



# BIRDLAND



DKB PRODUCTIONS & SOCCO CHICO FILMS

# B I R D L A N D

BY LEILA KILANI

## PRESS & MEDIAS

SG Organisation  
Anthony Humbertclaude,  
Sophie Gaulier et Juliana Sawicki  
presse@sg-organisation.com  
Tél. +33 (0)3 83 28 58 05

## DISTRIBUTION & SALES

DKB Productions  
Emmanuel Barrault  
17 rue Henry Monnier 75009 PARIS  
info@dkbproductions.com  
Tél. +33 (0)6 09 21 87 93

MORROCO / FRANCE • 2H07 • 2022 • 2.39 • SOUND 5.1 • DCP



## FESTIVALS

Festival de Rotterdam • Compétition Tiger

Festival du nouveau cinéma de Montréal • Prix de l'Innovation

Festival du Film Arabe de Fameck • Grand Prix

Festival du cinema d'Afrique du pays d'Apt • Prix du Jury Jeune Meilleure Fiction

FID Marseille

Festival de Marrakech

New Horizons IFF

FESCAAAL

BUEIFF International Film Festival

Filmfest Munchen

SAFAR film festival

Französische Filmtage Tübingen Stuttgart

Festival international du film d'Amiens

Festival du film franco-arabe de Noisy-le-Sec



**Synopsis** — *On the hills of Tangier, in the midst of the forest stands a decrepit house: La Mansouria. Lina lives there with her father Anis, her grandmother Amina, and the “good” Chinwiya. The father and the daughter have a passion: birds. It’s summer. Amina has agreed to organize a wedding for the family. Amina hidden purpose is to push her family to accept a real estate offer that will make them all billionaires. Anis refuses to sell. Worse: he renounces his right to property. He wants to make his share - an eternity donation in the form of a birds refuge. And suddenly, the tide turns: A first fire, the origin of which is unknown, starts in the hills. It’s raining birds on the forest...*

*Interview with **Leila KILANI***

## ***FAMILY***

**The film is set again in Tangier. Your previous movie ON THE EDGE was a close shot on a character. This movie – BIRDLAND - is a wide shot. How much did the city personally influence and affect your life?**

I always try to escape from my geography and genealogy. Yet I will come back to it and choke on it despites my childish desperate efforts to stay away. Though, it’s a strong love story between me and Tangier. I always come back to Tangier, not the mythical, bohemian chic. Extra-womb ever-changing Tangier. To be in Tangier, is like driving

an out-of-control car. Under your eyes, under your feet, all guts, and cavities open. Above your nose grey blue skies and construction sites with cranes, dikes, wholes, and excavators... and Birds. A scenery which is rough, intense. A set carved with a knife, striking to film inside and out.

**How did the premise of the film materialize?**

The story was with me. There are some autobiographical elements to the film.

Born to the bourgeoisie, in a family in disgrace, I do more than merely know the bourgeoisie. I suffocated within the bourgeoisie, was enraged

by it, and dreamt of dissecting through its flesh furiously. I grew up in the upper middle class of Tangier where the codes of small-town bourgeoisie de province banded into a passion for life. A good upper middle class, of the “tangeaouite” polite society, clinging to its traditions, shielded behind a barrier of good manners, with stories built up on the fear of over saying too much: not mingling as a sacred value. I grew up striving in its raw sensuality, hypersensitive, its sophisticated and ever smiling anxiety, navigating between the urgency of an expected collapse and a thin hope of surviving. Their faith into no change balanced by the fear of this « thing » perpetuating itself forever. The dubious company of the maid was strictly forbidden. With some of the girls who worked for my family, I found soulmates — Rhimo, Mina... made a lasting impact on me. I was ten, twelve years old. I made a point of defying the ban. All the experiences I shared was mysterious, enigmatic... breathtaking beautiful.

**How difficult is it for you as a woman director to work in Morocco? Have you encountered any specific problems or prejudices?**

Not at all. Being a woman helps me a lot. I love to be a woman and make films. Whether you are a woman or a man if you want to do what you want to do then you just have to do it, in the Arab world or outside.

**Do you think there is a growing permissiveness towards what can be shown in Morocco today?**

I don't make films to show them only in the western world. I live in France and my films was financed by Moroccan, French, Belgian, and German companies. I feel the freedom to say what I want to say and film what I want to film. No one tells me what to film.

**How did you come up with the idea for BIRDLAND?**

I wanted to make a film about a family. About birds. About teenagers girl.

I love films about teenagers. I love the cruelty at this age. We're more open minded as teenagers. We ask ourselves questions that we later avoid. This is particularly true for young women in Morocco, who are less inhibited than young men.

**The character of Lina quite complex: mute, writing keywords and questions all over her body. A paradoxical teenage warrior. She strongly believed she's to be a super heroine. At the end she betrays her own family. Is there a need to destroy everything, in order to hope building a new life differently?**

Every family is a love and demolition business... Intimate Violence within our homes are some of the deadliest and most destructive we can experience. She loves her grandma: who betrayed first? Where could the lifesaver come from? How to get rid of the family ties, when they turn into handcuffs? How to keep on living in a family one doesn't stand anymore? How would you break the family unbreakable death vortex?

**The film opens with what seems like a united family going out together. Very quickly, all the members of the family are trying to escape or flee in one way or another. You never project a particularly attractive image of family life.**

When it becomes to inheritance, Family is hell. As a young adult, my ears hummed a worn-out tune: inheritance, legacy, joint ownership. The same old story where irrational bonding to a property and financial gain motivation, genuine affection and fake solidarity, intimacy and wheeling and dealings... Money, cash or dough. I would say the family inheritance is one of the biggest scams ever invented. The family tree of property is an evil invention. Very often it means enslavement. Frozen movement. People are boasting of one of their ancestors lands! They tear each other apart for few inches or stones from a house. I have no fascination for “dynasties” or “empires”...







## PROPERTY

**One of the main themes the film explores is who does property belong to.**

Inheritance is a central theme. Lina and Anis has an umbilical link with the natural environment, and the grandmother wants to sell the property. The father believes that the earth belongs to no-one, just to itself. The family is shaking to its roots. He's considered as insane. They see him as a rebel without a cause. For me, he's a new type of a hero !

He is very transgressive, in a gentle way. With no bomb, no arms, no great ideological speeches. He is just in tune with his own emotions, his own motivations. He has an extremely stimulating commitment with Nature. Both, he and his daughter, adopt a way of life. They invent a code, a language to communicate to nature; although they don't communicate very well with the outside world. And they don't understand what other family members feel.

**The film is very focused on three powerful women. How much did you want to show the condition of women in Morocco, particularly during this period?**

I'm not that political. I believe in the "I", not in the "we". I didn't want to show only the women as cruel or tough but the whole of society. Everybody in the film is bad and good. There's not white or black. The grandmother, Amina is tenacious and "ill-loving", she is a titan feeding on her power. No doubt, the two teenagers are very similar and very different, they know how to hit a nerve inside the family. Lina is the kind of character you want to kiss or slap alternatively... She's an odd girl. She brings out the latent malaise behind ordinary situations. With her words, she paints a frightening picture of her family. Lina's overwhelming mood



of melancholy, in which the film begins, soon morphs into a alarming madness and haunting power. The maid is an ambiguous character. At first glance, she may seem fragile and likeable. We don't know quite what to make of her. But then, she fights to take back her life, in an unusual way. She transforms her pain in energy, and chaos.







**As the movers and shakers of this peculiar saga, the mistress and the maid are unnerving and fascinating to watch together. The duel between them is always tense, unpredictable, and rewarding. How did you deal with the character of the maid?**

It belongs to the play of Ikram Layachi, the maid. She only reluctantly reveals her character's feelings. The way she plays compliant suggests that there is something very unpleasant lurking just beneath the surface. When her mistress Amina says something, she has a way of slowly turning her head and letting the information sink in before reacting. A tangible if embryonic mode of resistance.

**But this is also a class struggle. The maid is also the enigmatic and feisty heroine of the film, who becomes an agitated, fiercely animated loose cannon. Through her, a cataclysm and a revolution happened.**

The narrative is not exclusively a binary vision of "them against us", the "poor against the riches". To be declared "insane," to become a "victim" or "aggressor," these are names for complex things, strings with which we bundle up the untidy and make it understandable — or perhaps more representable. The freedom and the identity of class are not there to be claimed as a dogma.

The father introduces an element of "soft anarchy" into the family when he refuses to sell his stake in the property and says he will donate it... It is a Revolution. The grandmother causes the apocalypse on the territory. But he is the one who stops the immanent disaster. He is the one who brings back his family down to earth. Ultimately, he made the family shake: about what they are, about the time in which they live, about the earth on which they are, demanding them to start taking the present *very* seriously. In doing so, he lays the groundwork for a new world. There is a general disobedience. Lina helps draw the maid out of her



state of a helplessness victim, and eventually the pair openly rebels against of the barbarian grandma who rules the family. The girls find a way to push against the disciplinary society, to avoid becoming just "docile bodies".

Birdland explores repression, revolt, and madness, telling a story that is not only revolutionary but also a story about two girls who let their spirits fly like birds as the daunting storm ascends.



**Birdland explores repression, revolt, and madness, telling a story that is not only revolutionary. So, the film is perhaps not frankly Marxist. However, it is a “class struggle”: the family of the bourgeoisie falls, facing the proletariat.**

There is a family. Then there is an estate, a bourgeois house, a vacant lot that separates it from the slums: The family must make the decision to sell. The ownership of the land is questioned. This conflict takes a dramatic dimension. The fires turn the slum upside down. The “thugs” become citizens. They regain control of their lives.

However, for the maid, there is no revolutionary act to glorify, no resolution of the class conflict. She is full of resentment, she acts violently, she wants revenge...

**Tonally very strange, subtle and ambiguous, the film is troubled by contradiction. The home invasion is a brutal negation of the propertied’s power. In the final scene, are the social divisions erased?**

It is a fit of anger yet a necessary move. While the people roar, the family worries about joint ownership and mending its caftans. The maid’s lover died ... but the mansion is hosting a wedding. While heads seem less and less attached to the bodies, a wedding is in process with rites scrupulously perpetuated.

The world as they know it is dying. At the end, there will a transformation... A bad draft enters the Mansouria forcing its walls and doors. The impact with the outside is shattering. A whole territory is rising up, it is like a physical hit to the body of the family : birds took power. Chinwiya took power. The slums gathered by her lover’s father took power . The Mansouria is no longer a haven even to the internal family tear-ups.. Will the family eventually come into motion, dragged against its will into the « events ». History will perpetuate itself?

## ***THRILLER***

**BIRDLAND is also distinctive thriller. Why do you choose a plot how do you explain that?**

It helps to get the audience involved. Generally, in thrillers, it’s the plot that keeps things moving. In BIRDLAND that’s not the case. In the final, the plot is not terribly significant.

**Nonetheless, there’s still a resolution at the end. What appeals to you most in the thriller?**

There has to be a corpse. It grabs people’s attention. What interested me was how the murder compromised these young girls. Today it’s hard to compromise a young woman. We’re no longer living at a time like 1001 nights when having an affair was enough to compromise a young woman.

**The mistress shows a deep respect for conservative values. She actually defends social order. Why doesn’t the maid kill the mistress?**

Chinwiya shoots at the family in the ballroom without knowing exactly what she wants to do. Chinwiya is obsessed to know what happened to her lover and wonders what her mistress will say. But she isn’t sure of herself; she doesn’t really know what’s expected of herself... as a Juliet who lost her Romeo. Chinwiya and Lina—they are truly children—don’t think that death is an end.

**The last sequence closes the lake is reminiscent of a lost Eden. There is great violence in your film, but it’s latent. You don’t spend a lot of time on violent scenes...**



I was raised in a latent violent environment in Morocco. What struck me was how violence boiled and ended before you really had time to understand what was happening.

**Your films do not check the “psychological drama” box. We watch some scenes, not for the revelation of what it all means, but for the simple, inexplicable beauty of what it is.**

I feel I don't want to explain everything... Film is a structure constructed out of moments that are articulated, with holes and gapes. Everyone imagines his own film. When I write, I'm concerned with rhythm, musicality, and lots of other elements but barely with a lack of information about the characters' "psychology." I keep, from writing through editing, removing as much information as possible.

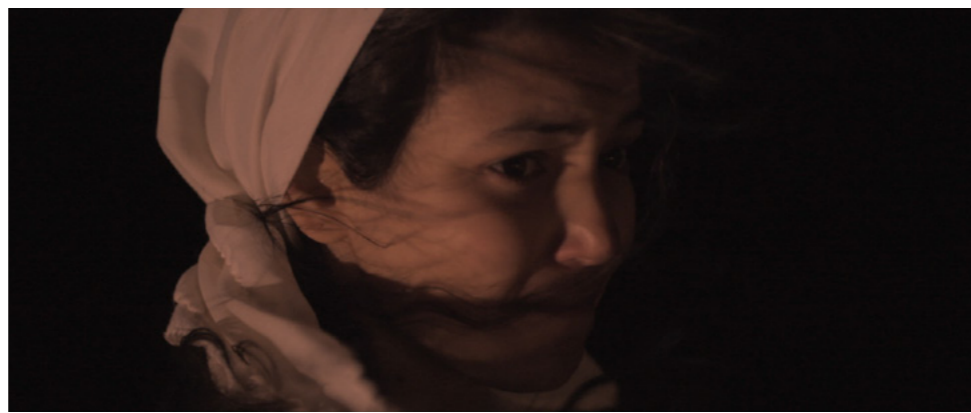
**Sometimes the voice-over is dreamy, sometimes it's concrete, sometimes poetic musings but it's always there, a character in its own right. How did you deal with the voiceover?**

I love voiceover; it is particularly cinematic. I wanted Lina to talk like a fourteen-year-old and also as an oriental storyteller who's trying to come off in the best possible light. I wanted to create a kind of oriental tale movie. It's one of the reasons I didn't want to be too realistic, too precise : I find it more interesting to establish connections between images and events based on non-linear principles, rather than following pre-formatted plots. Oral tales have had a colossal influence on me; my grandmother was a great master on deconstructed narration. In an oriental tale, you shouldn't interfere with a story that follows its own logic. The characters should distance you, and then make you participate, then distance you again, in a back-and-forth movement. If you feel that you understand them perfectly, may be... You forget them.

**The film manages to approach hefty topics. But there's such a in a lyrical, often poetic style side to your work, with bold emotions coming through...**







**Your films are always rocking on the edge.**

Why I'm constantly appealed to the edge? I have no clue. Making a film isn't only based on rational stuffs. There is a big instinctive side. There's an aspect of gambling ... and playfulness. Well, I do like sassy movie, brash, disturbing, over-the-top films reversing the eye. And I hope it is possible to stage those overwhelming, excessive aesthetics experiences, in a way that is honest... Making a movie for me is an attempt of creating forms.

**You created an interesting tone for the film that is both naturalistic and playful. The forest, wild and mysterious, is quick to show its dark side. What does the stroke represent? Are you playing with symbolism?**

It comes from childhood, from tales, popular and mystical. I'm intrigued by mystical narrative. In Morocco, there's a lot of myths with birds, and there's a lot of symbolism with birds. The white stroke is the ultimate symbol of the spirit of Saints. So of course, I used that symbolism, but I also just like strokes: especially black stroke.

**Did you want to become an ornithologist when you were a kid?**

No. I wasn't looking at birds scientifically. But I was obsessed by them.



## ***ACTORS***

**How did you choose Ifham Mathet and Ikram Layachi? And the others?**

They embody the character. I found them through a casting. I didn't know their life story in detail, but there was no mistaking that they had something genuine about them.

I find it impossible to film actors without loving them. It's a love story.

**Was it an obvious choice to have Ifham Mathet and Layachi?**

I came across Ifham Mathet, during casting. She's very enigmatic, taciturn and wild. She could come from the swamps. She's not a lovely ordinary teenage actress. I wanted to find someone who performed with her glasses! Since she has no dialogue in the film. She has a destabilizing sweetness. She looks strange, odd, present and absent. She has a "vanishing physicality", we explored together this in her performance. I don't think the film would have been possible without her.



Ikram is a gorgeous. But more than a pretty face, she has hidden depths. Ikram's beauty is both captivating and moving. She had to hide it. All the hard work has paid off! Portraying a maid, Ikram is unrecognizable. Her hair never coming out of the scarf... a bit of a nun and a bit of a convict, childish and warlike, always tense, strong and broken. Moving with mystery, fragility and determination at the same time, she delivered a great performance.

**The mistress is arguably an atypical portrait of a woman. Far away from the oriental loving mother. Weren't you afraid to have there's nothing likable about her or her story?**

I wanted a elegant woman to play this aristocrat who is a bit of a spinning spider and a castrating mother. She is manipulating her son and everybody around her. She wants at all costs to keep her son and granddaughter for herself. Bahia did an amazing job portraying both the cruelty and the violence of the character with the poisoned love. She is an incredibly actress who knows brilliantly how to perform, with creative meaning out of the smallest gesture. With her, "*less is more*". One of the most challenging things we talked about is her performance : how to remove the distance between herself and her emotions. To take risk. She doesn't allowed herself not to be in control. What I love about the performance she gives, towards the end, is that she's totally uncovered, almost naked...



**You drop us into her characters' lives in the progress. It's only over the course of the film that we learn how the characters are related to each other and what their shared stories are. For example, we see the tension between the two brothers very early on, but we also see a closeness. By the end of the film, we have a different take on the dynamic between them. The uncle is a complex character.**

He is a tormented man. He's lost. Lost in his desires, lost in his guilt, lost in his family. We know very little about him. When he performs a disgusting action at some point and he falls apart. The way in which his pettiness is melted with false good manners is very satisfying! He lacks

courage and nerve. I'd been struck by Jaafar's vivacity and quirky charm. He can pull a lot of the really tough turns in a character, he's not scared to look bad. He was dazzling at balancing depression with joy, pleasure and humor. He knows how little he can do and do a lot. He's a natural at comedy, he's got great comic!

**Anis, the father is also got something quite far from Arab male clichés: he's not afraid to show his feminine side, his vulnerability.**

Mustafa is himself and he is a performer, what makes a great actor. Mustafa goes for broke emotionally and will not take break until something truly

authentic emerges. He's edgy, uptight and awaiting release at the same time, like being sealed up with the door wide open. Mustafa is like that in real life. He's like a burning wire. He brings an unbelievable passion, a depth of emotion. He's a good listener, as an actor. And he never forgets a line in your text. All of these elements are amazing skills and a wonderful asset for me as a director. Mustafa wasn't afraid of the feminine elements of the character and he wasn't afraid of the dark side of the character. He turned towards them. I think that makes him so tender, original, moving in the film...

**How did you describe the character to your actors?**

If the actor needs me to explain psychologically what I want and what it all means, it probably means I have chosen the wrong actor! We talked about the characters. A lot. We rehearsed a lot.

**It truly is an extraordinary ensemble...**

I think casting is directing, and I feel very lucky and grateful to have had this cast. I love each of them, they are real soulmates. I feel like we were able to create a boat for a unique journey. We shared powerful and wonderful moments as human beings and as actors.

**The shooting was long. How far it was improvised?**

Things started out well but went downhill as we ran out of money... Soon our team was made up of only 2 or 3 people. The shooting took longer than expected: The film is very different to the original screenplay except for the scenes in the forest. We followed the birds. The film was freer, less constrained by my initial ideas... But I didn't have the confidence in myself to improvise. Sometimes, by following your instincts, you can end up with the best or the worst results. The actors had to rehearse 1000 times each scene. Exhausting...



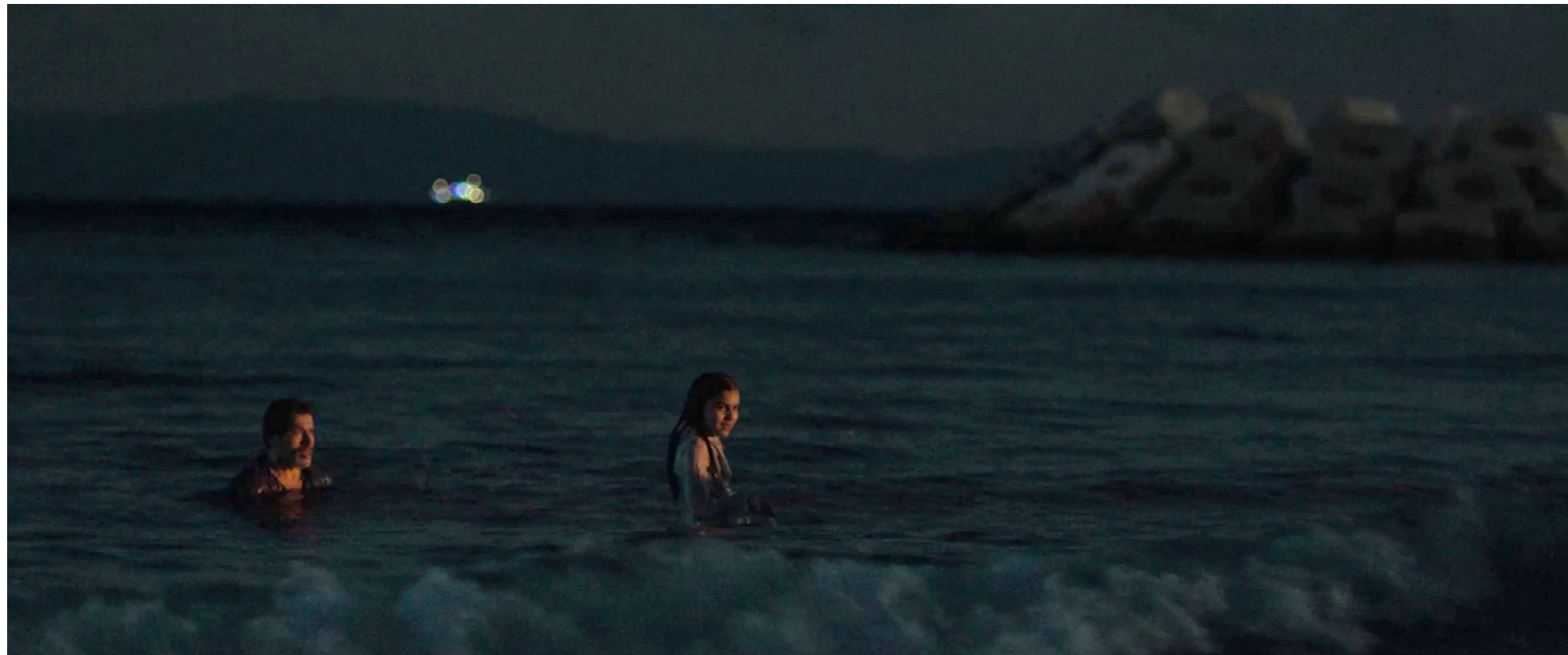
**But how easy was it to keep a freshness? Does your approach and methodology to film has changed over the years? Has that affected BIRDLAND?**

This film is somehow lighter, freer, less serious. BIRDLAND despite its many production problems, is may be the film where I felt the freest. I do make my films in a serious way, and I follow a certain methodology. I have a monastic discipline. I follow a certain methodology, but I don't want at all to have system to get things done, to stick to something I tried successfully in previous work; I don't like formula and recipes. I like questioning what I make. I don't want to keep making the same film over and over again. Doing something different is in fact a way of moving forward. I do feel my films sort of lead one into the other, like they're some sort of cards game.

**It must have been incredibly difficult to shoot the birds and the fire... Did shooting outdoors make that more difficult?**

It was more than a pleasure. A joy. A deep and powerful joy. It has driven us. We were transformed by these shootings. I'm an obsessive director,





and I was obsessed to shoot fires with no special effects... and birds. Eric Devin made an astonishing work. The forest wasn't on fire but he created this illusion, playing by his talent and technical skills. So we chased fires and birds... We were supplied by the birds. We were touched by grace. They took us to unique places, hidden and forbidden places, with a telluric beauty. Out of times, out of the city and close to it. Wild and unexplored. We feel we were in past and future and *NOW* in the same time. With the birds we were in a place where time has different rules.

**Your films suggest you're filming birds as if you're filming actors.**

I always felt that filming birds is about looking at them as actors that are in front of the camera. How will the birds interact with the camera and the other actors? How does the bird body move in space? The tension in the shot also comes from the way Eric Devin set up birds and the actors in the space and have them interact with each other. He found the *right* distance for him, the camera, all the actors: birds included. A counterweight, between the very near and the very far.



**Your cinematic style is very taut. To what extent did you work with your cameramen?**

Eric Devin shot the best scenes of the film—the fire, most of the chase, and most of the sequences at night, alone. He's a truly remarkable DOP. He has a unique style. He is my lover. Does it help? Certainly. Although, it's exhausting. It made the shooting incredibly passionate and tense... often jittery and very edgy. We are the Ying and the Yang.

**How did you choose the music for the film?**

Michel Deneuve created a feeling of melancholia contrasting with the piece by Wilkimix, which is in a major key and uplifting. Cairokee's music went well with the scenes in the beach: very pop! Michel Deneuve's music accompanies the house fire, the scenes in the forest, and the raining's birds ...I like Michel's music because it's very physical, with no digital alterations. It gives the film a unique atmosphere, like a body on its own, right in, amongst all the other bodies.

DKB PRODUCTIONS & SOCCO CHICO FILMS

# B I R D L A N D

BY LEILA KILANI

---

## *CAST*

Lina	IFHAM MATHET
Anis	MUSTAFA SHIMDAT
Amina	BAHIA BOOTIA EL OUMAMI
Chinwiya	IKRAM LAYACHI
Jaafar	JAAFAR BRIGUI
Youssef Al Akel	MOHAMMED BERRAK
Youssef's father	TAOUFIQ KILANI
Laoufir	KHALID OULEHRI

---

## *CREW*

Script	LEILA KILANI
Photography	ERIC DEVIN
Editing	TINA BAZ
Sound	LAURENT MALAN
Art director	ANGELO ZAMPARUTTI
Sound mixer	XAVIER THIEULIN
Music	MICHEL DENEUVE WILKIMIX

AVEC LE SOUTIEN DE L'AIDE AUX CINÉMAS DU MONDE ET DU CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE,  
DU CENTRE CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE MAROCAIN, DU WORLD CINEMA FUND ET DE LA FRANCOPHONIE  
SUPPORTED BY THE DOHA FILM INSTITUTE, BY THE RED SEA FUND, A RED SEA INTERANTIONAL FILM FESTIVAL INSTITUTE  
CO-PRODUCED WITH THE SUPPORT OF ENJAAZ, A DUBAÏ FILM MARKET INITIATIVE