

Persmap

AVENUE B PRODUCTIONS PRESENTEERT

ISABELLE HUPPERT

AURE ATIKA LOLITA CHAMMAH



JURGEN DELNAET

VEERLE DOBBELAERE

Copacabana

EEN FILM VAN
MARC FITOUSSI


SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
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COPACABANA

Een film van MARC FITOUSSI

De opgewekte en onafhankelijke Babou (Isabelle Huppert) heeft zich nooit zorgen gemaakt over haar sociale status. Maar wanneer ze ontdekt dat haar dochter (Lolita Chammah) haar niet op haar huwelijk wil uitnodigen omdat ze zich voor haar moeder schaamt, besluit Babou haar leven te beteren. Ze vertrekt naar Oostende waar ze timeshare appartementen gaat verkopen. Hier blijkt ze erg goed in te zijn. Door haar excentrieke levensvisie en stijl mogen haar collega's haar echter niet en wordt ze buitengesloten. Toch houdt Babou stand. Ze is vastbesloten het respect van haar dochter terug te winnen en haar een waardig huwelijgscadeau te geven.

Leuk weetje: Isabelle Huppert en Lolita Chammah zijn ook in het echt moeder en dochter.

France · 2010 · Color · 107 min

Isabelle Huppert
Aure Atika
Lolita Chammah
Jurgen Delnaet
Veerle Dobbelaere

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Cast

Isabelle Huppert · Babou
Aure Atika · Lydie
Lolita Chammah · Esméralda
Jurgen Delnaet · Bart
Chantal Banlier · Irène
Magali Woch · Sophie
Nelly Antignac · Amandine
Guillaume Goux · Kurt
Joachim Lombard · Justin
Noémie Lvovsky · Suzanne
Luis Rego · Patrice

Crew

Screenplay and direction

Marc Fitoussi

Image Hélène Louvart

Sound Olivier Le Vacon

Set Design Michel Barthélémy

Costumes Anne Schotte

Make-up Thi-Loan Nguyen

Hairdress Antonella Prestigiacomo

Editing Martine Giordano

Sound editing Benjamin Laurent

Sound Mix Emmanuel Croset

Original music Tim Gane & Sean O'Hagan

Produced by Caroline Bonmarchand

A Avenue B Production

In co-production with Arte France Cinéma, Mars films et Caviar Films

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Région Picardie

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Synopsis

Babou seems to be able to shrug off anything. Real jobs, husbands, responsibilities, who needs them? But when she finds out that her own daughter is too ashamed of her to invite her to her wedding, she decides to make some changes. She takes a job selling time-shares at the Belgian seaside during the off-season, and even to her own surprise, becomes the model employee. Eventually Babou once again gets in the way of her success, and she must find a way to get a wedding gift worthy of her daughter yet true to her one-of-a-kind self.



INTERVIEW WITH MARC FITOUSSI

Where did you get the idea for the film?

I wanted to make a movie about a single character. My previous feature, *La Vie d'artiste*, interwove three people's destinies, which forced me to focus on the highlights in each of the protagonists' lives. Babou, on the other hand, is in almost every shot in *Copacabana*, which gives me greater scope in the depiction of her, not only in her sometimes incredible misadventures, but also in the nothing moments that illustrate the idle melancholy she occasionally slips into.

I also wanted to explore themes I touched on in *Bonbon au poivre*—a woman forced to go on a training course to become a traveling salesperson can't stand the aggressive sales techniques she's expected to apply to her future customers. Shooting that short feature made me want to take the idea further—a comedy about social issues through the portrait of a woman used to living on the margins and suddenly being confronted with a "normal" environment that is completely foreign to her.

In *Copacabana*, that character is Babou. An experience that should turn her into a regular citizen in fact demonstrates that she is incurably allergic to the straight and narrow, and irresistibly tempted to go off the beaten path.

You cast Isabelle Huppert in a role we're no longer used to seeing her play. Was this a deliberate choice? What made you offer her the part?

The conviction that she is one of the very few actresses who can play any character, not only because she likes taking risks, but also because she has the talent to rise to any challenge. To be honest, although I only ever imagined Isabelle as Babou, it took me some time before I dared send her the script. Compared to the dangerous, icy heroines she's played recently, I was afraid she'd find Babou trivial and eccentric.

On the other hand, Lolita Chammah (Isabelle Huppert's real-life daughter) was the obvious choice for Esméralda. I first had a chance to work with her on *La Vie d'artiste* and I adored the natural way she played the stubborn and arrogant high school student always ready to give her French teacher a mouthful. I knew she'd bring her teenage impulsiveness to the part of Esméralda, as well as a dramatic depth that is never ostentatious.

I approached it in the time-honored fashion by sending each of them the script and crossing my fingers. It turned out they were both interested and keen to work together.

What was it like working with Isabelle Huppert?

I soon realized Isabelle is a very perspicacious reader. At our first meeting, her questions were so sharp it felt like a meeting with a script doctor. She asked if Babou was a victim of her own laziness, pointing up the danger that she might be seen as just a washed-up hippie reeking of patchouli and smoking joints all day. That was precisely what I wanted to avoid. I was caught a little by surprise but fascinated by what Isabelle had already seen in the script. She'd begun to construct the character and wanted to evacuate potential pitfalls to lock onto the character.

Before the shoot, we table-read, with just the two of them at first, then with the other actors. Isabelle wanted to maintain her spontaneity so Babou wasn't premeditated, but emerged from the moment in every take. At the same time—and this is a paradox I love—we agreed to do a lot of takes, so that the spontaneity was honed and rooted.

I think it's fair to say that Isabelle and I share an obsession with detail that helps meticulously build a character. For example, I wanted Babou to be swathed in jewelry to appear coquettish in an offbeat way. Isabelle focused that idea on three specific rings with different colored stones. An insignificant detail, perhaps, but crucial for us. We even spent a long time working out how she'd wear them, until finally deciding that she was "nuts" enough to wear them all on her pinkie fingers.

Lastly, working with Isabelle is amazing because it's a real collaboration. We forged a bond of trust and understanding that proved very productive. Throughout the shoot she respected my wishes and position. She never relies on her talent alone, but constantly asks for genuine direction. While offering a host of possibilities in her performance.

Did she reveal aspects of Babou you hadn't considered?

Her inventive and virtuoso performance constantly enriches the tiniest nuance of the character. I could go on and on about this, but I'd make particular mention of the physical eloquence she developed for Babou. The best example is the bowling scene with Bart when she mentions her upcoming trip to Brazil and makes a "fuck you" gesture while yelling "Outta here!" Isabelle improvised the gesture, which is not only extremely funny but also reveals Babou's bitterness at that stage of the story when she thinks she has definitively lost her daughter's affection. Then there's the scene of the first lunch break in Ostend when Amandine bombards her with intrusive questions about her past. At first, Babou simply dodges the issue, eating away at her tangerine. I was wondering how we could show that the questions bother her. On one take, Isabelle suddenly spat out a pip to demonstrate her irritation and end the conversation. Details like that give the character very realistic impetus and obvious comedic flavor.

What also amazed me about Isabelle is the fascination she exerts, her infallible genius on screen, even when she's just listening to other characters. It got to the point where my editor Martine Giordano and I had to actively resist the temptation to stay with her even when the logic of the scene was to alternate shot-reverse shot. The pained intensity of her expression when Esméralda tells her she doesn't want her at her wedding and her devastation when she finds out she's been fired are wonderful cinematic moments that we would have loved to prolong.

Does Babou embody an idea of resisting a certain model of society?

To some extent, yes, but I wouldn't set her up as a role model. I wanted to portray an offbeat character, sure, but one who resists the imperative demands for social efficiency. Babou embodies a laidback attitude that, as irresponsible as it may seem, offers an example of liberty. She's suffered setbacks, but they haven't eroded her generous and selfless enthusiasm for life. She embraces every day with outstretched arms, always ready to welcome something new. That's why I wanted her to be sexy and explosive—her undiminished capacity for desire sweeps everything in her path out of the way and is a telltale indicator of people she meets. She magnetically attracts anybody who hasn't totally buried their instinct for happiness—Patrice, Suzanne, Lydie, all these crumpled characters who maintain a shred of idealism. In the same way, it's enough for her to venture into a bar to set Bart's heart racing.

Babou has great powers of seduction, but she doesn't seem very lucky in love. Why?

I'd say that her approach to life makes her allergic to the routine of a relationship. That's precisely why she tells Esméralda not to marry so young. Babou has always proclaimed her independence. We've no idea who Esméralda's father was, for example. A one-night stand? Another jilted boyfriend? Some people will be saddened by the way she sacrifices her relationship with Bart. It so happens that she's too caught up in her issues with Esméralda. Anyway, Bart isn't the adventurous type who could win her over—rather than offering her a motorcycle trip round Europe, he hopes to buy a warehouse and get on with his mundane life in Ostend. Babou's relationship to men demonstrates her refusal to feel sorry for herself, but behind her apparent euphoria, she's alone.

And her confrontation with her new colleagues isn't likely to end her isolation. You seem particularly disillusioned with the world of work...

Yes, I try to denounce a certain working environment in which profitability is based on the cynical and dehumanizing exploitation of people. Whether they're selling mass-produced candy as high-quality confectionery in *Bonbon au poivre* or hurriedly built apartments as luxury condos in *Copacabana*, the strategy is the same. You use people who are desperate for work as puppets

churning out completely misleading sales patter. The worst thing is that this even transcends the master and slave dialectic. Who's pulling the strings? Nobody, apparently, controls anything and the system goes round in circles. The former victims become the exploiters—how many Amandines have become Lydies?—and so on. Not to mention Irène, Babou's roommate, who seems to be totally withdrawn with fear knotting her stomach. But how can she bloom when she's subjected to the humiliating authority of bosses who are much younger than her?

You never judge your characters. Do you think it's up to the audience to build its own interpretation of the movie?

I hope so. It would be awful to force everybody to see it my way. I don't feel any particular calling to deliver films with a message. I just hope to reflect as best I can the complexity of real life. And offer a personal vision of things. I feel genuine empathy for the characters who have been sucked into a repressive system. Not everybody is like Babou, able to develop a critical perspective on society. By the way, for me, Babou could be the extension of the character Isabelle Huppert played in Bertrand Blier's *Les Valseuses*, a middle class girl just turned 18 who tells her parents to shove it and runs away with a group wacky eccentrics. Even if she's in dire straits financially now, Babou could afford her independence, as shown by her house and undeniable sense of style. Most likely, that wasn't true of Lydie, who maybe had to earn a living as soon as she was old enough to get a job. And she's clearly worked her way up from the bottom. In pyramidal systems, everybody hopes to reach the top, which encourages the worst kind of competitive spirit. Lydie must have fought her way there, but what's she got in return? She is totally submissive to her bosses—the mysterious "head office"—and partner. She won't touch alcohol because she wants to be alert at all times. But her night out with Babou breaks the shackles in a quite unprecedented way. Which doesn't stop her firing Babou the next day. Is she overcome by fear again? Or does Lydie want to give Babou the freedom she can no longer claim for herself? Similarly, Babou and Esméralda's argument about Kurt and Sophie, in Ostend's royal galleries, raises a question to which I didn't want to give an answer—should the two travelers be seen as enslaved by their precarious social condition or empowered by the lack of constraints?

Your film features a raft of minor characters that sometimes seem as important as Babou. Was this your aim?

Yes, the film relies on the performances of the actors, all the actors. *Copacabana* focuses on Babou, but her journey leads her to encounter a multitude of very colorful minor characters. They all had a very precise role to play, even if they were just passing through. I wanted each of them to make an impact on screen. I can't imagine filming a minor character from behind or leaving them out of shot so they don't intrude on the heroine.

Hélène Louvart, my DP, and I decided the best way to film the story was to follow Babou's highly contrasting path. *Copacabana* starts in Tourcoing, chronicling the instability of her daily life by showing her always on the move. That's why we used handheld camera and fairly jerky movements. In Ostend, however, when she forces herself back onto the straight and narrow, the camera stops moving, imprisoning her in the impersonal and sterile setting of the *Ambassador Beach Resort*. Only when she begins to relax do we go back to handheld camera, like in the scene when she meets Bart and his friends in a bar, or when she goes out with Lydie.

We wanted certain scenes to have a documentary feel that you find in some British movies like Ken Loach's *It's A Free World* or Pawel Pawlikowski's *Transit Palace* and *My Summer of Love*. In the same vein, we also watched Milos Forman's early Czech comedies, *Black Peter* and *The Fireman's Ball*. That gave us the idea for the Candid Camera-style scenes where Babou accosts potential customers in the streets around the port.

Why did you shoot *Copacabana* in the north, usually the setting for dark dramas?

Sure, it's a part of the country that provokes more depression than laughter, but I find it very lyrical. I like its disused red brick factories, rows of decrepit houses and vast gray beaches. There's a strangeness there that I find very photogenic.

Also, the film's comedy is rooted in the contrast between Babou's exotic aspirations and the deliberately melancholic locations. Babou transcends that contrast with her constant cheerfulness. The flashy colors she wears dissipate the gloominess of Tourcoing. In her eyes, the lights of a power plant near Ostend become Rio de Janeiro Bay. And her taste for Brazilian music, which I share, offers a joyous counterpoint to the rundown landscapes. After *La Vie d'artiste*, I once more worked with Tim Gane of Stereolab and Sean O'Hagan of the High Llamas to add an original score inspired by samba and bossa nova to the Brazilian hits on the soundtrack.

Indeed, the film has a very musical tempo.

My editor, Martine Giordano, gave the film a very upbeat, breathless rhythm, as if the narrative is driven by Babou's full-on energy. In the same way as Babou lives at breakneck speed, the film never stops to mull things over. Martine succeeded wonderfully in making the complexity of *Copacabana*, with its array of storylines and esthetics, gel without anything losing its flavor.

One of those storylines is the mother-daughter relationship that could end very sourly. Where did you get the idea for this essentially feminine theme?

I have no answer to that. In theory, there's no reason for me to deal with this subject. I'm the only son of a happily married parents. I spent my whole childhood in the same neighborhood, always went to the same school—complete stability. So where did I come up with a story like this? In any case, I'm very grateful to my producer, Caroline Bonmarchand. Her regular updates on her occasionally explosive relationship with her mother were a great source of inspiration!

Babou and Esméralda seem determined to reverse the adult-child equation.

Compared to an eternal teenager like Babou, Esméralda, with her purse, romantic dinners at the Buffalo Grill and conventional desire to get married, is bound to seem pretty insipid, but I didn't want to make her an unsympathetic character. At the beginning of the film, she brings home the bacon by bussing tables in a restaurant. Her mother spends all morning getting made up for free in a department store or destroying the display case in a candy store. Actually, it's Esméralda's excessive and premature good sense that reveals her mother's limits. Babou is not only likable, she can be absolutely infuriating.

Even so, Esméralda admires certain aspects of her mother, like when she watches in astonishment as Babou goes back into the kitchen in her sari.

Even though she's chosen to live a sensible life—probably to compensate—Esméralda is still Babou's daughter. Their conflict is resolved at the end of the film. When they dance together at the wedding reception, they show the guests an indestructible bond, which goes beyond the individual choices they make, whose consequences they assume. Eccentric as ever, Babou wears an outrageous Brazilian headdress, while Esméralda plays safe as usual with her wedding dress. Their choices do not exclude the other person.

Your films deal with serious subjects but *Copacabana* is a feel-good movie. Do you think comedy transcends tragedy?

Whatever the story I want to tell, I can't help making it a comedy. I like films that give the audience a buzz. I'm very comfortable with that because I'm convinced that it takes courage to stay happy, and more than anything I want to avoid the trap of sordid realism. For example, I never thought of showing Babou at the job center or negotiating an overdraft. I prefer to allude to things like that. And I've always had a penchant for slackers and losers, most likely because they bring a dimension of adventure to even the most routine life. At any event, that's the best test of your resistance to adversity. So, yes, comedy definitely seems the genre to transcend serious issues.

At the end, like a *deus ex machina*, lady luck smiles on Babou at the casino. Were you trying to get across an optimistic moral to the story?

Up until we shot the scene, I kept wondering if I should make her lose. It would have been more realistic, but would have punished her silliness. Instead, I wanted to exalt her laidback genius, the joyful living-for-now attitude that means she never capitalizes. Babou is constantly dancing on the edge of the precipice. Until the very end, she takes the risk of losing the fruits of all her efforts to win back her daughter. Without relying on some kind of mystical idea either. When she puts all her chips on 4, it's easy to deduce that she sees the number as a sign of fate after what happened in the previous scene. But, no, she changes her mind and shifts all her chips to another number just before the ball rolls.

I'm not sure that Babou's recklessness lends itself to any particular moral, but I'm happy, through her, to pay tribute to all those adults who turn their life into a playground where there is no place for mistrust and resentment.



FILMOGRAPHY OF MARC FITOUSSI

2010

COPACABANA

Sélection à la Semaine de la Critique, Festival de Cannes 2010

2009

DES FIGURANTS (documentaire)

2007

LA VIE D'ARTISTE

Prix Michel d'Ornano de la Meilleure Première œuvre Française de Fiction

2006

L'ÉDUCATION ANGLAISE (documentaire)

2005

BONBON AU POIVRE (moyen métrage)

Nomination au César du Meilleur Court Métrage 2006

2003

ILLUSTRE INCONNUE (court métrage)

2001

SACHEZ CHASSER (moyen métrage)

1999

MA VIE ACTIVE (court métrage)