



PREVIEW

Passages

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Directed by: Ira Sachs

©: SBS Productions

Production Company: SBS

International Sales: SBS International

Executive Producers: Ali Betil, Kevin Chneiweiss, Hannah Janal, Kateryna Merkt

Presented by/Produced by: Saïd Ben Saïd, Michel Merkt

Production Manager: Marianne Germain

Unit Manager: Logan Lelièvre

Location Manager: Christophe Arnoud

Post-production Supervisor: Christine Duchier

1st Assistant Director: Julie-Anne Simon

Casting: Judith Chaliier, Aline Badiane

Casting Collaboration: Amy Kaufman

Written by: Mauricio Zacharias, Ira Sachs

Additional Dialogue: Arlette Langmann

Director of Photography: Josée Deshaies

Editor: Sophie Reine

Production Designer: Pascale Consigny

Set Decorator: Hervé Ingrand

Storyboard: Gabriel Germain

Costume Designer: Khadija Zeggai

Key Make-up Artist: Natali Tabareau-Vieuille

Key Hair Stylist: Laurent Bozzi

Music Supervisors: Élise Luguern, Lucile Egal, Lola Ryckelincx

Sound Mixer: Thomas Gastinel

Re-recording Mixer: Cyril Holtz

Sound Editor: Anne Gibourg

Cast:

Franz Rogowski (*Tomas*)

Ben Whishaw (*Martin*)

Adèle Exarchopoulos (*Agathe*)

Erwan Kepoa Falé (*Amad*)

Arcadi Radeff (*Dimo*)

Léa Boublil (*Erica*)

Théo Cholbi (*Jérémie*)

William Nadylam (*Clément*)

Tony Daoud (*Tony*)

Sarah Lisbonis (*Sarah*)

Anton Salachas (*Elias*)

Thibault Carterot (*Thibault*)

Théo Gabilloux (*young actor*)

Caroline Chaniolleau (*Agathe's mother*)

Jérôme Dauchez (*wine executive*)

François Boisrand (*artist 1*)

Kylian Moison (*artist 2*)

Chloé Granier, Juliette Moulon (*Martin's assistants*)

Malika Bejaoui (*school concierge*)

Olivier Rabourdin (*Agathe's father*)

France 2023

91 mins

A MUBI release

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SIGHT AND SOUND

+ Q&A with director Ira Sachs

Ira Sachs is interested in the dynamics of couples – in how two people in a relationship relate to one another, passionately, affectionately, through conflict and stress and across time – and also in how people in couples relate to others around them. To be in a couple in a Sachs movie is not like being in a couple in, say, a Hollywood studio romantic comedy, where consummation of a pair bond is typically framed as sufficient to bring happiness and security. In Sachs's films, the (arty, middle-class) couple is always already enmeshed in wider social, sexual, familial and structural webs and patterns. These relationships are tangled, porous and shifting and the stories' interest lies in investigating the messy permutations of these jostling wants and needs, the bounds of individual understanding and agency, and the subtle uses of cooperation, hypocrisy and sacrifice. Many of these stories centre on what might be called gay couples, though this label is often insufficient: one or other of the pair might be thought of as bisexual, or pre- or post-gay, or engaged in intense but not necessarily sexual friendship. (Other features by Sachs, meanwhile, focus on straight people.)

Sachs's first feature, *The Delta* (1996), followed two young men who explored their new gay relationship against the troubled racialised tensions of the American landscape. When the couple in *Keep the Lights On* (2012) first meet, one has a girlfriend but his sexuality proves less challenging to their relationship than his drug addiction. This is shown to have pernicious and damaging consequences to the bond between them but also to offer opportunities for radical love, forgiveness and hope. The film also invites us to wonder how far the urge to support someone might itself be seen as a form of addiction. Crucially, this couple are not an isolated island; they depend on an archipelago of biological and chosen family. Such an archipelago is more centrally the terrain of *Love Is Strange* (2014), which opens with the marriage of two men who've spent four decades together, and the celebrant's explicit call on those present to support them in life. This challenge is soon put to the test materially: the marriage costs one partner his job at a Catholic school, which costs the couple their home, which throws them on the mercy of friends and family while depriving them of sustaining habits of intimacy. The structural issue of New York real estate is also pivotal to *Little Men* (2016), in which the great threat to the precious friendship of two teenage boys is landlordism. The relationships of the same-sex pairs at the hearts of these films do not end happily ever after but nor are they framed as sites of failure or catastrophe. They are rather viewed as protracted mutual negotiations of pleasure, challenge and growth – passages, one might say.

Which brings us to Sachs's latest feature. Like the previously mentioned titles, *Passages* is co-written by Sachs and Mauricio Zacharias. (Their last collaboration, *Frankie*, about a terminally ill actor, played in competition at Cannes in 2019.) *Passages* centres on a married couple of some years' standing living in Paris, German filmmaker Tomas (Franz Rogowski) and British graphic artist Martin (Ben Whishaw). The film opens on the set of Tomas's latest feature, where he is seen growing increasingly frustrated as he micromanages an actor struggling to perform nonchalant enjoyment. This, it

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Manhunter

Tue 5 Sep 20:20

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Vinette Robinson, Stephen Graham, Hannah

Walters, Stephen Odubola, director Philip

Barantini and writer James Cummings

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Sat 16 Sep 12:00

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50th Anniversary: The Exorcist + intro by Mark Kermode

Mon 18 Sep 20:20

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Tue 19 Sep 18:15

Attack the Block + panel discussion

Thu 21 Sep 20:35

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turns out, is a sideways case study in Tomas's whole problem: he wants the people around him to be happy and carefree, and to dictate their actions and feelings, and for them to like it, and to be able to change his mind at will, and for them to like that too. *Passages* traces the impossibility of this desire and the pain it causes to Tomas, to Martin and to Agathe (Adèle Exarchopoulos), a schoolteacher whom Tomas begins seeing while still in his relationship with Martin. For a while it seems Tomas and Agathe might bring up a child together, then perhaps that the three might all co-parent. Meanwhile, Martin meets novelist Amad (Erwan Kepoa Falé), further complicating his and Tomas's feelings about their bond.

Rogowski memorably played Hans Hoffman in Sebastian Meise's *Great Freedom* (2021), bringing complex charm, consideration and insecurity to a character repeatedly victimised for his sexuality. Rogowski's charisma and energetic physicality are vital here: without them, it might be too clear too quickly that Tomas is, frankly, a bit of a shit. His passion for pleasure and life is obvious but his heedless and selfish conduct – unconnected to evident forms of disadvantage or trauma – make him perhaps Sachs's least sympathetic protagonist to date. Part of the film's power is showing how counterproductive this is for Tomas himself, and we hope he is changed by his experiences. Our hearts surely go out more strongly, though, to Agathe, curled up quietly on a bed in a room whose walls are painfully thin, or Martin, stoically trying to keep a coffee cup from shaking too hard as his body processes another outrage. Exarchopoulos and Whishaw each share a tellingly extended sex scene with Rogowski, character emerging through lust, and both nicely balance desire, vulnerability and dignity in differing ways, Whishaw more weary, Exarchopoulos more green.

In these and other scenes, Sachs, cinematographer Josée Deshaies and editor Sophie Reine use long, sometimes locked-off shots to powerful effect, allowing characters to find one another in the frame and the nuances of relationships to be expressed as they evolve from moment to moment – see, for example, the dancefloor scene in which Agathe and Tomas first establish a connection. At other points, the film cuts abruptly across time, leaving the audience to infer sometimes significant changes in circumstance. There's nice attention too to the implications of bold wardrobe choices, designed by Khadija Zeggai, like the clingy crop-top that sets Tomas's prospective in-laws' teeth on edge almost before a word has been spoken. *Passages* is interested in asking whether what seems like sharing information might in fact be avoiding conversation; whether what seems like patience might in fact be co-dependence; whether what seems like happy-go-lucky impulsiveness might in fact be a way of asserting distance and control with undesired consequences. Tomas is always ready to hop on his bike and start pedalling, whether or not he knows where he's going.

Ben Walters, *Sight and Sound*, September 2023