



Presented at the Closing Day of the Montreal International Black Film Festival (FIFBM) the short film "C'est Moi" not to be missed! Directed by the Canadian Howard J. Davis - complete artist (director, photographer, composer but also performer ...) - the film plunges us into the heart of Montreal and reminds us that Quebec has also experienced its dark hours.

C'est moi

Requiem for Angélique by Howard J. Davis

C'est moi retraces a little mediatized event that has yet marked the black history of New France. Montreal, 1734. Marie-Joseph Angélique is accused of having set fire to her mistress's house. The spread of fire affects the merchant district of the time (now Old Montreal) and the young slave is carried responsibly. Guilty or not, she appeared in court and was sentenced to have her hands cut off and burned alive. While the Court of Appeal revises its decision, Angélique is subjected to the question and ends up yielding under torture.

A sinner or martyr, Angélique is led in front of the Notre-Dame Basilica where she is forced to confess her crime and dragged to the public square to be hanged and burned.

A powerful and pure commemoration

The short film opens with a magnificent sequence, where from one shot to another, the camera freezes the scene of the crime, offering a nocturnal retrospective of the most beautiful monuments and mythical places of Old Montreal. The viewer plunges into the heart of this story where the show is also the killing of humanity and the celebration of atrocity. But violence is not a form that Howard J. Davis exploits in his short film. This is precisely the beauty of this "filmic experiment". In the space of 9 minutes, the director proposes a fresco at once chimerical and poetic appealing to the collective memory.

By situating his film in Montreal 2017,

Howard J. Davis puts the past and the present in tension. A position that goes beyond the tribute invites the viewer to reflect on a not so distant past. Throughout the film, we follow the footsteps of this anachronistic Angélique (Jenny Brizard) who, dressed in one of those big white dresses of the time, walks. She walks barefoot on the gray slab that one imagines cold from the forecourt of the Basilica. Then, under the questioning glances of 21st-century tourists who fix it as a curiosity, it stops. The spectator then becomes a witness among the observers. She then speaks and addresses the Virgin Mary who sits on the facade of the Basilica. Angélique asks for forgiveness. To God, to the King, but also to the people. Then, as if reliving her last moments, she turns her back to face the viewer. Face the world Like a martyr, her gaze lowered as a sign of forgiveness, in the image of the Virgin in the background, she collects herself and blends into the stone.

Then she leads us in her procession of Our Lady to the green fields. Still advancing, she walks and delivers a message which in the musical colors of the piano that accompanies it resonates in our ears like a "lullaby" (Howard J. Davis). What music that sounds simple, in appearance is power. If the realization and the game are to be welcomed, the photograph is excellent. The work of color contrasts, close-ups, transitions and superimpositions give meaning to this hymn to freedom.

« C'est moi. Her History : Our History »

C'est Moi revives the past and inserts it into the present. Beyond a simple tribute to this woman and her story, the message of the film is also that of memory and freedom. This poetic story resurfaces the strong theme of racial discrimination. And not without reason. Because in the last minutes of his film, the director transports us Place Vauquelin where from 1989 is engraved in stone the Declaration on the elimination of racial discrimination. Still under renovation at the time of filming, Place Vauquelin is completely redesigned for the 375th anniversary of the city of Montreal. Brand new now, what happened to the commemorative plaque that is no longer there? Forgotten, withdrawn or out of place ... we can not find it anywhere.

Funny decision to celebrate the anniversary of a city that has one of its most cherished values of multicultural equality.

The epitaph by Howard J. Davis

« C'est moi » marks the passage but also the moment. Howard J. Davis is the magician who in a poetic movement fuses past and present. His film is far from being an indictment. On the contrary, the director invites to the discussion. "Debate allows dialogue, opinions stifle it" With his film Howard J. Davis reminds us of the current value of this story, "our history" and invites us to move forward without forgetting. •

BY EUGÉNIE BATAILLE



Howard J. Davis

An emotionally charged work

He is what is called an accomplished artist. Singer, dancer, actor, we find him as well behind the camera as in the director's chair. Today he is assigned to not only the directing, but the script, the music, the photography and the editing of his short film *C'est Moi*.

A long term project

From his studies in sociology to his research in theater, it is driven by curiosity and advised by his mentors that Davis comes to the issue of slavery in Canada. He comes from a multiethnic family (Cuban and English and residing in Niagara-On-The-Lake, the embankment where formerly the underground passages were arranged), it is both its history but also Canadian responsibility in the issue of slavery that leads to *Angélique*.

He explains his legitimacy to be spokesman for this story. *"I consider that part of my journey as someone of mixed heritage is to recognize my privileges but also to be aware that I can also be an African and a spokesman for oppression (...), I wondered if it was legitimate as a man to tell the story of a woman. But there is a moment, or if uncertainty is allowed to take over, then nobody would tell any story."*

If the choice of situating the action in the modern era is partly linked to the shooting conditions, Davis proves to us here that nothing is lost, everything is created and transformed. And it is here that one recognizes his experience of performing. For Howard J. Davis *Angélique* is a *"mirage between the past and the present,"* a figure *"suggested especially in the treatment that is made of color contrasts, the character of Angélique is in shades of gray while those around are in color,"* he says.

Angélique, a new Joan of Arc?

It is not only because they have suffered the same sentence that Davis draws the parallel between Joan of Arc and Marie-Josèphe Angélique. Inspired by the 1928 silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* directed by the Dane Theodor Dreyer, it is in front of the Basilica Notre-Dame that Howard J. Davis and Jenny Brizard (*Angélique*) discuss the fight of the woman who holds head to oppression and face him until his last breath. Resistance that is also a conviction.

Why Jenny Brizard?

Before being a beautiful actress, Jenny Brizard comes from the world of dance. A feature that does not go unnoticed in the eyes of the director, himself a dancer who seeks to create a work in motion and strong emotions. *"C'est Moi"* will soon be available through Canadian distributor Moving Images Distribution. The greatest satisfaction of the director remains that his short film will be submitted to university programs. A good way to raise awareness and introduce students to this manifest figure who had never previously had its place in a history book.

Jenny Brizard:

« It's much more than a role »

A great dancer established in Canada, the theater scenes are no secret to Jenny, who is gradually developing an actress career. With *"C'est Moi"*, Jenny Brizard becomes Marie-Joseph Angélique, a strong role that she leads heads up.

« To play Angélique, it has become a duty to me »

After being Angélique in the play directed by Mike Payette, we find today Jenny on screen in *"C'est Moi"*. It is with this role that Jenny discovers the existence of Angélique she has never heard in class or elsewhere. She then decides to take up the challenge and play Angélique becomes a duty.

« From beginning to end this is one of the most beautiful experiences of my life »

For Jenny, Angélique is not a simple mask. Behind his interpretation

hides a big work of analysis where each scenic choice is carefully considered. With the director Mike Payette, she seeks to present to the public the truest of Angélique. A relationship that is based on the dialogue she also shares with director Howard J. Davis. She does not hesitate to make suggestions and to share her perception of the character, this woman who keeps her head up to the end.

Howard's film helped Jenny to understand the character and then approached Lorena Gale's play. The work of immersion and incorporation that she undertook during the filming also led her to touch the authenticity of the character, which is for the essential actress in the process of preparation. *"She will do everything to be recognized as a human person, as someone who has the choice, who has the right to live and who has the right to be."*



Jenny is interested in the human aspect of Angélique taking into account her emotions, her fears, her hopes, her dreams ... Angélique has resisted to the end and held her own to the end. She embodies freedom but also choice. The choice to express oneself and to make one's voice resonate at a time when everyone around her is silent and endures.