


**ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER**

**TOM MERCIER**

**BÉATRICE DALLE**

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**Panorama**

# THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE

A FILM BY **PATRIC CHIHA**

Photos © Elsa Okazaki





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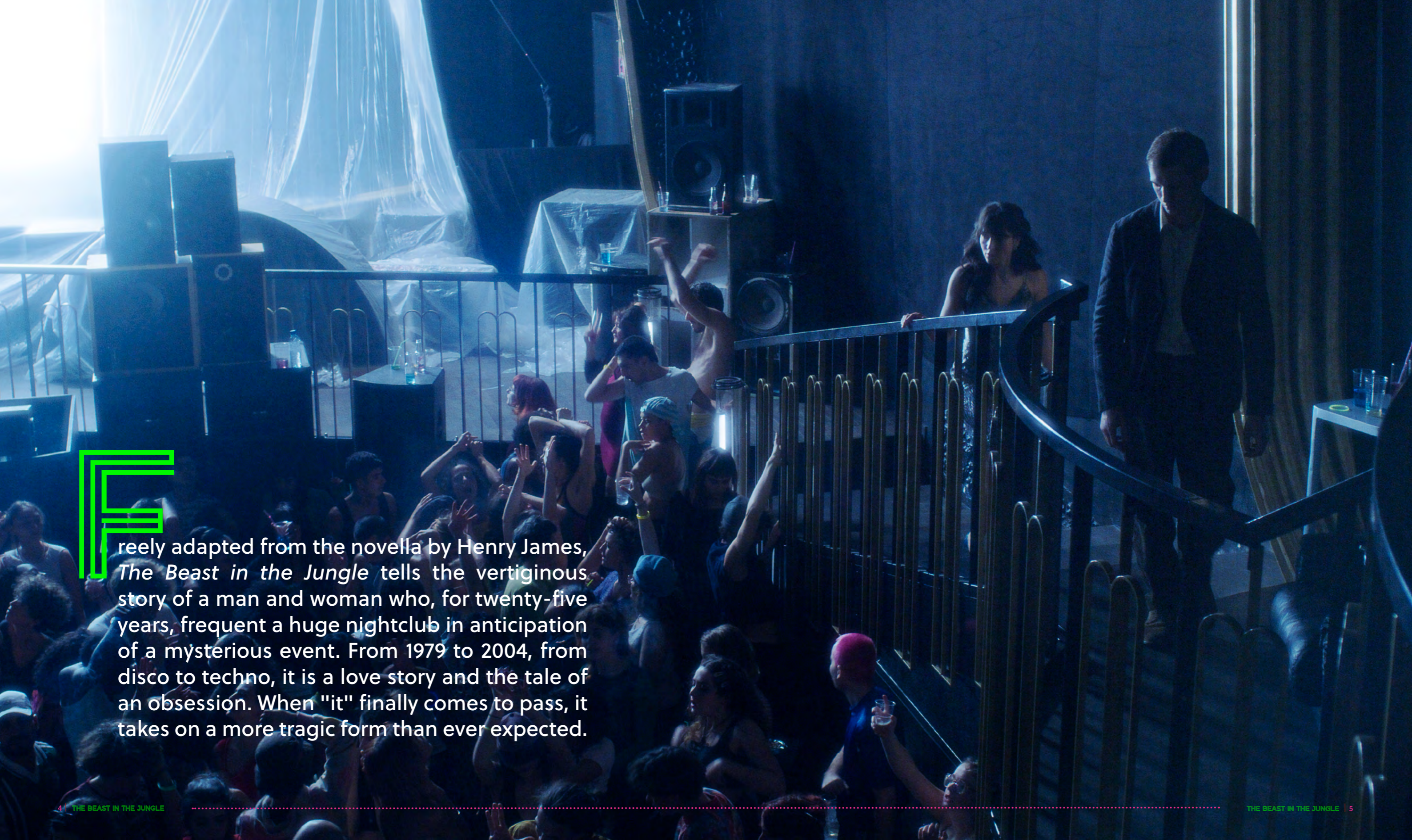
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reely adapted from the novella by Henry James, *The Beast in the Jungle* tells the vertiginous story of a man and woman who, for twenty-five years, frequent a huge nightclub in anticipation of a mysterious event. From 1979 to 2004, from disco to techno, it is a love story and the tale of an obsession. When "it" finally comes to pass, it takes on a more tragic form than ever expected.





# INTERVIEW WITH PATRIC CHIHA

**Where did the idea to adapt Henry James's novella *The Beast in the Jungle* come from?**

It's the story of a man who waits for an extraordinary event that will change his whole life. He asks a woman to wait with him and this adventure tragically overwhelms them. For me, this couple's story has the power of a myth. It takes us back to our human condition, always torn between the present and dreams, between reality and fantasy. The mystery of *The Beast in the Jungle* has haunted me for a very long time. It touches on something that no one talks about but everyone acknowledges: that terrifying feeling of missing out on your life precisely because you hope for a life above life, an extraordinary life, a life cast into the future. I wanted to turn it into a film because I'm convinced that this tension between present and fantasy, real life and dream life, is also very relevant to cinema.

**May and John, the two protagonists, seem driven by a mysterious force that escapes them. What is the force that compels them to miss out on their lives?**

Just like a myth, the story is both very simple and very mysterious. What is the Beast? What is the danger prowling around them? What is it to wait for another life? To

miss out on your life? In the book, it's clear, yet something escapes us. I'd be lying if I said I fully understood the book. You make movies precisely because something strikes you or moves you, and you can't put a name on it or explain it. It's when there is doubt, a mystery, that my filmmaking urge kicks in. As a director, but also as a filmgoer, I look for a surprising emotion that disrupts the linear rollout of a story and provides a new perspective. The opposite of a program. When writing, shooting and editing, we always paid great attention to the mystery of *The Beast in the Jungle*, never trying to explain, but rather getting lost in it and letting it take us by surprise. It seems crucial to me that there should always be an art of the unknown and of mystery. You have to take the risk of falling in love with an actor, an action, an expression whose meaning is not immediately clear.

**Deep down, what the film is telling us is that you always miss out on something. Our hopes are never really rewarded.**

That's our ultimate battle as human beings. We clearly miss out on something every day spent hoping for something else. Every life is another life spoiled. But if, like the character of May, we are more available, more open, we'll still experience things intensely.



**May, the heroine, allows herself to get caught up in John's delirium. There's the scene where he takes her arm, rather bossily, and asks her to follow him, which she does without much resistance.**

Yes, he has recognized in her a sister, an accomplice. She is the only person who knows his secret and doesn't think he's mad, who believes him. May's certainty reinforces his own certainty. John may be stubborn and unworldly but he has the innocence of a child. His dream is one he has clung to his whole life: as a child, he understood that he was destined for something, and he still believes it. Such immaturity, but also such innocence! Of course, he takes the lead, but she lets him lead early on. As if that's what she were waiting for. She says at one point, "I love it when life is like a novel." And he brings her an off-the-wall story straight out of a novel, the most exciting life possible. She wants to be a heroine, a movie star, live life on a bigger scale. In some respects, her conviction is greater than his. When, for example, he buckles, she provides the impetus to keep going.

**When you were writing the script, did you wonder how to help audiences relate to these two antiheroes, how to lead these two "losers" toward a kind of tragic grandeur?**

My co-writers, Axelle Ropert and Jihane Chouaib, and I always deeply loved both protagonists. The novella is moving, but more analytical, loaded with a kind of cold irony. We wanted the film to veer toward tragedy or melodrama. We had to bring to life these characters who, in the book, are abstracts. We had to flesh them out and bring them closer to us. How could we let them be traversed by emotions that are not always narrative

or psychological? The nightclub provided an ideal space, where they can have these surprises, where they have something to look at and emotions to feel.

**The beautiful thing in the film is the dialectic between May, full of vitality and movement, and John, who is a block of immobility, including in his outfits, which never change.**

They are very different but I see them as brothers in arms. They are looking for the same thing but their respective paths are not in sync. John is a loner and shy, whereas May is radiant and strong. Initially, they are both blind to the fate that awaits them. Each of them reaches awareness, but not at the same time. May is more perspicacious, and realizes at one point that the "thing" they are waiting for is most likely love, and that she will never fully share it with John. She tries to make him understand, at her place, in a final gesture, then on the rooftop at night, resolving, out of love, to protect him from a truth that is too painful. John only understands at the very end. At the cemetery, he finally realizes that the absolute he was looking for was love, and was May, and that he should have taken the risk of loving her. Finally, he lives in the present. It's the first time he feels real emotion, but it's too late.

**How did you approach the character of John with Tom Mercier?**

I see John as someone who does not live, or lives an alternate life. Radically. It's very rare and strange. Tom Mercier gave the character a unique, very personal tone. He has his own rhythm, out of sync with social intercourse, and is such a strong presence that always flirts with absence, his wit and his sadness. Tom has to capture something very complicated,



since his character has few narrative or psychological tools to help him grow. He really is at a standstill. In rehearsals, we did a lot of work on how to stand, flop or sit, based on the idea that he is almost a puppet, not really solid. It's a very physical performance, even if it doesn't seem that way on screen. We all have friends like him, slightly out of step, or marching to their own drummer.

**In contrast, Anaïs Demoustier's character is much more expressive.**

The path that Anaïs Demoustier carved out in the film is unbelievable. Even if we didn't always get the scenes or dialogue (we often laughed about it before the day's

shooting), she gave in to the place, the music, the character and the film. At first, May is so ecstatic, joyful and blazing, so absolutely alive. Anaïs and I went looking for hypersensitivity, hypermotivity and overperformance. In a nightclub, every emotion is amplified. Life is a fiction. But gradually, she begins to resemble John, to wrest herself from the world, to tire and burn out, though without pausing their story. To the contrary, she continues to fully experience it. For real. The question of fiction and reality, overperformance and "nudity" was one that I approached with all the cast. As if, on the far side of artificiality, exaggeration and the exhilaration of the night, we once more become ourselves.





**Watching the movie brought to mind silent films, where performances are often exaggerated, where things are primarily expressed by expressions and postures. I feel that your film is in the lineage of some Pabst films, like Pandora's Box.**

In my film, there's a lot of talking. But I always see words as an action, rather than conveying messages. When we were shooting, we often talked about *telenovelas*, where everything is very over the top. And in rehearsal, and developing the part with Anaïs, we worked on 1940s fashion photos—the poses and body language. We were looking for gestures that were relatively artificial and exaggerated, irrespective of the scene or dialogue. And I guess you sense that in the film. The characters dance all the time. Even when sitting on a couch, I asked Anaïs to give a sense that she was still dancing. She lifts her arms exaggeratedly when she's happy; the coat check girl dabs very tragically at her tears; Béatrice Dalle's ironic smile: everything is ratcheted up. Actually, in a nightclub, aren't we all always overperforming? In the opening scene, when she enters the club for the first time, May ventures into a magical forest, and we tried to come up with physical manifestations of that exhilaration. May has arrived at the temple of possibilities. She wants to touch everything. I thought of Naomi Watts in *Mulholland Drive* when she arrives in Los Angeles and everything seems so wonderful.

**In silent movies, everything also seems to be another world, a dream, and that was the feeling I got watching your movie.**

In our dreams, emotions are real. What we dreamed last night, we truly experienced. Deep down, I don't really distinguish between

reality and fantasy. Fantasy is as real to me as my utilities bills. And it's Béatrice Dalle who guides us through this dream world. I wrote the character of the nightclub gatekeeper for her. She was in my first film, *Domain* (2009), and I'd always wanted to work with her again. Her presence, both acutely real yet detached or floating, never fails to move me. But going back to your question, the film is in French and set in Paris. We shot in Brussels and Vienna, and as I'm Austrian, the movie must carry something Germanic. And when you mention Pabst, that type of director must obviously be part of my culture. Actually, I tie it to something else that is also linked to my story: this taste for the beauty of the darkness of romanticism. It's most likely a very romantic movie in its primary sense. Putting its faith in emotions ahead of comprehension. Or more precisely, putting its faith in emotion as a pathway to comprehension.

**It turns out, you're looking for truth in artifice.**

Yes, exactly. But curiously, I found out by making documentaries, like *Brothers of the Night*. It is my conviction that you have to trust the artificiality of cinema. Don't pretend that the art form is not artificial when it is excessively so, since it cuts up time and space. I manufacture a world with the lights, costumes, music and smoke, yet I also strip it naked. In a nightclub, everything is patently fake. Joy or sadness is exacerbated, the lighting is excessive, then you go outside when day is breaking and all that fakery seems to be life even so. Directing is about showing your hand, but I hope that at the end of the fakery, at the end of the artificiality, the humans are once more naked. That's what documentary-making brought home to me,



like when children play dress-up: through the disguise we see them as they really are. That's also what I admire about actors—how playing a character says something about them.

**The idea of transposing James's story into a nightclub was there from the beginning?**

It was when I had the nightclub idea that I dared to really take the plunge. Setting the movie in pretty much a single location makes it a kind of documentary about a nightclub from 1979 to 2004. The nightclub is both the euphoric space of the permanent present and eternal youth, and the melancholy space of infinite time because it is beyond reality and daily life. It's a theatre where you dream life more than you live it. So it was the ideal space to stage the story of May and John, who are locked into their quest for the absolute.

**The celebrations and disenchantment that follow exhilaration seem to be a metaphor for life itself.**

When we were writing—a long process—I kept going to nightclubs, particularly in Berlin. At Berghain, there are two spaces: the dancefloor and a sort of balcony from where you can observe the dancefloor. Half the time, I'm physically part of the party, and the other half, I'm perched on the balcony watching people, dreaming up stories about those who make the night a fiction, something way more vast than a night out clubbing. One of the pleasures, both joyous and slightly morbid, is to live and watch live. Actually, we borrowed an idea from Berghain where, around five in the morning, in the top room, the blinds are raised as day breaks. Suddenly, you leave the night and life starts up again. Then, the blinds are closed again, so we aren't completely

ripped out of our bubble of make-believe. This strange temporality between day and night, life and death, is both exhilarating and very melancholic.

**The beautiful part is that the nightclub has a life of its own that is independent of the story and the characters that pass through.**

One of my directorial choices was that people should do their thing and dance for real, and never to consider all those dancers as extras. They are the potential stars of each shot (as I kept telling them on set). They carry within them a thousand stories. We're always at the start of one story or at the end of another, and that magnificent crowd was eager to play along. We shot during the period of Covid regulations. It helped us a lot because everybody wanted to rediscover that fundamental urge, that vital necessity, to dance together. And I hope that rekindled vitality is visible on screen.

**Thanks to the nightclub, some of Henry James's slightly abstract characters come to life in very concrete actions, such as dancing and music.**

Dancing and music always bring us back to the present, to basic feelings that require no explanation. Or even to the birth of cinema. I always make a connection between dance and the Lumière brothers' *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, specifically in the pleasure of movement and so the absolute reality of that movement. Watching people dance, you don't ask yourself what it means. In John Ford or Jacques Demy movies, people dance for the sake of dancing. The shots of the dancers allow us, I think, to feel that concrete dimension, in the present tense, of dancing.







**The nightclub also tells the story of Time, through evolving musical trends and changing fashions.**

One of the movie's themes is the depiction of Time, its passing, its giddiness and, eventually, its annihilation. In the picture, sound, music, costumes and sets, the movement of Time was always a core issue for us. While the atmosphere is quite racy or even tawdry early in the film, it gradually becomes industrial and cold. Everything changes the whole time, except May and John, who are locked into a permanent present, infinite time. Moreover, age is a fairly blurry notion in a nightclub, where only now matters. That's why I didn't do anything artificial to make the actors look older or younger, but rather hinted at different physical states through lighting, costumes and makeup. By refusing reality, John and May live in a strange time. That is also true of the movie's overall temporality. While time plays out concretely at the beginning, it becomes increasingly elliptical and giddy. And Chronos, the god of Time and Destiny, ends up by eating his babies

**At the end of the first part, when the AIDS epidemic empties the club, a new generation arrives and the film takes a new turn, changes rhythm, and reinvents itself in a time that coils around itself.**

In editing, we worked very hard on the structure and rhythm of passages of time. How do you tell the story of two people in a closed space anticipating an occurrence for twenty-five years? Some parts of the film are very narrative, but I sensed before shooting that at the moment you mention, which is just before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1990, we were at the heart of the film. Once the stories

are over (May's husband has left; John has forgotten the coat check girl), once we are no longer really in the story, we are at the heart of their wait.

**Physically even, they are no longer among the dancers, but on the balcony, having become the spectators you described in your experience at Berghain.**

Yes, they're at the theatre. They're not taking part any longer. Actually, from that moment on, we only film the dancers from up there on the balcony. That's also what radically changes: we no longer go on the dancefloor, into the euphoria of dancing.

**You said at the start of the interview that James's novella was also relevant to the cinema...**

Yes, and my film is perhaps also a film about cinema, an art form that is so under-appreciated right now. In a movie theater, aren't we all May and John, audience members waiting for a *beast* to emerge from the screen or the world and turn our lives upside down?

INTERVIEW BY  
JEAN-SÉBASTIEN CHAUVIN







## CAST

May	Anaïs Demoustier
John	Tom Mercier
The Physionomist	Béatrice Dalle
Pierre	Martin Vischer
Alice	Sophie Demeyer
Mr Pee	Pedro Cabanas
Céline	Mara Taquin
Yacine	Bachir Tlili
Friend of May 1	Maximilien Delmelle
Friend of May 2	Harpo Guit
Pablo as a child	Melrose Landa-Nzinga
Pablo adult	Joël Bunganga
May 15 years old	Madelief Graux
John 15 years old	Nel Rivart

## CREW

Script	Patric Chiha, Axelle Ropert, Jihane Chouaib
Cinematography	Céline Bozon AFC
Editing	Karina Ressler AEA, Julien Lacheray
Sound	Atanas Tcholakov
Sound editing and mixing	Mikaël Barre
Original music	Yelli Yelli & Florent Charissoux, Dino Spiluttini
Set Design	Eve Martin
Costumes	Claire Dubien
Makeup	Lila Vander Elst
Hairdressing	Paul-François Matraja
Choreographies	Lorenzo de Angelis
First Assistant Director	Christele Agnello
Script	Morgane Aubert-Bourdon
Production manager	Sébastien Lépinay
Produced by	Aurora Films (France) Charlotte Vincent, Katia Khazak
Co-produced by	Frakas Productions (Belgique) Jean-Yves Roubin, Cassandre Warnauts WILDart FILM (Autriche) Ebba Sinzinger, Vincent Lucassen





# ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER

- 2023 **The Beast in the jungle** by Patric Chiha  
**Daaaaaali !** by Quentin Dupieux  
**Le Temps d'aimer** by Katell Quillévéré
- 2022 **Coma** by Bertrand Bonello
- 2021 **Smoking Causes Coughing** by Quentin Dupieux  
**November** by Cédric Jimenez
- 2020 **Incredible But True** by Quentin Dupieux  
**Anaïs in Love** by Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet
- 2019 **The Love Letter** by Jérôme Bonnell  
**Gloria Mundi** by Robert Guédiguian  
**The Unsophisticated Lady** by Antonin Peretjatko
- 2018 **Alice and the Mayor** by Nicolas Parisier  
*César de la Meilleure Actrice 2020*  
**The Girl with a Bracelet** by Stéphane Demoustier
- 2017 **Jealous** by Stéphane et David Foerkinos  
**Keep an Eye Out** by Quentin Dupieux  
**Father and Sons** by Félix Moati  
**Through the Fire** by Frédéric Tellier
- 2016 **Cornelius, The Howling Miller** by Yann Le Quellec  
**Tomorrow and Thereafter** by Noémie Lvovsky  
**The House by the Sea** by Robert Guédiguian
- 2015 **Sophie's Misfortunes** by Christophe Honoré
- 2014 **Demons** by Marcial Di Fonzo Bo  
**Caprices** by Emmanuel Mouret  
**All About Them** by Jérôme Bonnell  
*Swan D'Or de la Meilleure Actrice au Festival de Cabourg 2015*  
**Marguerite et Julien** by Valérie Donzelli
- 2013 **Wolfy, the Incredible Secret** by Éric Omond  
**Paris Follies** by Marc Fitoussi  
**Ariane's Thread** by Robert Guédiguian  
**Situation amoureuse : c'est compliqué** by Manu Payet
- The New Girlfriend** by François Ozon
- 2012 **Bird people** by Pascale Ferran  
**Quai d'Orsay** by Bertrand Tavernier
- 2011 **Thérèse Desqueyroux** by Claude Miller
- 2010 **La joie de vivre** by Jean-Pierre Améris  
**Fracture** by Alain Tasma  
**George et Fanchette** by Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe  
**Snows of Kilimanjaro** by Robert Guédiguian  
*Étoile d'Or de la Révélation Féminine*  
**The Last Winter** by John Shank  
**Elles** by Malgorzata Szumowska
- 2009 **Sweet Evil** by Olivier Coussemaçq  
**Living on Love Alone** by Isabelle Czajka  
*Nomination au César du Meilleur Espoir Féminin*  
**Dear Prudence** by Rebecca Zlotowski
- 2008 **Sois sage** by Juliette Garcias  
**Grown Ups** by Anna Novion  
*Nomination au César du Meilleur Espoir Féminin*  
**Elsewhere** by Frédéric Pelle
- 2007 **Hellphone** by James Huth  
**Give Me Your Hand** by Pascal-Alex Vincent  
**Le prix à payer** by Alexandra Leclère  
**The Beautiful Person** by Christophe Honoré
- 2006 **L'année suivante** by Isabelle Czajka  
**Cycles** by Cyril Gelblat  
**La vie d'artiste** by Marc Fitoussi
- 2004 **Barrage** by Raphaël Jacoulot
- 2003 **Time of the Wolf** by Michael Haneke



# TOM MERCIER

## FEATURES FILMS

- 2023 **The animal kingdom** by Thomas Cailley  
**The incident report** by Naomi Jaye  
**The Beast in the jungle** by Patric Chiha  
2021 **My night** by Antoinette Boulat  
2019 **Synonyms** by Nadav Lapid

## SHORT

- 2021 **The star** by Nadav Lapid

## TELEVISION

- 2021 **The rope** by Dominique Rocher  
2020 **We are who we are** by Luca Guadagnino





# BÉATRICE DALLE

- 2023 **The Beast in the jungle** by Patric Chiha
- Le bonheur est pour demain** by Brigitte Sy
- 2021 **Love is better than life** by Claude Lelouch
- 2019 **Adoration** by Fabrice du Welz
- La vertu des imponderables** by Claude Lelouch
- 2018 **My guy** by Marion Vernoux
- The happy prince** by Rupert Everett
- 2017 **Everyone's life** by Claude Lelouch
- 2013 **Le renard jaune** by Jean-Pierre Mocky
- You and the night** by Yann Gonzalez
- Aux yeux des vivants** by Julien Maury, Alexandre Bustillo
- 2011 **Starlight** by Sophie blondy
- Livid** by Julien Maury, Alexandre Bustillo
- 2010 **Bye bye blondie** by Virginie Despentes
- Our paradise** by Gaël Morel
- 2009 **Domaine** by Patric Chiha
- Jimmy Rivière** by Teddy Lussi-Modeste
- 2008 **God's office** by Claire Simon
- 2007 **Inside** by Julien Maury, Alexandre Bustillo
- 2006 **Crime insiders** by Frédéric Schoendoerffer
- 2005 **Dans tes rêves** by Denis thybaud
- 2004 **Tete d'or** by Gilles Blanchard
- 2003 **Process** by Christian Leigh
- Clean** by Olivier Assayas
- The intruder** by Claire Denis
- 2002 **Time of the wolf** by Michael Haneke
- 2001 **17 times Cecile Cassard** by Christophe honoré
- 2000 **Trouble everyday** by Claire Denis
- H-story** by Suwa Nobuhiro
- 1998 **Toni** by Philomène Esposito
- 1997 **The blackout** by Abel Ferrara
- To the limit** by Eduardo Campoy
- 1995 **Desire** by Bernard Murat
- Clubbed to death** by Yolande zaubermann
- 1994 **I can't sleep** by Claire Denis
- 6 days, 6 nights** by Diane Kurys
- 1992 **The gril in the air** by Maroun Bagdadi
- 1991 **Night on earth** by Jim Jarmusch
- 1990 **The beautiful story** by Claude Lelouch
- 1989 **A woman's revenge** by Jacques Doillon
- 1988 **Chimeres** by Claire Devers
- Dark woods** by Jacques Deray
- 1987 **The witches' sabbath** by Marco Bellochio
- 1986 **On a volé Charlie Spencer** by Francis Huster
- 1985 **Betty blue** by Jean-Jacques Beineix







## PATRIC CHIHA

Patric Chiha is an Austrian filmmaker of Hungarian and Lebanese origin, born in Vienna (Austria) in 1975. He moved to Paris at the age of 18 to study fashion design. He then studied film editing at INSAS Film School in Brussels. His short films and documentaries (*Home* and *Les Messieurs*) have been selected in a variety of film festivals. In 2009 he directed his first feature film, *Domaine*, starring Béatrice Dalle, which premiered at the Mostra di Venezia. Followed by *Boys like us* (2014), and the documentaries *Brothers of the night* (2016) and *If it were love* (2019), which both premiered at the Berlinale. *The Beast in the jungle* (2023) is his fifth feature film.

- 2023 **The Beast in the jungle**, Fiction, 103 min
- 2019 **If it were love**, Documentary, 82 min
- 2016 **Brothers of the night**, Documentary, 88 min
- 2014 **Boys like us**, Fiction, 90 min
- 2009 **Domaine**, Fiction, 110 min
- 2007 **Where is the head of the prison ?**, Fiction, 18 min
- 2006 **Home**, Fiction, 50 min
- 2005 **Les Messieurs**, Documentary, 52 min
- 2004 **Casa Ugalde**, Fiction, 20 min





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