

# SATURN BOWLING

A FILM BY  
PATRICIA MAZUY

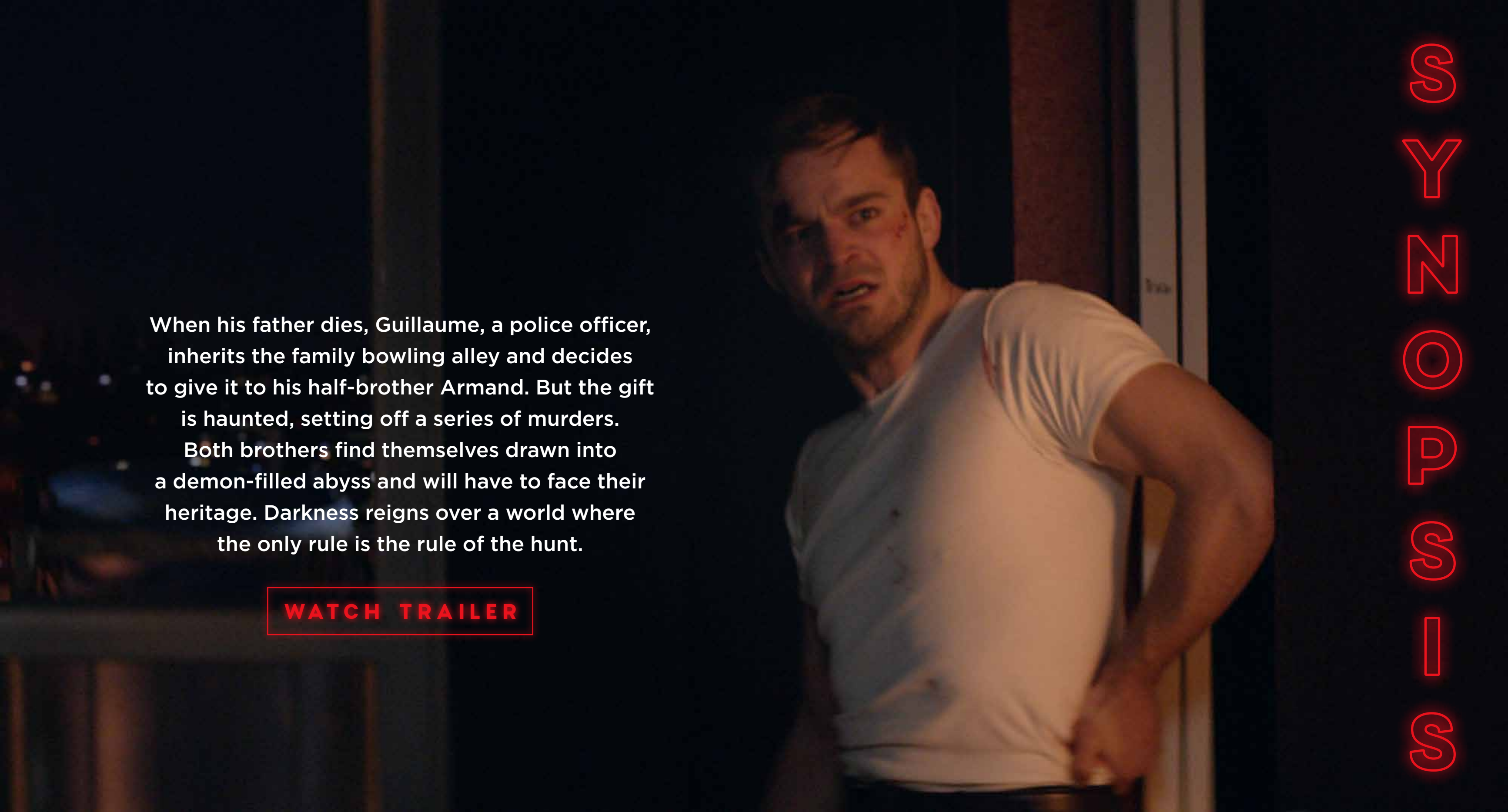
2022 | THRILLER | FRANCE, BELGIUM | 114' | COLOR

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In a family-owned bowling alley,  
an unresolved heritage creates chaos.





When his father dies, Guillaume, a police officer, inherits the family bowling alley and decides to give it to his half-brother Armand. But the gift is haunted, setting off a series of murders. Both brothers find themselves drawn into a demon-filled abyss and will have to face their heritage. Darkness reigns over a world where the only rule is the rule of the hunt.

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***Saturn Bowling* is a film noir. Can you tell us about your reference points, which were not only American, since you also cite Nagisa Oshima and recent Korean films such as *JSA - Joint Security Area* by Park Chan-wook...**

— I draw my inspiration from films that are often American, but also Russian, Japanese, Korean...

When we started writing it, Yves Thomas, the screenwriter, and I thought a lot about *Party Girl* (1958), Nicholas Ray's great film, where Robert Taylor plays a shady lawyer who is stuck, thwarted, like the character of Guillaume, the policeman with a brilliant future all laid out ahead of him. When we were writing the last part, with the gang of old hunters who take over the bowling alley for their yearly private dinner, Nagisa Oshima's 1967 movie (*A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Songs*) came to my mind. In Oshima's film, the ancestrality came from the songs themselves. In *Saturn Bowling*, ancestrality is embodied in the images of hunting, but the memory of Oshima's film gave me confidence to build the rhythm of the dinner scene, the moments of suspense and adrenaline while they are viewing those hunting images. But then, later, when you're making the movie, you forget cinephilia and your influences, and you are in the present of the film and the action. The adventure of the film was to

follow a tragedy in the present, a "film noir" that is rooted in today's world—to bring something of today into a film that deals with heritage and violence, in a primitive way.

**Film noir is synonymous with the atmosphere of a city at night. This was your first film set in a city—how did you approach it? Where did you shoot *Saturn Bowling*?**

— We shot it in three different cities in succession, and the shoot was out of order and complicated to manage in terms of acting and directing, in order to construct the world of the film, its composite city, with its historic police station under renovation, its underground bowling alley with the crazy apartment above it, the apartment that belonged to the dead father. So between Caen, Deauville, and Lisieux we put together the pieces of the puzzle to create to the "city in the film."

Every time I make a movie, I'm scared as if it's the first time. I think I like the idea of doing something I've never done before. And yes, this was the first time I tried to convey the feeling of a city, even if we see very little of it onscreen. It had to be felt, a mixture of historic city center and new neighborhoods. It was in Caen that we found this heterogeneity. It was good to face the rain and the night.

As for the underground bowling alley, the alley itself was shot in Deauville and the arrival tunnel was in Lisieux, it gives that urban atmosphere I was looking for. It's a regular underground tunnel like you find in cities, but it's also the gate to hell. The color red comes in, and clings to it. You could call this a cinematic homage to Nicholas Ray; blood, the beauty of red in a gloomy world...

### **What was it about the universe of film noir that drew you?**

— Exploring the clichés found in what is called “genre film,” where you are constantly stripping things down, ultimately gives you the freedom to be complex.

Cars, manly men, women who go out alone at night, corpses on display, the policeman, the killer, the outcast—these are the clichés of the genre, the typical ingredients of a basic thriller. I think the movie uses these basic elements, with which we're all familiar, to try and descend into a very complex world. This is the world of today, where everything is hard, violent, where relationships are governed by the rules of domination, whether inherited or circumstantial. The rhythm, images, and the way the actors inhabit their characters create a film that is like a muted, tense nightmare from beginning to end, with unsettling silences. We are in the real world, but with

an opaque, dreamlike ambiance, where words are rare and reverberate in imprisoned bodies.

### **How did you approach the violence in the film?**

— One of the challenges as far as directing is concerned was how to handle the violence. Should it be filmed, or left offscreen, which is often the right solution? I told myself that if I put the violence offscreen, I wasn't addressing my subject—“where does violence spring from, how is it born?” I didn't want to avoid that. I had to be courageous. On the other hand, I think that going deeply into “just one” violent scene, the murder of Gloria, is enough. No need to add onto it.

### **Speaking of that, how did you envision that very difficult scene of the first murder, as far as mise-en-scène and directing the actors?**

— I prepared the scene with the actors, Achille Reggiani and Leila Muse.

The murder scene couldn't be filmed as it was described in the screenplay, like a mechanical sequence of causes and consequences: they sleep together; she climaxes; that makes him angry; he kills her. We had to show it going off the skids, create the moment where it becomes something



totally different, the grey area where consent becomes questionable—and so we also had to imagine a carefree before. The advantage of working with Achille Reggiani and Leila Muse was that they already knew each other well. They were true work friends when they were together at the National Theatre School in Strasbourg. This was a huge benefit, because there was a tangible relationship of trust between them. We constructed the scene together; they made many contributions and suggestions for it.

We broke the scene down into three moments: laughter and youth; then rite, when they get undressed and Armand looks at Gloria's sex with the hope that things might go well. For that moment, I was inspired by the poster for Nagisa Oshima's *Pleasures of the Flesh*. That image helped me a lot. And then there a sexual act that turns into violence, with ellipses that still give the impression that everything is unfolding in real time. For this last part, we established a very precise timing. Then the two actors worked with the stuntman Alexandre Vu to choreograph the entire bed scene. I watched the steps, we simplified more, and timing was essential because it was almost like a theatrical composition. This was so that when we went to shoot, the movements would be "engraved," so that the actors would still have some room to act, not be made mechanical by technique,

to suddenly shift from laughter to rite, from tenderness to violence, "without realizing it." And this "without realizing it," they needed the space to act it. So we rehearsed "the bed" a lot, in the bare setting of a boxing ring, on a plastic mattress. When it came time to shoot, it was the only scene where I was in another room and only came in to see them between takes, when the dresser Mathilde Koch would cover them with a sheet to protect them.

**Do you consider *Saturn Bowling* a modern tragedy?**

— Yes. It was necessary to take on the tragic dimension of this project. We are in a nightmare; people speak, are run through with passivity, remain silent, then let out a word. This puts us in a reality that is not the natural everyday. The black dog is just a black dog, and it is also the ghost of the father.

When Armand takes off in the truck with the music blasting, I think he becomes a tragic figure who accepts his fate. And he is frightening. There is no objective reason why a lost, frustrated kid should become a killer. If we give a murder a psychological explanation, we're screwed. Nor should we be finding excuses.



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There is not just one reason, there is a series of reasons: Armand's father's apartment; his previous invisibility; his past; the society that surrounds him; and also him, most of all him, and his heritage, as his relationship with his brother shows.

As for Guillaume, he is crushed by guilt without knowing it. He doesn't understand why he can't solve this case, but he is determined. The two brothers are trapped and isolated in their fears, Guillaume with his guilt, Armand with his invisibility at the beginning of the film. We are in a tragedy, with long periods of silence. I wanted to create a kind of slow tension. The film is not very narrative, it's more about material and sensation in the first part with Armand, and then about non-action with Guillaume. This was one of the challenges of the film: to show Guillaume bogged down in an investigation that's going nowhere, without him seeming like a failed or weak character.

**In the film, tragedy doesn't just touch the relations between the two brothers, the brother who became a police officer and the brother who was rejected. It extends to the state of the world, which has been plunged into chaos.**

— This is a movie about the unconscious of a sick society, and about the heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was full of

savagery. The goal was to make this clear, but not through dialogue and without becoming caricatural. The hunters represent power, wealth. A safari in Africa to kill a lion or a hippopotamus, that's their life adrenaline, and it represents hundreds of thousands of euros. They put everything in the service of satisfying their drives and their passion. They throw themselves into the quest for an absolute, and at the same time, they are terrifying old rednecks who behave as if they belong to an ancient sect that is certain of its absolute power. It's also their nonchalance that makes them terrifying, no?

In the last part, the film veers into a kind of baroque chaos that's almost fantastical, with their party in the bowling alley and the screening of their hunting memories. We have the impression of a nightmare that is spreading outward, and at the same time the viewing is unsettlingly realistic. These films exist, there are companies that specialize in making safari movies, with live murders of animals. Hunting, in the broad sense, is the experience of power.

**The film paints a fairly pessimistic picture of the relations between men and women...**

— It's a movie about two men in which the two women figures are fundamental. And maybe that's where the connection to

genre cinema lies; we are in the realm of archetypes—the cop; the killer; Xuan, the strong-willed woman; and Gloria, the picture of youth, “living life,” like in Dostoyevsky. These archetypes had to reach a new form of modernity, a certain depth.

### Would you say the film is feminist?

— I didn’t realize it before it was shot and edited, but now, of all my films, this is the one where maybe for the first time I feel that it was a woman who “watched and filmed it.” Before, with my earlier films, when I was asked that question, I didn’t understand why. Here, the question makes sense in relation to the content the film deals with. *Saturn Bowling* shows an open wound in the relations between men and women. I am watching two men and a complicated masculinity that is between heritage and impediment, frustration and violence, ferocity and attraction, relation to sex and to the invisible. Leila Muse, who plays Gloria, carries on her shoulders strength, joy, the desire for life and the reflex to live. She infuses with feminine power the offscreen corpses that will later be found thrown away. Gloria is not a victim. But she becomes one, during the present tense of the first murder. Xuan’s view of the community of hunters conveys her contempt for a certain type of domination, and for the powerful, who are so sure of their impunity. It

seems to me that there is something very current about this hunting tableau.

### Could you tell us a bit about your three lead actors and the characters they play?

— Achille Reggiani is my son. I admire how deeply he approaches his work. Giving him the role of Armand wasn’t simple, the idea scared me. Antoinette Boulat (who cast him) and Yves Thomas convinced me to come in and audition. And that turned out to be more than conclusive. No one else promised such a potentially strong Armand, a mixture of power, terror, and sweetness. Achille is not an actor who you steer. He knows which direction to work in to be able to continue taking risks in a role. He knew he was creating a terrifying character. He had to provoke fear. It was not a question of saving the character. Anyway, in the film, no one is saved. They are all left to their solitude, it’s a portrait of a dark world.

Achille understood perfectly well that this role required a lot of preparation and an enormous personal investment. I am glad for the film that he agreed to do it. He crafted his character by integrating all the stages of Armand, from his invisibility at the beginning, nearly documentary like, to the



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monster that comes next and runs throughout the second part of the film.

From the writing stage onward, the challenge was to show the birth of a monster. We had to make the viewer feel that this young man is killing for the first time. He's a boy with a lot of problems, but that doesn't explain him becoming an assassin. We had to bring in the themes of destiny and tragedy. Armand's social and familial suffering isn't an excuse, it's one element among others. To give a reason diminishes the violence of the real, which is much more complex than that. When we leave his point of view in the second part of the film, the goal was to create an "unhinged" character, who is incomprehensible to his brother.

When we were rehearsing and shooting the scene of the murder, we were very intentional about not mixing family and work, to spare ourselves ten years of therapy. We knew it was going to be hard, but we had no idea just how hard it would be. In the days after we shot that scene, we were all feeling it. Not just Achille and I but the whole crew. We had touched the heart of violence.

Arieh Worthalter joined the project not long before we began shooting. But he wasn't afraid. He used his own method to quickly get into the skin of his character, Guillaume. We

talked about cops in Melville's films, silences, hardness. Arieh is very subtle, quick to seize on moments that are real. As an actor, he has an impressive capacity for physical transformation, the plasticity of his face is pretty crazy! The destiny that unfolds is also played out in the metamorphoses of his face. It's all well and good for the movie to be a classical tragedy set in the modern world, it still rests on very concrete situations. He is also a man alone, a cop who succeeds, under the weight of a guilt that leaves him in a state of stupefaction. Like Armand, his character raises the question of ferocity: is it inherited or is it learned? From that point of view, it's good that he's a cop. It was good to show a policeman who thinks that he is strong and just and comfortable in his masculinity and his work, and who is, to the contrary, crushed and blind, both in his work and in his relationship to a woman's desire.

I have the impression that my characters don't have any morality, but that they possess a sort of ethics that is bigger than them, and which is maybe also that of the film. We go from being inside Armand's head to inside Guillaume's, and then into the chaos of both with the arrival of Xuan (whose name is pronounced "Swan").

The young woman who plays Xuan is not a professional



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actress. Her name is Y-Lan Lucas. We were looking for someone who could project her desire. That was the definition of the character of Xuan. She had to be carried by the strength of her desire for Guillaume. She also had to be credible as an environmental activist, even though we see very little of her activism onscreen.

The casting director, Anaïs Duran, remembered a young Franco-Vietnamese woman she had crossed paths with at parties in Belleville, where she was all anyone could look at. She called her up. Y-Lan had gone to London and we did the first auditions with her on Zoom. I found her vitality fantastic. She had studied theater at university, up until age 25, because she wanted to be an actress. And then she became a set designer in London. She is very vibrant, very intelligent, and takes a lot of initiative. She plays the role of a liberated woman who is comfortable with what she wants. She repeatedly affirms her desire for her lost cop.

## **The sets in the movie are highly significant.**

— The bowling alley is the belly of the whale, the ogre's den. The father's apartment is a haunted place, with terrifying drawings and paintings of hunts, which refer to a post-colonial imaginary. The police station in disarray was Yves

Thomas's idea, so that we didn't end up with a TV show set. The station had to be across the street from the bowling alley, and to say something about Guillaume's state of mind; he lives and works in discomfort and guilt.

## ***Saturn Bowling* is not a naturalist film. You opted for a highly stylized mise-en-scène.**

— It is stylized for at least two reasons: by choice (in order to affirm the tragic, and a sort of expressionism), but also by necessity, because we were shooting very quickly, and it was necessary to make radical decisions. I didn't want there to be anything in the camera's movements that was just for show. And that's complicated to do: studied shots, without being pretentious, and at the same time, not to abandon aesthetics. Ultimately, that's the dynamic of the film, its desire to be beautiful but not complacent, which guided all the decisions. Rigor sometimes creates anxiety, and we didn't want to let go of that muted tension. Simon Beaufils, the director of photography, and I worked very closely together. We were constantly seeking to push the film further, to remain tense, to believe even in the bizarre situations. The technical crew was incredibly strong and mutually supportive. We all truly worked together, always seeking, questioning.

*Saturn Bowling* doesn't contribute any solutions to the evil in the world, it doesn't solve anything. It raises questions about violence, disaster, power, the relations between men and women. The film had to be clear, stripped down, and primitive in how it handled these questions so that they would remain open, and be asked frankly. You can try to explain *mise-en-scène*, but it's felt above all. In each moment, movement, scene, I try to come back to what I am trying to say, to the film's original skeleton in a way, while at the same time bringing it to life and giving it body. That is what guides my formal choices, above all else.

**Can you tell us about the music in *Saturn Bowling*?**

— Thibault Deboaisne played in a Walloon group called Wyatt E. for me, and I really liked them. It's two young musicians who play drone metal. Their goal is to play Babylonian documentary music from the 6th century BC. That makes me laugh but it is a true musical experience. Their pieces are like a substance, a voyage that invites you into a trance. When we contacted them, they realized right away that for a film you can't compose a piece that's 15-20 minutes long. Mathilde Muiyard, the editor, guided them with

incredible finesse. She knew better than I did how to put words to what we were looking for.

I think they succeeded in creating a soundtrack that enters into the characters' states of mind. Film score was a new genre for Wyatt E., and they approached it with unwavering enthusiasm. I am very happy with the result, which never feels like it's situated "above" the characters, thanks in particular to the delicacy of Thomas Gauder's mixing and Mathilde's editing.

DIRECTOR'S  
BIOGRAPHY

RETROSPECTIVE  
@ LA CINÉMATHEQUE FRANÇAISE  
FALL 2022

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Born in 1960, **PATRICIA MAZUY** was a good student who went to business school to make her baker father happy. There, she ran the movie club and discovered the Doors, who were already dead. She quit to go to LA, where she used her babysitting money to make a short. Thanks to Sabine Mamou, who hired her for *A Room in Town*, she finally learned. After editing *Vagabond* and out of work, she began working on her first feature film, *Thick Skinned*.



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GUILLAUME  
**ARIEH WORTHALTER**

ARMAND  
**ACHILLE REGGIANI**

XUAN  
**Y-LAN LUCAS**

GLORIA  
**LEILA MUSE**



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SCRIPT

**YVES THOMAS, PATRICIA MAZUY**

SCORE

**WYATT E.**

DOP

**SIMON BEAUFILS**

EDITING

**MATHILDE MUYARD**

PRODUCTION DESIGN

**DORIAN MALOINE**

SOUND

**PIERRE MERTENS, JEAN MALLET,  
THOMAS GAUDER**

1<sup>ST</sup> ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

**DIDIER ROUGET**

CAST

**ANAÏS DURAN, ANTOINETTE BOULAT**

COSTUMES

**KHADIJA ZEGGAI**

MAKEUP

**ODILE FOURQUIN**

PROPS MASTER

**NICOLAS VRANKEN**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**THIERRY FRANÇOIS**

PRODUCTION MANAGER

**SACHA GUILLAUME-BOURBAULT**

POSTPRODUCTION

**PIERRE HUOT**

COPRODUCERS

**JEAN-PIERRE & LUC DARDENNE,  
DELPHINE TOMSON, LES FILMS DU FLEUVE**

PRODUCER

**PATRICK SOBELMAN, EX NIHILO**

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