



PREVIEW

Titane

+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Julia Ducournau

Julia Ducournau on ‘Titane’

How did Titane take shape in the writing?

I sensed I was facing a very complex puzzle, with dense matter that I clearly needed to simplify. But I had to be careful or I’d risk losing the existential scope I was aiming for. It was a real balancing act. To give *Titane* its definitive shape, I honed in on the character of Vincent [Vincent Lindon] and his fantasy: this idea that through a lie, you can bring love and humanity to life. I wanted to make a film that initially may seem ‘unlovable’ because of its violence, but then we grow deeply attached to the characters, and ultimately we receive the film as a love story. Or rather, a story about the ‘birth of love’ because here, everything is a question of election.

Can you tell us about the sequence shot following the title that introduces Alexia [Agathe Rousselle] as an adult?

That sequence is there to impose a certain vision – not my vision – of Alexia, or more accurately, who others want her to be. This vision idealises her, forcefully iconises and sexualises her, makes her obey a whole series of clichés. I see it as a decoy: we’re exploring a surface layer that hints at the ocean we’re about to plunge into, where we’ll discover a femininity with very blurry contours. I wanted this sequence to be both extremely organic and totally disconnected from reality. The Alexia presented to us here does not align with the truth of the character.

Tell us about the casting process that led you to the actress who plays Alexia.

I knew right away she’d have to be an unknown face. As she goes through her ‘mutations’ I didn’t want people thinking they’re watching the transformation of a physically familiar actress. I mentioned above a ‘femininity with blurry contours’. I needed an unknown to embody that. Someone the audience couldn’t project any expectations onto. Someone they could watch transform as the story plays out without being conscious of the artifice. So I went straight to non-professional young women. I had a certain androgynous physique in mind, one that could endure the various transformational states that play out for the camera. I wanted a face that would change with the angle of the shot. A face that could make us believe anything. So the casting was both vast and precise. I knew there’d be a lot of work for whoever I chose. Not so much rehearsing lines (Alexia is practically mute) but in the acting itself. I’d have to go digging for something inside her, push her to places she wasn’t used to going, and obviously that takes time. When I saw Agathe [Rousselle] for the first time at a casting session, she really stood out. She had the right physique and a fascinating face, but also a presence. She commanded the screen, and that’s exactly what I wanted.

And for the character of Vincent [Vincent Lindon]?

For the character of Vincent it was far simpler: I wrote the role for Vincent Lindon. We’ve known each other for a long time. I wanted to film him and show him to everyone the way I see him. His character required a range of

emotions that, in my eyes, only he is capable of: at once scary and vulnerable, childlike and dark, deeply human yet monstrous... especially with that impressive hulk of a body. In preparation for the role he did serious weightlifting for a year. I wanted him beefy like an ox, reminding us of Harvey Keitel's massiveness in Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*. We got along beautifully during the shoot and I'm very proud of that. Vincent trusted me. He accepted the idea of surrendering to the character without necessarily holding all the keys to my cinema. He was exceptionally generous in what he gave to the role and to me. I think I got something from him that he himself was looking for at this stage in his career. I came along at the right time, if you will.

Can you tell us about some of the many special effects in Titane?

The biggest challenge by far were the prosthetics Agathe [Rousselle] had to wear. She spent long, laborious hours in make-up every day, which was exhausting for her and stressful for us, as every little touchup obviously takes time. The prosthetics were a central part of our daily schedules. It's funny, because I've been using them since *Junior* [2011] and every time I say to myself, 'Never again, too much hassle!' Then I go right back and do it again on the next film! But the thing is, for actors, prosthetics are true companions in the acting process. And they're so organic on screen.

What indicator did you give your DOP Ruben Impens for the cinematography on Titane?

I often used the word 'malfunction' to evoke the film's transformations. 'Derailment' too, because the story is peppered with machines and metal. Ruben and I worked hand in hand. We did the shot list together, the lighting chart together, we were practically joined at the hip on set... We started by figuring out what machinery we'd need on the film, because we shared a frustration from not having played on that more in *Raw* [2016]. And we discussed how to do something graphic without losing the characters in the process. When it comes to lighting, I work a lot within a cold/hot dichotomy. *Titane* is concerned with metal and fire, so the cold/hot relationship had to be ever-present. Ruben and I wanted to take a deep dive into contrast. We were constantly flirting with the limit, the limit being the cartoon: one step further and we could fall into cartoonish. We had to stay in the reality of the film. Push the shadow/light envelope as far as we could, without getting lost in an ultra-stylisation that would suck the blood out of the characters and the action. We focused more on pictorial references than film references, the paintings of Caravaggio in particular. I also showed Ruben 'Summer Night' by Winslow Homer and 'The Empire of Light' series by Rene Magritte to give him an idea of what I was looking for in the contrasts. I wanted light to spring from the shadows in the same way emotion gushes after an initial shock. I also wanted lots of colours, to break with the darkness of the story and avoid an impression of inescapable sordidness. For the many nude scenes, which I wanted to be as non-sexualised as possible, I tried to use lighting to reinvent the skin each time. Our work with colour made it possible to bring new textures, meanings and emotions to the skin itself.

For the music you worked with Jim Williams again. What were your specs for him?

I asked him to use percussion and bells. And I insisted on the bells. Why? Because I absolutely wanted to incorporate metal into the score. I wanted music that sounded metallic while still being melodic. As with *Raw*, I wanted a memorable recurring theme that would vary according to my characters'

trajectories. *Titane* goes from animal to impulsive to sacred. To help us feel that progression, the music must also fluctuate, hybridise, transform. We go from percussion to bells to electric guitar and sometimes everything combined. Then voices come in, bringing a liturgical dimension to the film. I asked Jim to work on creating a momentum towards the sacred. His music also needed to be like bursts of light in the shadows.

Production notes

TITANE

Directed by: Julia Ducournau
©: Kazak Productions, Arte France Cinéma, VOO, Frakas Production
Produced by: Kazak Productions
in co-production with: Frakas Productions, Arte France Cinéma, VOO, Be TV
With the participation of: Canal+, Ciné+, ARTE France
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In association with: Cinémage 15, Cofinova 17, Cinémage 13 développement
International Sales: Wild Bunch International
Produced by: Jean-Christophe Reymond
Unit Production Manager: Julien Linieres
Assistant Director: Claire Corbetta-Doll
Script Supervisor: Bénédicte Kermadec
Casting: Christine Baras, Constance Demontoy, Audrey Gatimel
Written by: Julia Ducournau
Director of Photography: Ruben Impens
Stills Photography: Carole Bethuel
Visual Effects: Mac Guff
Edited by: Jean-Christophe Bouzy
Production Desigr: Laurie Colson, Lise Péault
Costume Designer: Anne-Sophie Gledhill
Make-up Designer: Flore Masson

Special Effects Make-up Designer: Olivier Afonso
Hair Designer: Antoine Mancini
Opening Titles: Claire Allante
Original Music: Jim Williams
Production Sound Mixer: Fabrice Osinski
Sound: Fabrice Osinski, Séverin Favriau, Stéphane Thiébaut
Sound Mixer: Stéphane Thiébaut
Stunt Co-ordinator: Emmanuel Lanzi

Cast
Vincent Lindon (*Vincent*)
Agathe Rousselle (*Alexia/Adrien*)
Garance Marillier (*Justine*)
Laïs Salamah (*Rayane*)
Myriem Akheddiou (*Adrien’s mother*)
Mara Cissé (*Jeantet*)
Marin Judas (*Charrier*)
Diong-Kéba Tacu (*Sissoko*)
Thibault Cathalifaud (*the fan, tuning show*)
Bertrand Bonello (*Alexia’s father*)
Dominique Frot (*the Macarena lady*)

France/Belgium 2020©
108 mins

Courtesy of Altitude Film Entertainment

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

TV Preview: The Mezzotint + Q&A with director Mark Gatiss
Tue 7 Dec 18:10
TV Preview: The Tourist + Q&A with actors Jamie Dornan, Danielle Macdonald, Shalom Brune-Franklin and creatives
Tue 7 Dec 20:30
Exclusive Preview: Swan Song + pre-recorded Q&A
Wed 8 Dec 17:15
Preview: Boiling Point + Q&A with director Philip Barantini and actors Ray Panthaki and Lauryn Ajufo
Wed 8 Dec 20:30
TV Preview: Ghosts Christmas Special + Q&A (guests TBA)
Thu 9 Dec 18:10

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Thu 9 Dec 20:30
Patti Boulaye
Sun 12 Dec 15:30
Woman with a Movie Camera: Bridget Jones’s Diary at 20 + Q&A with director Sharon Maguire
Thu 16 Dec 18:00
Preview: Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy (Guzen to sozo)
Wed 29 Dec 18:00

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