big French movie that I was not so sure I wanted to be a part of. I got Zeina's script, printed it, read it, and although it is a tiny movie compared to what I was supposed to do in France, I thought, "Oh my god, this is really what I want to do." The dates of production were the same, and I felt much more in touch with this film; it really came to me at the right moment on the right night.

When I pick a project, it is because I am deeply attracted to it in its totality. It is really like a package. There's the script and how well it is written, both in terms of story and characters, and then there's the director's vision. Most of the time I'm in independent French and American films and it's often the directors themselves who write the scripts. So when you read their script you can usually get a vision and a point of view already and, for me, a strong vision is very important. Whatever the style of film, whether comedy or drama or whatever else, I like it when there is a strong vision and something meaningful to talk about. Mostly, it's just an instinct. Also, when you're part of a good movie with a good director, nothing is hard to do. I've realised that the few times things were very hard for me on a film were when I was unhappy with the director or the film itself. Even very intense movies that look like they

are hard at first become easy when you have great people to work with.

Luckily, Zeina has a very strong personality and we connected right away. I'm very happy with the film, and it talks about something really important, but in a very funny and light way. Essentially, it's the story of this young French conceptual artist named Asya living in New York City. She really lives the New York high life. At the beginning of the film she hears that her childhood friend was flying from New York to Houston and was abducted. We have no news of him from the CIA because he is an Arab. So she wants to do something to help her friend, but is totally helpless. At the same time, it's also a movie

about New York City and the rhythm of life there. This situation creates a split between her politically charged inner life and the lightness and superficiality of her city life. She also meets a Mexican man and falls in love, so it's a love story too.

IAM really proud of a bunch of movies I have done, including *The Imperialists Are Still Alive!* My first movie was Serge Gainsbourg's last movie as a director, which I did when I was 16. The film started my career and gave it tone; it was a very special film to begin my career with.

I am also proud of the parts I played in *Wild Reeds* and *The Dreamlife of Angels* and *La Faute à Voltaire* by a director called Abdel Kechiche, an amazing director in France.

My latest film is *Happy Few*, which I shot in France last summer and had an amazing experience filming. It's a love story about two couples who meet and fall in love with each other, but exchange partners. It's not about adultery, because everybody knows it's happening. It's about freedom and love and sharing. It carries on until the situation is no longer possible. It's a wonderful story, and we're taking it to the Venice Film Festival this year. This will be my third time at Venice, and I'm very excited to compete. Exciting projects like this keep life interesting. I just want to continue working on new, exciting and interesting projects. And most importantly, I never want to fall into the routine of working on movies as a job instead of making movies I'm truly proud of with people I love.

Élodie Bouchez is an award-winning French actress, Happy Few opens in France on 15 September

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