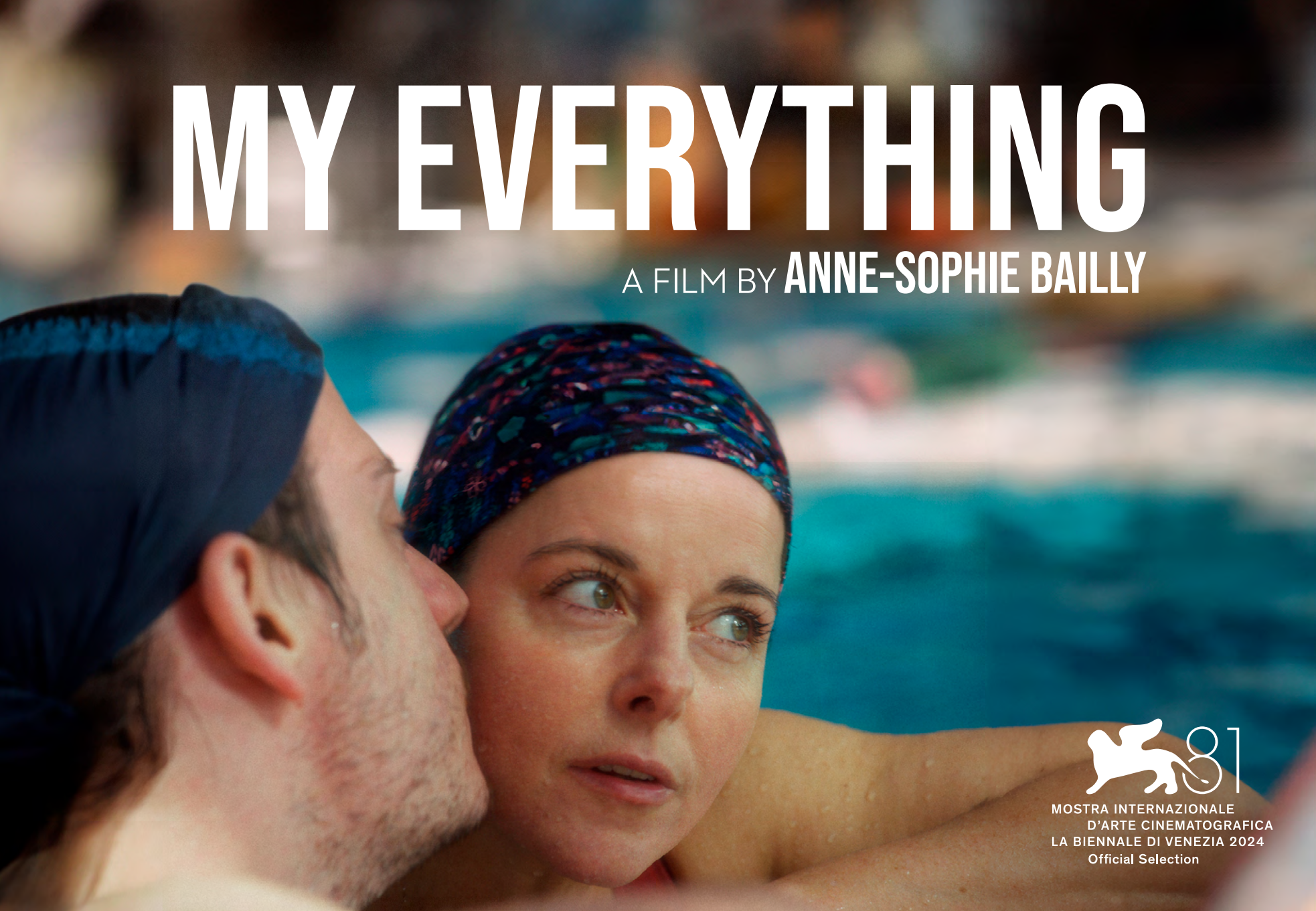
MY EVERYTHING
A FILM BY ANNE-SOPHIE BAILLY
81
MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2024
Official Selection

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LAURE CALAMY CHARLES PECCIA GALLETTO

MY EVERYTHING

A FILM BY
ANNE-SOPHIE BAILLY

FRANCE · 2024 · 1H34 · COLOR · 1.85 · 5.1

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SYNOPSIS

Mona lives with her adult son, Joël, who is "slow" as they say. He works in a specialized facility and he is passionately in love with his coworker Oceane, who is also disabled. While Mona knows nothing of their relationship, she learns that Oceane is pregnant. The symbiotic bond between mother and son falters.

INTERVIEW WITH
ANNE-SOPHIE BAILLY

How did you come to be a director?

I started out as an actor after studying drama and political science. Then I applied to La Fémis film school at age 27, which is the age limit. I didn't grow up in a family of film lovers but my parents took me to museums a lot. And when I became hooked on cinema, I took a screenwriting course. In the end, it was directing that stood out for me, particularly since I had a very strong relationship to actors.

How did your debut feature with its sensitive themes take shape? Is there a personal connection to the subject?

I don't have a sibling with special needs, but I come from a family of caregivers, primarily female ones (I only have sisters). The depiction of the practice of care guides and inhabits my desire to make movies. I find it fascinating because care always creates a co-dependence between the person who gives and the person who receives care. The idea for the film came from meeting a 60-year-old woman and her 80-year-old mother in a retirement home where my mother worked when I was younger. They had always lived together due to the daughter, Yolande, having an intellectual disability, so when her mother became dependent, her daughter moved into the retirement home with her. I remember Yolande and her mother forming a twosome that made me think, wow, what a radical image of a mother-daughter relationship.

Yes, your film focuses more on the mother-son relationship than on disability. Above all, it's the story of dual emancipation.

Disability creates a magnifying glass to take a look at the complexity of relationships between parents and offspring. The vulnerability of a disabled child accentuates the fears of their parent or parents. It makes detachment harder to achieve, and generates resentment and guilt on both side, which are strong dramatic levers, present to a greater or lesser extent in all family relationships. A character being disabled does not automatically mean that the subject is disability. And it gives a real role, artistically, to protagonists who are "different" by putting them at the heart of stories irrespective of issues of mental health, hindrance or obstacles.

Having said that, what came first when I was writing, was Mona and Joël, and Joël has always been defined as disabled. He is "slow," with learning disabilities linked to a neurological deficiency. I have to say, however, that the time I have spent with people said to be "slow" has made me think long and hard about the nature of intelligence. It's something that gave me pause before, and it resonated enormously when I started to visit institutions and their users. I'm not sure that it can be truly measured by reducing it to the famous notion of "intelligence quotient."

Océane and Joël are played by young actors, Charles Peccia Galletto and Julie Froger, who are themselves disabled.

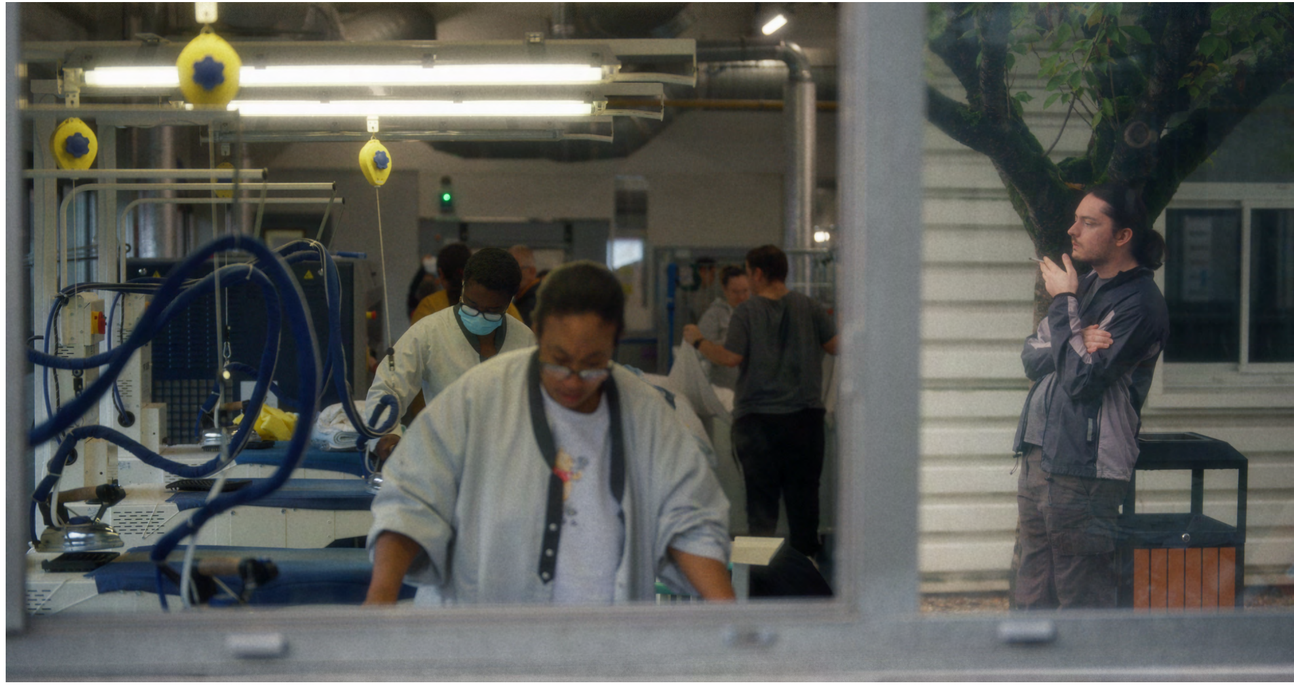
It was inconceivable to imitate or perform disability. Charles and Julie have things in common with their characters, but they are not their characters. For example, as Joël, Charles developed a way of understanding the world based on the script, but he does not have Joël's obsessions, nor even the same points of misunderstanding as Joël. He is an actor who happens to have a disability. Nobody can be reduced to his or her disability: not everybody in that situation sees themselves the same way. It can be extremely delicate to untangle strands of disability and personality. From my point of view, I wanted to work with awareness of the disorders that affect my characters and bring them closer to Charles and Julie, but at no point does the film establish a medical diagnosis. That's a perspective I did not want to have.

Did you do a lot of research before you started writing?

Yes, I did. I needed to base what I was doing on actual things and real people. When I was writing, I spent a lot of time at ESAT Ménilmontant, a facility where people with disabilities can enter the workforce. The reality is so much more powerful than anything you might imagine. At Ménilmontant, I met a young man with Down syndrome whose fashion choices were out of this world. If one of my characters looked like him, I'd be accused of laying it on thick.

Why did you want to film these characters?

Because they're faces that are rarely seen in film, and bodies that are rarely shown. Even if there are landmark examples in the more or less recent past, nobody can



claim there is varied and diverse representation! Their disabilities being barely visible adds to the mystery of the characters: awkward elocution, gait or expressions simply hint at something. For me, it was an incredible pleasure to film them. Cinematically, we're venturing into magnificent, unexplored territory. Where there is no visibility, cinema shines its light.

I suppose that the difficulty of a film like this is to avoid being preachy. Did anything in particular play on your mind?

I absolutely wanted to avoid gloom and doom, and voyeurism. I wanted it to be sensual and mysterious; to speak out, since disability is the realm of euphemism and silence, without saying too much, leaving some things unsaid. At the end, when Mona begins to explain that she was very young when Joël was born, she is interrupted and we never get to hear the rest of the story. It happened by accident on set—she was supposed to say much more—but we kept that take as it was.

There was also a scene I had shot in an assisted-living facility to show how two people with disabilities starting a family inconveniences the institutions, which do all they can to prevent it. But it turned out to be more powerful to hint at it. I really wanted to speak about the unmentionables, about institutional structures that have no response to these issues, and the way young women are prevented from getting pregnant through implants, and so on. Often,

there are no double beds in these facilities, so residents will make love anyplace they can. But that's changing. There is a real move to bring in some humanity and evolve along with young adults' desire for emancipation.

We also needed to avoid any kind of determinism. I think the film expresses the threat that confronts this young couple, especially the issue of custody and the potential transmission of a disorder. But to detail the ins-and-outs of the difficulties facing them felt unnecessary. Océane and Joël are caught between a rock and a hard place. They have a sword of Damocles over their heads. Their desire for a family has the potential to make life difficult for them, but there is also the chance that they will be all the better for it.

The film clearly shows that Joël is far more ready to free

himself of his mother, than the other way round.

Parents of children with disabilities require closure from their dreams of what parenthood would be. The child they have is not the child they were expecting. At the beginning of the relationship is suffering, trauma, which makes separation more difficult for them later. Added to that, there is the real and supposed fragility of their children.

When two disabled young people become parents, what is life like for them? Are there many of them?

When I was researching the subject, I found out that about 10% of the French population has disabilities (6-13% depending on the definition used). That's huge. Of those who live in institutions, requiring considerable assistance, those who start a family are like birds on a wire. Usually, they live just opposite their parents, in apartments that they rent just like anyone else. Group homes do not provide for families. There are some halfway houses now, where they can live with social workers nearby, but the issue of having a family is not considered because you run into a eugenicist taboo. But these are questions that need to be asked. Likewise, the question of the rights of the child on the way. That's what the film explores: who has rights over whom and what is passed on, and not only genetically?

How did you cast the film?

To find Océane and Joël, I saw a lot of people, both disabled professional actors and people working at ESAT-type facilities, and conducted multiple improv workshops in institutions. There was always a lot of laughter, which inspired some of the social workers. We saw hundreds of people, and we kept looking for a period of several months. I called people back to work on their backstories, in a variety of situations, sometimes working from the script. I often wondered about my choice of Charles and Julie. Can you choose people depending on their disability? Does that not involve objectification? We also had to be sure they clearly understood everything I might ask of them. That's the issue at the heart of the film, the question of consent.

Then I worked in pairs. First, we sketched out the mother-son duo, then the couple, Joël and Océane. I have seen a lot of Laure on stage, and she is also a great tragedian. She possesses intense emotional power, and a capacity to go into fits, like Gena Rowlands would in Cassavates' movies. She also brought vitality to Mona. With her, I was sure to steer clear of gloom and doom. She was a safeguard! Audiences must be able to understand her as a mother, especially when she gives up, when she decides to put herself first.

Her love affair runs alongside that of her son, which adds to the range of feelings they experience.

I was very keen for them to mirror each other. I wanted that dual trajectory and that dual emancipation, including in the sensuality. I also wanted people to see that Mona is reaching a sensitive age, getting older, and that, for her, meeting a man is anything but insignificant.

The character is tormented, hard almost, not always exactly likable.

Laure is a very brave performer. She isn't scared to get her hands dirty, and it wasn't a problem for her to be hard like that. Also, her character's underlying guilt is a wonderful resource for an actor. For the scene outside the hotel, where she flips her lid at her lover, we started out shooting in the pouring rain. Laure was barefoot and cold. What she says then is very powerful. I find her particularly beautiful in her exhaustion, and at the same time, when she walks away, back to camera, and you see this small woman wrapped in her son's jacket, it almost makes you smile. That's what I like. For humor and tragedy to go together.

Did Laure and Charles meet before the shoot?

Yes, and they found out they had a similar sense of humor. When Laure and Julie met, it was funny seeing them together, one very exuberant and voluble, and the other ultra-sensitive to the slightest sound, always on the alert.

What was your formal approach to directing the film?

The crux of the film for me as director was the handover between mother and son. First of all, we see Joël through Mona's eyes, then he gradually begins to assert himself as a young man, and he becomes a father. It was about testifying to the upheaval in their relationship. The point of view evolves as the story develops. I also knew I wanted to work close-up to the characters, like in the films of directors that guide me, especially Pialat. This story has a form of simplicity that requires us to focus primarily on the essential: the emotions. I wanted to use medium lenses in scenes between characters, with dialogue, and long lenses for the exteriors to isolate the characters from their environment, and give them some breathing room. I had in mind escape movies. I wanted the characters to be able to outrun us. It's a twosomes film. I didn't want to avoid shot-reverse shot at all costs but I wanted scope for regular breakouts. Finally, I was very keen to include a documentary angle in the fiction through the participation of counselors and social workers who are all non-professionals, and the deep-dive into the street festival where Joël gets lost.

Did you have films that inspired you?

You only work from masterpieces, obviously. Or movies that left their mark on you, at least. Cassavetes' Gloria often came to mind, with the characters being on the run providing a premise to explore the evolution of a relationship. Likewise, Lumet's Running On Empty, which tells the story of a heartbreaking emancipation, and Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore by Martin Scorsese. For Mona, I also had in mind the tangent taken by Barbara Loden's Wanda. For Joël, it was the simplicity with no explanations of Alice Rohrwacher's Lazzaro. All those protagonists and the directors' choices were a constant source of inspiration.

Directing is also in the detail: Mona makes love with her bra on, American-style...

I wanted to show that this woman who doesn't often make love is shy. So, sure, she keeps her bra on. It was already there in the script.

More broadly, for the sex scenes, I worked hand in hand with Laure: she saw the framing before doing the scene, which, I am sure, is what makes her performance so generous and unbound. Julie was also able to visualize the shot on set. And we had a body-double for certain gestures, as well as an intimacy coordinator who was very good, and was there to protect the actors and as someone I could fall back on as director.

You are also an actor. Is that an advantage for a director?

Yes, and it was a stroke of luck. Eliciting a performance is tricky—directing actors is something that happens unseen. It's both intuitive and physical. In fact, my love of cinema comes from my love of actors and bodies.

Was it a long shoot?

35 days, which is slightly longer than for a lot of first features, but it was a luxury I needed. As director, however much you want to be mobile and alert to the actors, you're dealing with bodies that are bulkier, slower, more cumbersome. The elocution is also a little bit slower. We rehearsed scenes, even though Laure doesn't really like to do that. She was a real trooper!

Did Charles and Julie enjoy being filmed?

Yes, I think so. Charles is an actor, with a deep love of acting and a distinctive way of speaking and seeing the world. Julie is not a professional actor but she enjoyed the experience. She constantly took me by surprise during the shoot. She has real power, which makes for an impressive combination with her vulnerability. And she has a political investment in the film: the possibility of living as a couple and starting a family is something she demands for herself. Exploring that with her was a great thrill. ■

Interview conducted in Paris, august 2024

CAST

Mona **LAURE CALAMY** • Joël **CHARLES PECCIA GALLETTO** • Océane **JULIE FROGER** • Frank **GEERT VAN RAMPELBERG**
Nathalie **RÉBECCA FINET** • Séverine **AISSATOU DIALLO SAGNA** • Gabriel **PASQUALE • D'INCA** • Christophe **JEAN DE PANGE**

CREW

Written and Directed by **ANNE-SOPHIE BAILLY** • Produced by **DAVID THION** • Associate Producer **PHILIPPE MARTIN** • Image **NADER CHALHOUB** Editing **QUENTIN SOMBSTHAY** and **FRANÇOIS QUIQUERÉ, LMA** • Music **JEAN THÉVENIN** • Sound **PIERRE-LOUIS CLAIRIN** • First Assistant Director **LOUISE BLACHÈRE** • Script Supervisor **MANON ALIROL** • Casting **SANDIE GALAN PEREZ, ARDA** • Accessibility Coordination Manager **MARGAULT ALGUDO-BRZOSTE** • Production Design **CLÉMENCE NEY** • Costumes **FLORIANE GAUDIN** • Production Management **JULIA MARAVAL** • Location Management **STÉPHANIE DELBOS** • Sound Editing **ADRIEN CANNEPIN** and **PIERRE-LOUIS CLAIRIN** • Mixing **XAVIER THIEULIN** • A production **LES FILMS PELLÉAS** • In coproduction with **FRANCE 3 CINÉMA, PICTANOVO** • with the support of **RÉGION HAUTS-DE-FRANCE** • With the support of **CANAL+** • With the participation of **FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS, CINÉ+, LES FILMS DU LOSANGE** • In association with **CINÉMAGE 18** • With the support of **LE CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE** and **L'AGEFIPH, LA RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE** In partnership with the **CNC** • In association with **LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 17, PALATINE ÉTOILE 21, CINÉCAP 7** • Developped with the support of **INDÉFILMS INITIATIVE 11, CINÉMAGE 17 DÉVELOPPEMENT** • French Distribution and International Sales **LES FILMS DU LOSANGE**

ANNE-SOPHIE BAILLY

Director's biography

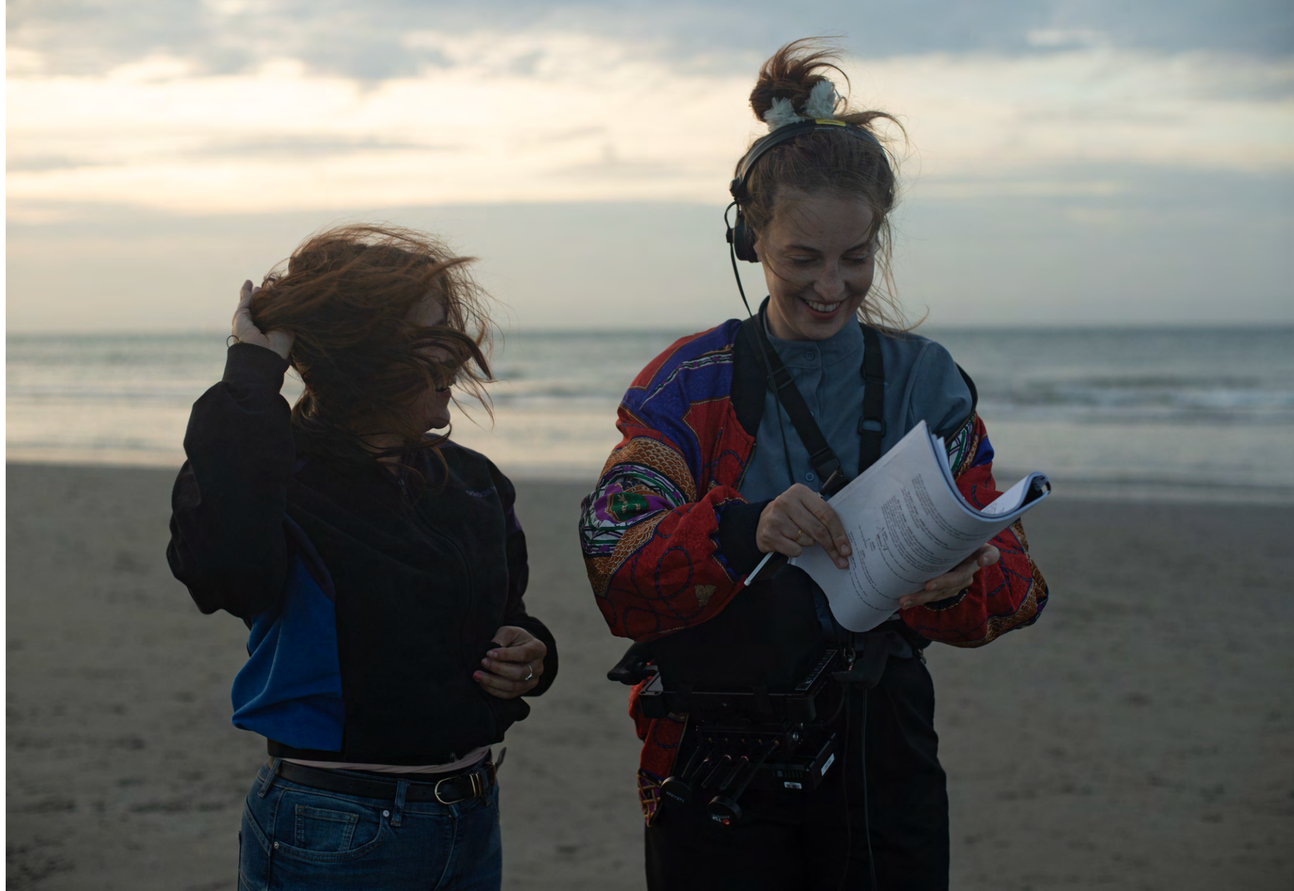
Anne-Sophie Bailly was born and grew up in Franche-Comté. She started out as an actress in theatre and film before joining the Femis directing department in 2017. She made several short films between 2018 and 2021, moving between documentary (***In Labour*** in 2019) and fiction. Her films are marked by a taste for staging groups, and the themes of care, motherhood, filiation and transmission. Her graduation short, ***The Midwife*** (2021), is steeped in these obsessions. It was selected for over forty festivals around the world, from France (Clermont-Ferrand) to the United States (Telluride), and won no less than a dozen awards.

As well as directing, she has co-written several screenplays, including ***Dog on Trial*** (2024) alongside Laetitia Dosch, selected this year at Cannes in the Un Certain Regard category, and ***Long Feu*** with Manuel Billi, laureate of the Héroïnes de la Scénaristerie residency and supported by writing grants from the Grand Est region.

Her first feature film, ***My Everything***, starring Laure Calamy and the young Charles Peccia Galletto and Julie Froger, was produced by Les Films Pelléas and distributed by Les Films du Losange. ***My Everything*** will premiere at Venice Film Festival at the Orizzonti competition. ■

Filmography

- 2024 - **MY EVERYTHING *(MON INSÉPARABLE)*** – *Feature film*
- 2021 - **THE MIDWIVE *(LA VENTRIÈRE)*** – *Short film*
- 2019 - **IN LABOUR *(EN TRAVAIL)*** – *Short film*



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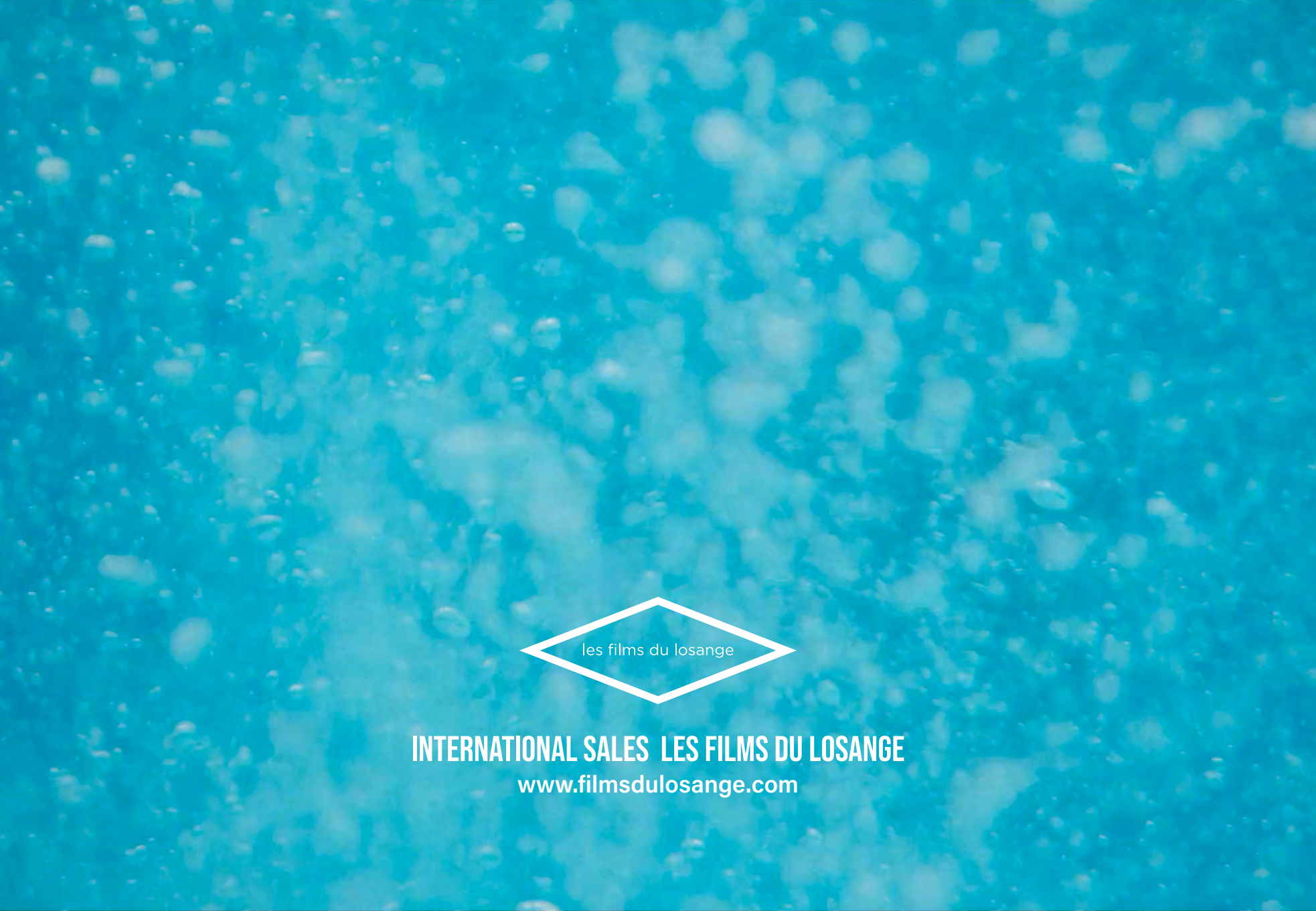

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