

VIRGINIE EFIRA
ARIEH WORTHALTER

ABLAZE

A FILM BY
THOMAS KRUIHOF

SCREENPLAY BY
JEAN-BAPTISTE DELAFON
AND
THOMAS KRUIHOF

WITH
JUSTINE LACROIX LOUP PINARD MAMA PRASSINOS
AUDE BRIANT PASCAL OUMAKLOUF FRANCK TRILLOT ALAIN CAUCHI
JULES SADOUGH ANTONIA BURESI RACHEL ARDITI

WARD: CHRISTOPHE BEAUCARNE A.F.C. S.B.C. COSTUMEUR: JEAN BARASSE A.D.C. MAKEUP: JEAN-BAPTISTE BEAUDOU
CRAVATTE: GREGOIRE AUGER STYLING: NICOLAS PROVOST JON GOC ALEXANDRE WIDMER QUADALUPE CASSEUS
CARTIER: MICHAËL LAGUENS COIFFEUR: CARINE SARFATI PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: THOMAS BERTHON-FISCHMAN

COORDONATEUR: ANNE-SOPHIE DUPLESSIS 1^{ER} ADJOINT: RYAN LAURE PREVOST
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR: CHRISTINE RICHARD-SIVAN 2^{ES} ADJOINTS: AMÉLIE BOUILLY GARNIER MATHIEU GUÉRAÇAGUE
POST-PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR: AURÉLIEN ADJEDJ 1^{ER} SUPERVISEUR: BENJAMIN AGÉORGES STEPHANE BIDAULT

PRODUCED BY: THIBAUT GAST MATTHIAS WEBER EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: DAVID GIORDANO
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER: JEAN-BAPTISTE DELAFON A CO-PRODUCTION: 24 25 FILMS WILD BUNCH FRANCE 3 CINÉMA
IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH: ATELIER DE PRODUCTION ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS: MATHIEU VERHAEGHE THOMAS VERHAEGHE

IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH: KALLOUCHE CINÉMA ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS: JEAN-RACHID ARNAUD CHAUTARD
IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH: LES FILMS VELVET PRODUCED BY: FREDÉRIC JOUYE IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH: SRAB FILMS
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ABLAZE

A FILM BY
THOMAS KRUTHOF

WITH
VIRGINIE EFIRA AND ARIEH WORTHALTER

France – Running time : 1h42 – Scope – Color – 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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SYNOPSIS

Karine and Jimmy have been deeply in love for years. They work hard each day to balance their jobs - Karine is a factory worker, and Jimmy is a truck driver looking to grow his small transportation business. With their two teenage children, Enzo and Anaïs, they form a close-knit and loving family.

In 2018, as rising prices weigh heavily on modest households and stir widespread public anger, Karine throws herself wholeheartedly into the militant cause. She joins a new wave of protest, attends demonstrations, and soon dedicates her nights and weekends to the cause, putting her relationship and family at risk of falling apart.



INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS KRUIHOF

Was your initial intention to portray a couple of this age going through their first serious crisis, or was it the Yellow Vests movement that imposed itself?

In both case, it's about commitment. With my co-writer Jean-Baptiste Delafon, we had already explored the intimate workings of commitment in *Promises*, but Isabelle Huppert and Reda Kateb were portraying professional politicians. This time, we wanted to approach politics without the occupation and the pursuit of power: to relate the story of discovering activism and to observe how it can collide with romantic and family life. When you are just an ordinary citizen who decides to get involved without being prepared for it, while already leading a busy life, the stakes are not the same as for someone who does it as a profession. The sudden intrusion of politics into personal and family life can be deeply disruptive. It was also a way of weaving together the large and small scale, the personal and the collective. To intertwine the ideal of solidarity with married life, including in its political dimension, because living together for a long time is itself a worldview built by two. Can you continue to love each other when you no longer share the same belief in the future?

The political ideal takes shape through the Yellow Vests. Why that movement in particular?

First, because it is the largest social protest movement in our recent history, one that still resonates strongly seven years on, and one that has hardly been explored in fiction on film. But above all because it was a very spontaneous movement that had the particularity of introducing hundreds of thousands of citizens to political activism outside the traditional structures of engagement. It all began with the fuel tax hike and the feeling of being despised by politicians who ignored a way of life in which the car is essential. But very quickly, the demands grew broader, more structural, and began to challenge the very functioning of democracy.

The media coverage of the Yellow Vests focused heavily on clashes at demonstrations, with a tendency to reduce the movement to outbreaks of physical and verbal violence. What we wanted instead was to tell the story from the inside—through a group, through a character. The writing process began with meetings with Yellow Vests activists.

Was there a person in real life who inspired the character of Karine?

Everyone we met inspired us. We gathered testimonies first in Brittany and Haute-Loire, then in Limoges and Angoulême, where the film was shot. They all spoke with pleasure about those first gatherings, the social bonds, the friendships that endured, the thrill of believing they could change the world together, even just a little. Of course, the hardening of the struggle, the end of the movement, and the absence of political follow-up left their mark as well. But none of them regretted discovering political engagement, or what it had changed within them.

What were your priorities as a director when filming this struggle?

The choice of aspect ratio was important in a film whose two main settings are, in a way, the crowd and Karine and Jimmy's kitchen. With Christophe Beaucarne, the film's cinematographer, we chose to shoot in scope—obviously to capture the energy of the collective, but also because it's an interesting format for more intimate scenes: it conveys more clearly the space between bodies, their closeness or distance, and the tensions that arise.

There was also the idea that the Yellow Vests movement had been shown almost exclusively in 16:9 on television, and in vertical format on smartphones. Choosing a wider frame, with a carefully selected palette of vibrant colors, was a way of shifting the viewer's gaze.

We wanted to create a feeling of immersion in life, in the tumult. The campfires, the smoke, the uniforms, the shouts, chants, sirens—all of these naturally imposed themselves as visual and sound motifs. The film had to convey that collective breath, in moments of unity as well as disagreement, and also capture the chaos when actions or demonstrations went wrong.

Let's come back to your characters. They are complex, built with great care...

They are made of multiple layers and contradictions, and what they go through makes them even more complex. Karine's commitment is driven by several forces, starting with the fact that she is the mother of teenagers. Children tie us strongly to the future of the world. What do we want to leave them?

Karine is a woman in the process of emancipation—not from a status of submissive wife, because she never was—but she feels her life has long been governed by rules set by others, and now she wants a voice. She discovers a new sense of purpose, a space for expression, relevance, a hunger to learn. Every aspect of her life becomes implicated and affected by her discovery of activism. Fueled by an almost spiritual energy, she believes she can reconcile everything: work, love, children, fixing up the house... and the fight.

Jimmy is rooted in the concrete, yet grappling with the same questions about his freedom, his capacity for emancipation while still providing for his family. They are both strong characters, bound together for a long time, yet in the film separated by divergent answers to similar questions.

Jimmy is a man of action, and at the same time, a romantic...

I think he feels he is losing his wife as he sees her get more and more involved, even though at first he was happy for her. But he is more individualistic; he wants to chart his own course, to grow his business, to build his life with courage. He genuinely aspires to succeed and sees himself a bit as the hero of his family. Karine and Jimmy, in the end, embody two sides of a universal and very contemporary question: should one join in collective action in the fragile hope of changing society, or continue alone, trying simply to protect one's loved ones in an increasingly chaotic world?



And the children? They don't seem very engaged—even the son, who at one point shows interest in the Yellow Vests... Is this a portrait of a generation?

We had no intention of making a generational portrait, but when you're the parent of teenagers, they challenge you. I wanted children who question things, who have their own desires, their excesses, their own strength. Their opinions are already taking shape; they have their own way of seeing the world. And while Enzo, the son, seems for a moment ready to embrace his mother's ideas, in reality he sticks to his own path. After all, from the outside, activism looks like something that demands a lot of time and energy for little concrete result. Anaïs, meanwhile, is less curious about politics than her brother, but she is deeply affected by her mother's life.

Karine and Jimmy are renovating their house. You film this work with great attention, almost as something precious, beautiful...

I wanted to film their gestures as an act of sharing. It's a project that brings them together, that embodies their life together. They are plastering walls; it's not a work of art, but there is a gentleness in the way they move in sync, a common rhythm that I didn't even try to choreograph. It's also a way of showing their daily life and their harmony as a couple. Their love story is not told only through passionate impulses or declarations, but above all through the gestures of everyday life, habits, glances, the smallest attentions—something I feel we rarely see in cinema.

More broadly, work is at the heart of the film. These are people who work hard.

It's a film where you cannot ignore the characters' jobs. Their lives depend on it. And it is at the heart of the Yellow Vests movement.

You can't talk about social anger with a disembodied view of the working world. It had to be concrete: gestures, physical constraints, the small details that give things their texture and allow us to feel, in a short span, the weight of their efforts.

Virginie Efira's scenes in the food-processing plant were shot during real production days. And Ariele Worthalter learned how to drive a truck.

The film speaks of love and revolution, but the characters' lives are constantly pulled back to an exhausting daily reality, to material struggles around purchasing power and power dynamics.



Did you write the script with Virginie Efira and Arieh Worthalter in mind?

We didn't write for specific actors, because the challenge was above all to find a couple. Once I imagined Virginie in the role, the immediate question was: with whom? This is a couple who have lived together for twenty years, and their mere presence, the way they carry themselves, had to convey that. I envisioned them together; I found them to be a credible, almost natural couple, yet one that also radiates a strong sense of romance on screen. Often the chemistry between two actors comes from affinity or mutual admiration in their craft. The connection and complicity between Virginie and Arieh gave real substance to Karine and Jimmy's story, allowing for nuances in the evolution of their relationship that weren't even on the page.

The script feels very precise. Did anything change during filming or in the edit?

The structure of the script was respected, but the film kept writing itself right to the end—through readings and rehearsals, new ideas that emerged, scenes reworked the night before or on set. Especially in all the group scenes, where you can't write everything. You need a bit of improvisation. You need freedom for the actors: to listen to each other, to interrupt, to let some chaos in, so the scene vibrates beyond its dramatic purpose.

The sets, too, had the power to alter what I had imagined. For instance, we had to partially rewrite the sequence where the "buffalos" discover their roundabout burned down. We had just spent several days filming joyful scenes there, but when Jean Rabasse, the production designer, set fire to the hut, we all stood before this grim sight and felt something deeply. The tone of the sequence shifted instantly; there were lines in the script that no longer had a place.

Around thirty Yellow Vests and activists from Angoulême and Limoges participated regularly in the shoot, feeding us their advice and observations. There was naturally a palpable emotion in recreating moments close to their lived experience—except this time the collective project was making a film. On the final night of shooting, they had to chase Macron's car, in a sequence inspired by the President's visit to Le Puy-en-Velay in December 2018. I thought we wouldn't need many takes, that they'd tire quickly of running and shouting in the cold. But they were all carried by an extraordinary energy, ready to do it again and again.

There was a real harmony between the actors, the actual activists, and the crew. We were searching for a kind of collective vibration that took hold during the shoot, and which I believe comes across on screen.



The courtroom scene is particularly harsh...

We drew from testimonies of Yellow Vests and lawyers, who described a justice system that was, to say the least, swift and often contemptuous from the very beginning of the movement. There was a clear intent to discourage people from protesting again. And later in the film, you see the preventive arrests at the edge of big cities on protest days, even before demonstrations had begun.

How did the Christmas dinner scene come about?

At the heart of the film is the evolution of the couple, and we all know that during family Christmas dinners, tensions can flare. We imagined the audience might expect: “Okay, now they’ll talk politics, and it will explode.” Jean-Baptiste Delafon and I liked the idea of defying that expectation by turning instead to the memory of their first meeting. For that scene we thought of Claude Sautet, of his way of plunging the viewer into a group scene without preamble.

It’s the only moment in the film when we look back at the couple’s past. Generally, I’m wary of delving into characters’ prehistories—where they come from, their families, their childhoods. We don’t hear anything, for example, about Karine’s parents. But recalling the moment when Jimmy and Karine met allowed us to situate them as a couple, a couple in love with their own mythology...

So no detailed biographies for your characters?

No. We touched on them a little while writing and sometimes traces of cut scenes remain. Occasionally the actors asked me questions, but more often than not they built their own backstory from the script. And I prefer the audience to meet the character through the actor’s embodiment, rather than through narrated past histories. I don’t like resorting to backstories—they tend to over-explain and over-psychologize the characters.

The film’s title, “Ablaze”, suggests that this movement, full of hope, is still smoldering...

It’s a title that resonates as much with love and passion as with protest. It speaks of what glows beneath the surface, of what hesitates between bursting into flame or burning out—this in-between where the film takes place, between social tension and intimate fragility. We are very close to this couple; we feel both the big tremors and the tiny aggressions. By the end, Jimmy has moved closer to Karine—he’s made the effort to understand her, without becoming a Yellow Vest himself. Everything remains unresolved. Nothing will be simple between them, but something endures nonetheless: their bond, unbreakable, in which they choose to believe.





CAST

Karine Virginie EFIRA
Jimmy Ariele WORTHALTER
Magali Mama PRASSINOS
Anaïs Justine LACROIX
Enzo Loup PINARD



CREW

A film by	Thomas KRUTHOF
Produced by	Thibault GAST Matthias WEBER
Associate producer	Jean-Baptiste DELAFON
Executive producer	David GIORDANO
Screenplay	Jean-Baptiste DELAFON Thomas KRUTHOF
Casting	Michaël LAGUENS
Cinematography	Christophe BEAUCARNE A.F.C. S.B.C
Sound	Nicolas PROVOST
Original score	Grégoire AUGER
Set design	Jean RABASSE A.D.C
Costumes	Carine SARFATI
Make-up	Amélie BOUILLY GARNIER
Hair	Mathieu GUÉRAÇAGUE
Script supervisor	Christine RICHARD-SIVAN
First assistant director	Laure PREVOST
Production manager	Thomas BERTHON-FISCHMAN
Film editing	Jean-Baptiste BEAUDOIN
Sound editing	Jon GOC, Guadalupe CASSIUS
Mixing	Alexandre WIDMER
Unit manager	Anne-Sophie DUPLESSIS
Gaffer	Olivier DIRKSEN
Key grip	Nils MOREAU
Production company	24 25 Films - Une société Mediawan
In co-production with	Wild Bunch, France 3 Cinéma, Atelier de Production, Kallouche Cinéma, Les Films Velvet, Srab Films, Panache Productions, La Compagnie Cinématographique, Proximus, BeTV & Orange
With the participation of	France Télévisions, Canal +, Ciné+ OCS
With the support of	La région Nouvelle-Aquitaine
In partnership with	Le CNC
With the support of	ALCA, Entourage Sofica 3, Tax Shelter, La Sacem
In partnership with	Elle Driver
French distributor	Wild Bunch
International sales	Elle Driver