



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
COMPETITION
2019 OFFICIAL SELECTION

ATLANTICS

A FILM BY
MATI DIOP

LES FILMS DU BAL, CINEKAP AND FRAKAS PRODUCTION
PRESENT



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MAMA SANÉ

AMADOU MBOW IBRAHIMA TRAORÉ

ATLANTICS

A FILM BY **MATI DIOP**

2019 / France - Senegal - Belgium / Wolof / 1.66 / 105'

A young man and woman are shown in a close embrace, nearly kissing. The man is on the left, wearing a white t-shirt, and the woman is on the right. They are bathed in a mix of green and blue light, with bright green beams of light cutting through the darker blue background. The scene has a dreamy, cinematic quality.

SYNOPSIS

Along the Atlantic coast, a soon-to-be-inaugurated futuristic tower looms over a suburb of Dakar. Ada, 17, is in love with Souleiman, a young construction worker. But she has been promised to another man. One night, Souleiman and his co-workers leave the country by sea, in hope of a better future. Several days later, a fire ruins Ada's wedding and a mysterious fever starts to spread. Little does Ada know that Souleiman has returned.

INTERVIEW WITH MATI DIOP

Where did the desire for the *Atlantics* project come from?

Atlantics (2019) is an extension of my first short film shot in Dakar, *Atlantiques* (2009). In this short film, I filmed Serigne, a young man who is telling his friends the story of his sea crossing. It was the “Barcelone ou la Mort” [Barcelona or Bust] period when thousands of young people were leaving the Senegalese coast for a better future by attempting to enter Spain. Many perished at sea. In 2012, several months after the Arab Spring, riots shook Dakar, a citizens’ uprising took place in Senegal, propelled by the movement “Y en a marre” [Fed Up]. Most of the young Senegalese wanted to oust Abdoulaye Wade and impose his resignation. This citizen awakening marked me because symbolically it reminded us that Senegalese youth had not entirely disappeared. “Y’en a marre” turned the page on the dark chapter of “Barcelone ou la Mort”. For me, somehow, there were not the dead at sea on the one hand and young people marching on the other. The living were carrying the dead within them, who had taken something of us with them when they went. It was one single, collective story. That’s what I wanted to express in *Atlantics*.

***Atlantics* is not a film-report on political or social current events because you add a whole fantastical, poetic and cinematographic dimension to it.**

The night I filmed Serigne in *Atlantiques* (2009), he told me, “when you decide to leave, it’s because you’re already dead.” It’s true that at that time, the boys that I interviewed and listened to no

longer really seemed to be there. Their spirits, their dreams were elsewhere. I felt that a very ghostly atmosphere reigned in Dakar and it became impossible for me to contemplate the ocean without thinking of all these young people who had drowned.

For me, making a film is not just about telling a story. It’s above all about finding a form for a story. This form emerges from a vision, an intuition. I wanted to write a ghost film and the choice of film genre arose precisely from the fantastic dimension inherent in the reality I observed, or perhaps simply dreamed up. Throughout the writing phase, I was constantly seeking to transcribe the very unusual atmosphere felt during this dark period.

***Atlantics* has a very feminine dimension. Would you also call it feminist?**

Ada’s character goes from one phase of her life to another. From teenager to woman. What does “becoming a woman” mean? The answers vary according to cultures and trends. For me, above all it is about becoming oneself, choosing one’s life. A first film is often autobiographical, even indirectly. Inventing the character of Ada was also a way of having the experience, through fiction, of the African adolescence that I hadn’t lived. Also, even if I haven’t directly lost loved ones at sea, I was marked by the collective drama of clandestine immigration. I can identify with the women who suffered from it. *Atlantics* tells the story of a young woman who, after the departure by sea of the man she loves, finds herself confronted by an arranged marriage with an immigrant man who she has no desire for but must accept to satisfy her family. The return of Souleiman



and his sabotage of the wedding gives Ada a real second chance. Like an awakening, a second wind. It is also when she understands that Souleiman is dead that she opens up a new dimension of herself and accords value to her own life. Friendship between women plays a very important role in the film. Ada is also given a wake-up call by Dior who becomes a model of a free woman for her, inspiring her and helping her to see things differently. In short, people don't just become emancipated with a click of the fingers or from one day to the next and they don't do it alone. I think you need an ally or allies for that. As I was writing the script, I met girls in Dakar who I questioned about their relationships with men, sex, marriage, and religion. None of them corresponded to a particular stereotype, there was obviously a variation in points of view and various sensibilities (that we find in the various female characters of the film). I loved the honesty of some of them who weren't afraid to say that they were now using men to their advantage and without qualms. I see this phenomenon as a kind of Afro capitalist neo-feminism.

Atlantics is also and above all, a love story.

When I started writing, I realised that besides *Touki Bouki*, I hadn't grown up with any black couple figures worthy of Romeo and Juliet. Through Ada and Souleiman I wanted to relate an impossible love, in the age of rampant capitalism. A love obliterated by injustice, stolen by the ocean.

The combination between social issues and fantasy is embodied by the women who are haunted by the spirits of their lovers, husbands, or brothers lost at sea.

It's a film about being haunted, being spellbound, and the idea that ghosts are created within us. In the film, the ghosts of the boys who died at sea return and possess women because they have no tombs, but above all because they won't be at peace until the money they're owed is returned to them. I thought it was beautiful that their struggle took place through the bodies of the ones who

loved them but especially through the bodies of women who also have their own battles to fight. There's a merging of bodies and struggles.

Can you tell us about the tower block that stretches upwards like a beautiful, disturbing, and malevolent totem and that conveys a certain number of metaphors?

The tower (in 3D) in the film was inspired by a real architectural project that Wade (former president of Senegal) and Gaddafi wanted to build together. The first solar tower and the tallest in Africa. When I came across a picture of the architectural project, I felt a mixture of indignation and fascination. How could they spend millions on a luxury tower in the midst of such a disastrous social and economic situation? What fascinated me at the same time was that this tower, in the form of a black pyramid, looked like a war memorial to me. In the end, this project was never realised but it inspired the tower in *Atlantics*. Today, a new city named "Diamniadio" is being built on the outskirts of Dakar. I shot there, that's where the film opens. A city designed for an upmarket lifestyle, built by men who will not find their place there.

The lead actors in the film are superb. How did you find them?

Finding the actors represented one of the biggest challenges of the film. Especially for the characters of Ada and Issa. I knew early on that we would be casting amateurs, that I wouldn't find my actors among the professional actors that you can see in Senegalese series or theatre. It wasn't a new step for me because I've only ever worked with non-professional actors. So we launched a massive casting operation in Dakar based on quite a precise strategy. It was a matter of finding the actors in the social environment of the film's characters. For instance, I went to find Souleiman on a construction site. And it was behind the bar of a nightclub in Saly that I found Dior. I chose people who are already characters unwittingly and, most importantly, who know these characters better than I do.



I found Ada in Thiaroye – she was the last one, after 7 months of research. Once I'd found all the people, there was a mammoth task to undertake. To train them, initiate them, give them some tools for expression. I set up acting workshops with Ibrahima M'Baye, one of the rare veteran actors in the film.

How did you find working with Claire Mathon, the cinematographer?

I chose Claire Mathon because I knew that she would know how to apply a documentary approach (to shoot quickly, catch things on the fly, spontaneously invent things) without losing any aesthetic ambition. I wanted to make a stylised film but one that would remain very embodied. I think that Claire was the right person to understand this balance. We got to know one another before we got started. I really like her way of first questioning the depths of things before turning her attention to our images. Who are we looking at? What are we saying? Being careful never to be above the subject.

The music is stunning and is a vital aspect in the overall aesthetic of your project.

I was particularly attracted to the sounds and melodies in Fatima Al Qadiri's music, which are like an enchantment. Her music is dark, sensual, and haunted, while being firmly rooted in a very precise geopolitical reality. I was drawn into her cultural mix, her "impossible landscape" where seemingly disparate elements coexist: electro pads, sacred chants, hip hop beats, Spa music. When I came across Fatima Al Qadiri in 2011, I felt like the music of my era, of the present time, had arrived. It was the visionary dimension that really struck me; Fatima knew how to glimpse and grab hold of what was coming. I knew that the soundtrack was going to have to be responsible for the film's invisible component – everything that is present, but that we don't see, that we can't film. The world of spirits. The film takes place in a world where the fantastic is embodied and emerges within the characters themselves before entering reality. So I relied heavily on the music to consolidate this and establish the film within the genre. Also, for me, it was vital for the composer of the music to be familiar with the cultural and political issues in the film. Only Fatima Al Qadiri could create the soundtrack to a supernatural film that takes place in a Muslim country. And also, it turns out that Fatima was born in Dakar. She only lived there for a few months, but I like to imagine that she had her first sensory experiences there. We worked together with ease on the project. Even though our formal approaches are quite different, I think we both pay special attention to forgotten stories and lost narratives, returning them to a central and honoured position in our work. I was happy to entrust the soundtrack to a woman. There are only men in the director/musician duos that have influenced me, like De Palma/Moroder, Carpenter and himself, and my uncle and my father, Djbril Diop Mambety and Wasiss Diop.



MATI DIOP

Trained in Le Fresnoy (National Studio of Contemporary Arts – a leading and very selective French artistic institution), Mati Diop directed four shorts and a medium-length film which received the “Martin E. Segal – Emerging Artist Award” of the Lincoln Center (USA) in 2016.

A THOUSAND SUNS (2013), BIG IN VIETNAM (2011), SNOW CANON (2010) and ATLANTIQUES (2009) were selected and awarded in a wide number of international festivals such as the Venice International Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival, the Rotterdam International Film Festival, the Viennale, The Indie Lisboa International Film Festival, and the FID Marseille. They were also programmed in the MoMA and in the Moving Image Museum (USA).

As an actress, Mati Diop played in HERMIA Y HELENA by director Matias Piñeiro (2015), FORT BUCHANAN by Benjamin Crotty (2014), SIMON KILLER by Antonio Campos (2012) and 35 SHOTS OF RHUM by Claire Denis (2008).

2013 A THOUSAND SUNS (MILLE SOLEILS)
(Senegal, France – 45min) / Anna Sanders Films

Awards

NOMINATED FOR BEST FIRST FEATURE FILM / LOUIS DELLUC PRIZE, WINNER OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION / FID MARSEILLE, SILVER WOLF / MONTRÉAL FESTIVAL OF NEW CINEMA, WINNER MEDIUM-LENGTH FILM PRIZE / AMIENS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
SHORT FILM GRAND PRIZE / INDIE LISBOA FESTIVAL (PORTUGAL), CRITICS PRIZE / FESTIVAL BLACK MOVIE (SWITZERLAND), WINNER OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION / CORDOBA FILM FESTIVAL (ESPAGNE), WINNER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SELECTION / ANN ARBOR FESTIVAL (USA)

Selections

VIENNALE (AUSTRIA), JEONJU IFF (KOREA), EDOC FESTIVAL (ECUADOR), LIMA INDEPENDIENTE FESTIVAL DE CINE (PERU), FESTIVAL I. DE LAS PALMAS DE GRAN CANARIA (SPAIN), MEXICAN DISTRICTAL FESTIVAL, KINO OTOK FF (SLOVENIA), MIDNIGHT SUN FILM FESTIVAL (NORWAY), FESTIVAL IMAGE ET VIE (SENEGAL),
LUTINS DU COURT-MÉTRAGE (FRANCE), FESTIVAL ÉCRANS NOIRS (CAMEROUN), TRAVERSE CITY FILM FESTIVAL (USA), MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (AUSTRALIA), DOKUFEST (KOSOVO), RENCONTRES CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUES DE BÉJAÏA (ALGERIA), FESTIVAL CINEMIGRANTE (ARGENTINA),
TAIWAN DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL, LEIDEN FILM FESTIVAL (NETHERLANDS), CAIRO IFF (EGYPT), AFRIKAMERA FESTIVAL (GERMANY), HOUSTON CINEMA ARTS FESTIVAL (USA), LJUBLJANA FILM FESTIVAL (SLOVENIA), CARTHAGE FILM FESTIVAL (TUNISIA), VALDIVIA IFF (CHILI).

2012 BIG IN VIETNAM
(France – 26min) / Néon Production

Awards

TIGER AWARD BEST SHORT FILM / ROTTERDAM IFF

Selections

VIENNALE (AUSTRIA), ROTTERDAM IFF (NETHERLANDS), IMAGE FORUM FESTIVAL TOKYO, COURTSANE FESTIVAL BELGIQUE, ONION CITY EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL (USA), LONDON FILM FESTIVAL, MOBILE NEW HORIZONS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (POLAND), SHORT FILM IFF SAO PAULO,
FID MARSEILLE, INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF DOCUMENTARY AND SHORT FILM ZINEBI (BILBAO, SPAIN), BFI FESTIVAL (UK), TORONTO IFF, OSLAN'S CINEFAN FILM FESTIVAL (INDIA), ZAGREB EXPERIMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL (CROATIA), FIRST LOOK- ASTORIA MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE FESTIVAL (USA),
CINE UNAM INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL FICUNAM (MEXICO), VENDOÔME FILM FESTIVAL (FRANCE), VALDIVIA IFF (CHILI), KIEV SHORT FILM FESTIVAL (UKRAINE).

2011 SNOW CANON
(France – 35min) / Aurora Films

World premiere

MOSTRA DE VENISE — ORIZZONTI

Selections

LONDON IFF, VIENNALE (AUSTRIA), CÔTÉ COURT — PANTIN (FRANCE), SHORTFILM FESTIVAL HAMBURG (GERMANY), ROTTERDAM FILM FESTIVAL (NETHERLANDS), BFI FILM FESTIVAL (UK), MIFF (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA) CFC WORLDWIDE SHORT FILM FEST (CANADA), RHODE ISLAND IFF (USA), FEST - ESPINHO (PORTUGAL),
EMAF (GERMANY), BILBAO FILM FESTIVAL (SPAIN), ENTREVUES — BELFORT (FRANCE), VALDIVIA IFF (CHILI)

2009 ATLANTIQUES
(Senegal – 16min) / Le Fresnoy and Anna Sanders Films

Awards

TIGER AWARD BEST SHORT FILM / ROTTERDAM IFF, SPECIAL MENTION - PRIX LOUIS MARCORELLES / CINÉMA DU RÉEL FESTIVAL (FRANCE), SECOND PRIZE / FESTIVAL MEDIA CITY (ONTARIO, CANADA), NO VIOLENCE AWARD / ANN ARBOR FILM FESTIVAL (USA)

Sélections

BRADFORD INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (UK), CINÉMA DU RÉEL (FRANCE), ROTTERDAM IFF (NETHERLANDS), AFRICAN, ASIAN AND LATIN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL (MILAN), FESTIVAL DE FILMS DE FEMMES DE CRÉTEIL (FRANCE), FESTIVAL SONGES D'UNE NUIT DV (FRANCE),
ATELIERS DE RENNES-BIENNALE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN (FRANCE), FESTIVAL COURTSANE (FRANCE), LILLE ART FAIR (FRANCE), FESTIVAL INDIE LISBOA (PORTUGAL), INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL OBERHAUSEN (GERMANY), FLARE (BEAUX ARTS DE MONTPELLIER, FRANCE),
« FENÊTRE SUR LE COURT MÉTRAGE CONTEMPORAIN » (CINÉMATHEQUE FRANÇAISE, FRANCE), MEDIA CITY FILM FESTIVAL (WINDSOR, CANADA), DOCUMENTARY BEACH FESTIVAL (KRIBI, CAMEROUN), FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE CINÉMA DE VERNON « LA NORMANDIE ET LE MONDE » (FRANCE),
EXPRESION EN CORTO IFF (SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE AND GUANAJUATO, MEXICO), SAO PAULO INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL (BRÉSIL), FESTIVAL SILHOUETTE, FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM BLACK DE MONTRÉAL (CANADA), 25 FPS FESTIVAL (CROATIA), VIENNALE (AUSTRIA),
14TH ANNUAL VIEWS PROGRAM (48TH NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL - LINCOLN CENTER), INTERNATIONAL LEIPZIG FESTIVAL (GERMANY), AMAKULA KAMPALA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (UGANDA), FESTIVAL RÉSONANCES (BOBIGNY), BANGKOK WORLD FILM FESTIVAL (THAÏLANDE),
TÜBINGEN FILM FESTIVAL (GERMANY), ART OF THE REAL, DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL (USA), VALDIVIA IFF (CHILI)

CAST

Ada	Mama SANÉ
Issa	Amadou MBOW
Souleiman	Ibrahima TRAORÉ
Dior	Nicole SOUGOU
Fanta	Amina KANE
Mariama	Mariama GASSAMA
Thérèse	Coumba DIENG
Moustapha	Ibrahima MBAYE
Mr Ndiaye	Diankou SEMBENE



CREW

Director	Mati DIOP
Executive Producer	LES FILMS DU BAL Judith Lou LÉVY Eve ROBIN
A Senegalese Co-Production with	CINEKAP Oumar SALL
A Belgian Co-Production with	FRAKAS PRODUCTIONS Jean-Yves ROUBIN Cassandre WARNAUTS
Writers	Mati DIOP & Olivier DEMANGEL
Director of Photography	Claire MATHON
Editor	Ael DALLIER VEGA
Sound	Benoît DE CLERCK
Original Soundtrack	Fatima AL QADIRI
Casting	Mati DIOP & Bahijja EL AMRANI
Script Supervisor	Christelle MEAUX
Assistant Director	Vincent PRADES & Fatou TOURE
Artistic Advisor	Fabacary ASSYMBLY COLY
Production Designer	Toma BAQUENI & Oumar SALL
Costume Designer	Rachèle RAOULT & Salimata NDIAYE
Production Manager	Pascal METGE & Oumar SALL
French Distribution	AD VITAM DISTRIBUTION
International Sales	MK2 FILMS
Production Countries	France, Senegal, Belgium

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