

TARANTULA, GOOD FORTUNE FILMS, MICRO\_SCOPE  
PRESENT

tiff. toronto  
international  
film festival

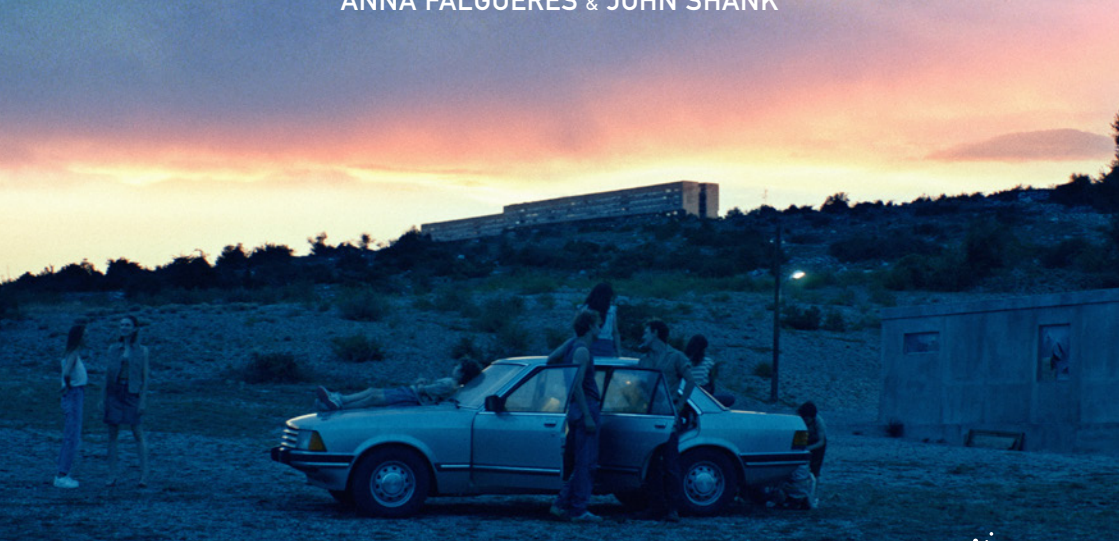
GARANCE  
MARILLIER

ALIOCHA  
SCHNEIDER

VINCENT  
ROTTIERS

# POMPEI

A FILM BY  
ANNA FALGUÈRES & JOHN SHANK



TARANTULA

GOOD  
fortune  
FILMS

micro\_scope

jour  
2fête

TARANTULA BELGIQUE, GOOD FORTUNE FILMS, MICRO\_SCOPE  
PRESENT



**GARANCE  
MARILLIER**

**ALIOCHA  
SCHNEIDER**

**VINCENT  
ROTTIERS**

# POMPEI

A FILM BY  
**ANNA FALGUÈRES AND JOHN SHANK**

95 min – Belgium, France, Canada – DCP – 1 :77 :1 – 5.1 – 2019

Press materials available for download at [www.jour2fete.com](http://www.jour2fete.com)

**INTERNATIONAL SALES**

**Jour2Fête**

**Sarah Chazelle, Etienne Ollagnier**

9, rue Ambroise Thomas - 75009 PARIS

[sales@jour2fete.com](mailto:sales@jour2fete.com)

+33 1 40 22 92 15



**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Brigitta Portier**

**Alibi Communications**

+32 477 98 25 84

[brigitaportier@alibicomunications.be](mailto:brigitaportier@alibicomunications.be)



S Y N O P S I S

In a deserted region, Victor and his younger brother Jimmy are left to fend for themselves and killing time with a bunch of other kids does not help overcome loneliness. When Victor falls in love with Billie, a young girl from a troubled home, things slowly begin to change for Jimmy.



INTERVIEW WITH  
**ANNA FALGUÈRES**  
& **JOHN SHANK**

**How did this project come to be?**

**John Shank:** For me, it all started with a desire to write a film with Anna.

**Anna Falguères:** At first, our idea was to work with characters who were fighting something, resisting. Literally. We did research on anarchist movements, thought about resisters' during the Second World War. And then as we wrote, gradually, without censoring ourselves regarding the themes, the dramatic stakes – and also because we wanted to write a love story – the project shifted towards forsaken figures whose acts of resistance were more subtle, who were fighting more against themselves than against a system or an establishment.

**J:** A love story and acts of resistance. And we knew pretty early on that we wanted concrete and wilderness in the film too.

**POMPEI is precisely set outside any kind of urban context, on the fringes of our world, our society, with timelessness to it. How did you build the world of POMPEI?**

**J:** Paradoxically we were working in a very urban setting at first. Things began to change when we wrote and went on location scouting simultaneously. We were drawn towards



modern architecture and buildings that had already been abandoned. We did quite a lot of research and scouting, and we slowly saw a world appear.

**A:** At a certain point in the process, it dawned on us that we needed the environment to materialize and express a lack of heritage. We needed it to convey the absence of any kind of transmission from the previous generation, which is one of the things that our characters have to endure. So, in a world where love is on the verge of disappearing, to highlight their urge to resist, we needed them to roam an abandoned world; ruins in which they could look, dig and try to understand things. The locations imposed themselves really. We wanted the film world to be like a small planet, made of archetypes, and personal memories.

**J:** The artificiality of the world wasn't there from the get go. We chose spaces that we wanted to film, places that we wanted to coexist, in the film, visually. And we started putting things together on paper, building one unique territory and world from the different bits and pieces.

**Come to mind the first films of Pasolini, who sets his stories in rural areas but with a sense of the sprawling cities growing nearer and nearer.**

**A:** Exactly. ACCATTONE and MAMMA ROMA were on our mind while writing. With their powerful images of that specific time when people wandered in a world overtaken by modernity, with the future looming ahead, ready to impose itself on them. We were trying to find a new way of visually representing a society that builds walls that the characters will have to collide into. We wanted to accompany characters that will be forced to say goodbye to a world they loved, try to touch that particular feeling. It was complicated because the future in Pasolini's films has become our present, concrete walls are everywhere...

**All of this coexists with a certain form of American imagery. Was this a way for you to address Time rather than a specific place or country?**

**J:** Yes. We were actually trying to strip things bare, to get away from reality. From too much reality. The idea was to create an indefinable world but that could still somehow be familiar to the spectator. American imagery is part of that familiarity. But I'd say that it's not as much a question of American imagery, as it is about a



way of relating to space, and about places that are seldom filmed in contemporary European cinema.

**A:** American cinema is part of popular culture... The fantasies, dreams, illusions, disillusionment that I experienced when I was younger were accompanied, whether I like it or not, by that imagery. And since we were working with childhood memories, it seemed natural to call on that imagery. And one could say the United-States is a representation of our time – of where we are, of where our civilization has finally ended up. We felt like we had to fit that into a film if we were going to attempt to take a look at civilization on a time scale much bigger than one single generation.

**There's a mythical dimension to the landscapes and characters of POMPEI. How did this dimension come to be?**

**J:** Tragedy was one of the things we discussed while we were writing. In POMPEI, similarly to the structure of ancient Greek tragedy, the dramatic disaster has taken place long before the film begins. The characters are all struggling with the weight of what has come before, with a disaster that precedes the time of our narrative in the film. They all live with myths and illusions they have built for themselves, or that have been passed on to them.

**A:** It's true, they are all struggling with some kind of deficiency, a gaping hole, and no matter how unconscious they are of what's missing, they're fighting it. There is a heroic side to the characters, but they all have something of anti-heroes too. Their beliefs are constantly challenged. Especially for Victor – who is unconsciously creating the obstacles that won't allow him to open his eyes.

**In POMPEI there are no references to the digital world, no Internet, no smartphones... You seem to have dropped the characters into your childhood memories, with no references to modern communication devices.**

**A:** When writing, we really wanted our characters, if they planned to meet, to not be able to call each other, to have to wait for each other. We wanted our characters to be connected to their hopes, their survival instincts. We thought it was important to convey and share that particular feeling of having to wait.

**J:** We also wanted to build on the feeling of absence. And try to get away from the impression of immediacy that cellphones bring. It was our way of focusing on the bonds that connect the characters, of articulating those bonds and the way they



change throughout the film. The characters don't communicate that much, and share very little information, but their relationships change. That was important to us: to focus on the issue of relationship, links, connections and feelings, rather than communication.

**A:** It's also because we wanted to stray away from any kind of form of realism, for it to be a vision, like someone remembering a story that happened, once upon a time, somewhere - far from the pace of contemporary communication.

#### **How did you choose the title?**

**J:** Anna showed up one day and said: "The title is POMPEI."

**A:** There were two important ideas: first, choosing a word that everybody knows but that belongs to no one. And secondly, we were both moved – aside from the natural disaster - by the fact that people unknowingly left a trace, a print, a common memory. It's pretty unique in the history of humanity, even if it will certainly occur again. But today, there's this one place where it has occurred.

**J:** Yes, we really liked the idea of that particular trace: one left behind by people who weren't necessarily trying to leave a trace of their existence.

**A:** And if History is always written by the victorious, Pompei is a marvelous counterexample. There's beauty in the memory of these people bound and connected by disaster, like a photo taken by nature.

#### **The film evokes adolescence, and childhood and the connections between these two ages.**

**J:** For a long time there were no children in the script. And then all of sudden there they were! We wanted to tell a story about characters who'd never had any guides, anyone to turn to. We originally thought the simplest idea was to work with one single generation. But in the end, the lack of any adult reference, or guiding presence, is more powerful when there are both children and young adults. We also felt like brotherhood, and the feelings that arise from the relationship between an older brother and a younger brother were something we wanted to build on.



**A:** The children are peeping-disruptive elements. I had this childhood memory that kept resurfacing during the first months of writing. There were two students, when I was in 7th or 8th grade, who were rumored to be dating. Nobody had ever seen them together, but there was a lot of gossip. A friend of mine was convinced that she had discovered where they secretly met. We weren't sure if they were really there, but we wanted them to know that we had found their hiding place. So we both screamed out into this field, at the countryside. I felt really guilty afterwards. I hoped that I hadn't thwarted their love story... The children stem from that memory. But they were also a way for us to get a peak at our main character's childhood. We wanted the spectator to see what Victor and Toxou went through as kids. Unable to question the habits and patterns that are shown to them, the children end up being the ones to feed and uphold the self-censorship of the older adolescents.

**Tell us about the casting. All the actors in the film have impressive physical presences.**

**A:** For Billie, we were looking for a young woman who could embody a form of resistance, someone intense yet reserved, someone who had more courage than one could imagine at first sight. We wanted Billie to be stubborn in the way she

takes stand against the group's rituals and belief system. By standing up to them, she offers everyone the opportunity to express their own free will and challenges their beliefs, for better and for worst. Garance was rapidly an obvious choice. Her ever-changing face, the passion in her eyes, and her physical determination despite her small build, was exactly what we wanted for Billie.

For Victor, we were looking for a romantic soul hidden behind the traits of a bad boy. We wanted to find an actor whose face could convey a wound, a sense of being trapped. Victor is stuck in the role of replacing a father that ran away. And he is trying very hard to keep that figure alive for his brother, even if the father's a son of a bitch, because it's his only heritage. Aliocha's sensitivity, his antique statue-like features and his reserve were all part of what we were looking for Victor.

Jimmy had to be a boy on the brink of adolescence, impatient to grow up but still expressing the needs of a child. We were looking for a boy who wasn't too muscular, whose voice hadn't changed yet. And also still able to tear up like a child. A boy whose experience and sensibility had something in common with us. When our casting director had us meet Auguste – who lives in the area where we shot – we were instantly struck by his emotional maturity, how carefully he dealt





with the character's feelings, and his lines. We felt like he was trying to understand and love Jimmy just as much as we wanted to film him.

**J:** We looked for Jimmy for a long time, and saw an enormous amount of children. It was exciting to find him at last.

For Toxou, we just wanted Vincent Rottiers to be part of the project. And when he accepted to play the part, we knew that he'd bring the strength, the presence that we were looking for. But he'd be bringing tenderness and vulnerability to that character too.

But for me, choosing an actor comes down to instinct. And it's true, that the actors in POMPEI are all physical actors. Maybe because I could sense that, on set, they'd be working, and I'd be working, first and foremost with their bodies.

**Visually the film is striking. We can sense how attached you are to landscapes, faces, composition. When did you decide to shoot in anamorphic cinemascope?**

**J:** The visual aspect of the film was in the script. We were striving to build the story around the way our characters relate to their environment, their way of

moving through space, of positioning themselves. But the decision to shoot in cinemascope with anamorphic lenses was made with our DOP, Florian Berutti while in prep. POMPEI is his first feature film as DOP. Without going into details, we ended up choosing the Lomo anamorphic lenses because of the optical mishaps that occurred with them. I'd never shot digital before, previously I'd only worked on film, and I felt like it was really important to still have something magical happening from an optical perspective. The anamorphic lenses we used, even if we were recording digitally, still left room for something organic to happen. Florian understood how important that was to us, how much we wanted the images to have a particular texture, how much we wanted the light to convey feelings. He worked very hard and dove into the visual aspect of the script and into our work directing on set.

**A:** It was great to meet Florian. In our first discussions, we understood that our respective desires of cinema and our approaches could meet. We immediately felt like we were standing on common ground in terms of artistic sensibility. Furthermore, Florian was able to find his space somewhere between a duo of directors, which is not an easy thing to do, and this was very precious on set. We also shared with him a true love for negative film, but paradoxically, because of his experience and knowledge of digital post-production, he came with the perfect

tools to accompany us in building both the organic image we wanted for the film and the color palette we were striving for.

**The sound design plays an important role in the sensual and organic dimension of the film.**

**J:** We worked on set with Emmanuel de Boissieu, who is a great sound mixer and hadn't recorded on set for more than 10 years. He came as a friend. But also to confront himself with recording again after years of being on the receiving end of pre-recorded sounds. I say he's a great mixer because he's so obstinate, no matter the circumstances, on set or while mixing. He never forgets the physical aspect of a sound, it's sensual impact. No matter how complicated things can be technically sometimes, he remains focused on the sensitive dimension of sound: its softness, its violence, its texture, its proximity or distance. A sound is first and foremost a feeling, and a very physical one to him.

This aspect was important for the film. Later, in post-production, we worked in the same direction, and were very careful to simplify and strip down the soundscape of the film. We wanted only the few necessary sounds that would help us create the feelings we were trying to convey.

**A:** Sound designs that truly move me are usually designs that leave a lot of room. Designs where I can fill in the silence with my own sounds, my own sound library... Additionally, POMPEI is like a memory to me, and when you call on your memory, I have the feeling that all the sounds don't come back to you. Some stick in mind, like a smell, others don't.

**The film opens with a long shot in which you let us watch two of the main characters. We know nothing about them and have no idea where they are going. Was this key to interpretation something you wrote in the script or is it something that came to be while editing?**

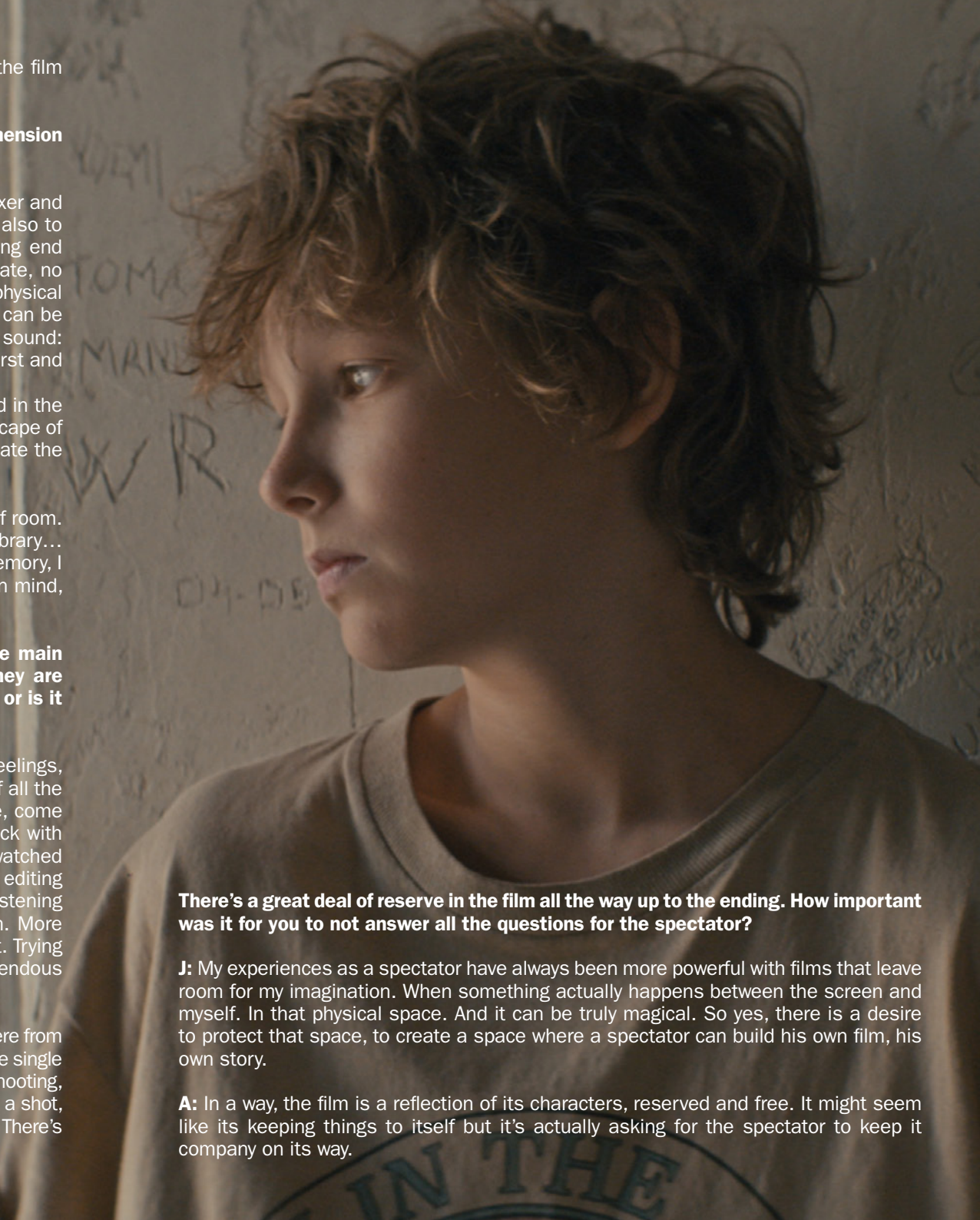
**A:** We felt like we had a pretty tight script. We really wrote the images, the feelings, the shots. The screenplay was like a memo of what we wanted to gather, of all the things we needed to focus on. And then of course, on set, things change, come to life, unexpected things happen, the clock is ticking... and we came back with material that wasn't quite the same as what we had written. After having watched all the dailies, we both felt like we were going to have to be radical in the editing room. And by shaping and re-shaping the material, by stepping back and listening to what we had shot, the film found a slower pace, its floating sensation. More about feelings, memories. We needed to love and accept what we had shot. Trying to force the material to become something different would've been a horrendous nightmare.

**J:** The idea of a film that led the spectator towards an unknown territory was there from the start and stuck with us every step of the way. POMPEI is not the vision of one single person trying to assert itself, but a dialogue. After so many steps of writing, shooting, it was very enriching to try to understand and feel how each of us experienced a shot, a sequence, a rhythm, in the editing room, and continue to re-write the film. There's something beautiful in that process, in making a film this way.

**There's a great deal of reserve in the film all the way up to the ending. How important was it for you to not answer all the questions for the spectator?**

**J:** My experiences as a spectator have always been more powerful with films that leave room for my imagination. When something actually happens between the screen and myself. In that physical space. And it can be truly magical. So yes, there is a desire to protect that space, to create a space where a spectator can build his own film, his own story.

**A:** In a way, the film is a reflection of its characters, reserved and free. It might seem like its keeping things to itself but it's actually asking for the spectator to keep it company on its way.



## B I O & F I L M O G R A P H Y

John Shank is an American filmmaker born in Bloomington, Indiana. He developed his first feature-film *LAST WINTER* in the Cannes Cinéfondation program and the film was showcased at the Venice Days and in Toronto in 2011. Anna Falguères is a French production designer, author and photographer. Her work on sets has enabled her to work with Mia Hansen-Løve, Catherine Corsini and Joachim Lafosse among other filmmakers. *POMPEI* is Falguères' first feature-film and their debut feature as co-directors.

### ANNA FALGUÈRES

---

2019 **POMPEI**  
Feature length

### JOHN SHANK

---

2019 **POMPEI**  
Feature length

2011 **LAST WINTER**  
Feature length

2007 **ABANDON**  
Short film

2003 **LES MAINS FROIDES**  
Short film

2000 **UN VEAU PLEURAIT, LA NUIT**  
Short film



**C A S T**

Billie **GARANCE MARILLIER**  
Victor **ALIOCHA SCHNEIDER**  
Toxou **VINCENT ROTTIERS**  
Jimmy **AUGUSTE WILHELM**  
Hélène **JUDITH WILLIQUET**

**C R E W**

Written & directed by **ANNA FALGUÈRES & JOHN SHANK**  
Director of photography **FLORIAN BERUTTI**  
Production design **ALINA SANTOS**  
Costumes **CLAIRE DUBIEN**  
Sound **EMMANUEL DE BOISSIEU,  
OLIVIER CALVERT, BERNARD GARIÉPY STROBL**  
Make-up **CAROLINE PHILIPPONNAT**  
Editing **JULIE BRENTA**  
Music **DEAR CRIMINALS**  
Casting **PATRICIA GUYOTTE**  
1st assistant director **CHRISTÈLE AGNELLO**  
Script girl **MORGANE AUBERT**  
Line producer **HÉLÈNE PIGEARD-BENAZERA**  
Executive producers **KARIM CHAM, FLORENCE COHEN**  
Post-production supervisor **ERIK DANIEL**  
Producers **JOSEPH ROUSCHOP, VALÉRIE BOURNONVILLE,  
CLÉMENT DUBOIN, LUC DÉRY, KIM McCRAW,  
JASMYRH LEMOINE**  
Associate producers **ARLETTE ZYLBERBERG, PHILIPPE LOGIE**

A Belgium-France-Canada co-production with the RTBF (Belgian television) and VOO-Betv with the support of the Film and Audiovisual Centre of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation with the support of the Tax Shelter of Belgian Federal Government system,  
Casa Kafka Pictures Movie empowered by Belfius, and Eurimages  
with the support of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region in collaboration with CNC,  
produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada, the Occitanie Region  
in collaboration with CNC, SODEC - Société de développement des entreprises culturelles – Québec,  
with Québec - Crédit d'impôt cinéma et télévision - Gestion SODEC, Canadian film or video production tax credit  
with the support of European Union MEDIA Programme  
in association with Cinémage 13 and To Be Continued,  
Distribution BeneluxCinéart  
International sales and distribution France Jour2fête,  
Distribution Canada Métropole Films Distribution

