

Strand Releasing presents

A film by CÉLINE SCIAMMA

GIRLHOOD

BY THE DIRECTOR OF *TOMBOY* AND *WATER LILLIES*

Starring Karidja Touré, Assa Sylla, Lindsay Karamoh and Marietou Touré

Cannes Film Festival – Opening Night Directors’ Fortnight
Toronto International Film Festival
Sundance Film Festival
AFI Fest

Country of Origin: France
Format: DCP/2.35/Color
Sound Format: Dolby 5.1 SRD
Running Time: 112 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated
In French with English Subtitles

PRELIMINARY PRESS NOTES

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<http://strandreleasing.com/films/girlhood/>

SYNOPSIS

Fed up with her abusive family situation, lack of school prospects and the “boys’ law” in the neighborhood, Marieme starts a new life after meeting a group of three free-spirited girls. She changes her name, her style, drops out of school and starts stealing to be accepted into the gang. When her home situation becomes unbearable, Marieme seeks solace in an older man who promises her money and protection. Realizing this sort of lifestyle will never result in the freedom and independence she truly desires, she finally decides to take matters into her own hands.

Notes about the Production from Writer-Director Céline Sciamma

THE GENESIS

The characters themselves sparked the project. The teenage girls that I would regularly see hanging out in the vicinity of Paris’ Les Halles shopping center, or in the metro, sometimes in Gare du Nord train station: always in a gang, loud, lively, dancing. Wanting to delve deeper, I sought out their blogs and came to be fascinated by their esthetics, styles and poses.

Beyond their irresistible energy, their profiles reflect all the themes that are at the heart of my ongoing work as a filmmaker: the construction of a feminine identity within the framework of social pressure, restrictions and taboos, of which the question of plays on image and identity are central. It was my desire to continue working around the question of youth and initiatory narratives, but in a contemporary corollary, anchored in the political reality of France today.

These unique protagonists carry within them the promise of depicting a realistic portrait as well as the fictional dynamic necessary for narrative tension. Although the story is generational and very much rooted in French society, it also belongs to the realm of cinematic mythology: youth subjected to societal restrictions and taboos. It is a story that is better told in France today by the young women who were brought up in these poor minority areas.

TALENT SCOUTING

Casting took place over a four-month period. At first, Christel Baras, the casting director, scoured the streets of Paris and its working-class suburbs. Open casting calls gave us the chance to meet hundreds of young women in situation - in the streets, shopping malls and fairgrounds. We were looking for girls with strong physical charisma and powerful identities. It was essential to compose a group with both strong affinities and contrasts. With the use of improvisation as a basis for choosing our actresses, we then introduced the text, the film's dialogue being very scripted. Karidja Touré, Assa Sylla, Lindsay Karamoh, and Marietou Touré stood out from the rest. I would nevertheless like to point out that we were struck by the generally high quality, presence and energy of the majority of the girls we met. Intelligence, humor, inventiveness and style: the casting process reinforced my belief that it was absolutely vital to film these girls and this youth, even more so because we so rarely see these types of characters on the big screen. One of the central ideas of my filmmaking and this project is to show faces and bodies that we never see on screen. Generally when these types of personalities are represented on screen, it's not to focus on the character but more so a kind of grand gesture showcasing them as part of a certain diversity. This movie isn't about diversity, but exclusiveness: The male and female actors are exclusively colored.

INTIMACY AND STAGING

Girlhood is an intimate portrait, a classical coming of age story. It's not a film about minority working class areas, if roughly speaking we consider that a genre has emerged with its own rules and codes about this subject over the past twenty years in France. Hard-hitting films centered on social realism such as *La Haine* (Hate) or language-centered films like *L'Esquive* (Games of Love and Chance) immerse the audience into the rituals of these poor suburbs. With its contemporary characters, new faces and attitudes, *Girlhood* can be qualified as a fictional manifesto using a new, promising narrative approach.

The story is set in several neighborhoods on the outskirts of Paris in the suburbs of Bagnolet and Bobigny. It depicts these areas, spaces and how people and things circulate within them. Our set up attempts to reinterpret these areas. All of the interior decors were created in a studio, where the colors were chosen and carefully thought through. A perspective was given: a space for creating the setting and the staging. *Girlhood* was shot in CinemaScope, the ideal format for filming a gang and the solidarity that stands out amongst these bodies. We used static shots with a very deliberate perspective as opposed to the Steadicam's predictable energy. We relied on travelling shots and often used sequence shots. It's an episodic narrative, with dramatic accelerations.

THE MUSIC

From the moment I started writing the screenplay, I contacted Para One, who had already written the music for my first film *La Naissance des Pieuvres* (Water Lilies), and

asked them if they could compose an original score for the film. We agreed that we preferred to limit the score to one theme that would return several times during the course of the film. Thus each time richer (in composition and length) and therefore following the character's evolution. The musical theme would be developed as the story and the character progressed.

Another aspect that we challenged was to insert a strong musical presence within the storyline itself, in particular during the dance sequences. The high point, as well as the most daunting task for us, was to obtain the rights to Rihanna's song Diamonds. She gave us the authorization once she'd seen the sequence dedicated to the song.

THE ACTRESSES

It was clear to us all that **Karidja Touré** was a natural for the role of Marieme/Vic. It was the most difficult role to cast, because it required someone who was incredibly solid. The character appears in every single scene. The difficulty here lies in the paradox that the character has to appear unforgettable and unique whereas it was asked of the actress to maintain a blank slate, someone who is immediately identifiable, yet also someone who can convincingly slip into different personas. As Marieme goes through several changes, multiple stages and she must show many faces. She begins as a child, asserts herself as a young woman, and then progressively builds virility. It's an enormous challenge for any actress, let alone Karidja, who had never acted before. We worked a great deal before filming, constructing the different stages of her character, through costumes and hairstyles. In one day Karidja could put on the three different faces of Marieme/Vic. She is a very hard worker, with great focus and a wonderful ability to listen. She lent her body and her voice to the role and the staging, trusting what we were trying to accomplish. Vic's sidekicks had more radical parts. And we chose them accordingly.

Assa Sylla, with her charisma, dancer's body and elegance was a natural for Lady. She knew how to muster the necessary authority to become the leader of the pack, all the while being very sensitive to the role's ambiguity.

Lindsay Karamoh utterly charmed me with her sense of humor; she has a rare verbal delivery and intelligence. Adiatou's character was at the heart of the scenes that called for improvisation, calling to find someone with a funny streak.

Marietou Touré plays the role of the most enigmatic character in the gang, she speaks very little. Somebody with great presence was needed for the role. She has this miraculous thing about her: pure attitude, in every situation.

All of the girls demonstrated a great combative energy, coupled with a childlike side. A bit of melancholy, fragility and tenderness, which is the exact balance I had been hoping for. We met and worked together a dozen or so times before we started shooting the film. We put an emphasis on developing the group's energy, calling up different states and emotions and working on concentration. A friendship also grew among the girls and

between us all. From day one of the shooting it already appeared that we had formed a group with a solid bond.

CÉLINE SCIAMMA – BIOGRAPHY

Céline Sciamma's first feature film *WATER LILIES* attracted attention at the 2007 Cannes Festival in the Un Certain Regard section, and won the Louis Delluc Prize, for Best First film, awarded by French film critics. It was followed in 2011 by *TOMBOY*, selected for the Berlin Film Festival's Opening Night film of the Panorama section, where it won the Teddy Award, and subsequently enjoyed a successful international career (selling to 35 territories including the US). *GIRLHOOD* (*Bande de filles*) is her third film.

CÉLINE SCIAMMA – FILMOGRAPHY

2014 – <i>Girlhood (Bande de Filles)</i>	Festival de Cannes 2014 – Directors' Fortnight – Opening Film
2011 – <i>Tomboy</i>	Berlinale 2011 – Panorama – Opening Film
2007 – <i>Water Lilies (Naissance des Pieuvres)</i>	Festival de Cannes 2007 – Un Certain Regard – Prix Louis Delluc for best first film

CAST

Karidja Touré	Marieme / Vic
Assa Sylla	Lady
Lindsay Karamoh	Adiatou
Marietou Touré	Fily
Idrissa Diabate	Ismaël
Simina Soumare	Bébé
Cyril Mendy	Djibril
Djibril Gueye	Abou

CREW

Writer/Director	Céline Sciamma
Production	Bénédicte Couvreur
Casting	Christel Baras
Cinematography	Crystel Fournier
Editing	Julien Lacheray
Sound	Pierre André
Music	Daniel Sobrino
Assistant Director	Para One
Script	Delphine Daull
Set Design	Roselyne Bellec
Production Manager	Thomas Grézaud
Make-up	Gaëtane Josse
	Marie Luiset