

"A WILD RIDE THAT'S ENJOYABLE IN ALL ITS B-MOVIE GLORY WHILE ALSO TITILLATING THE INTELLECT"

- THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER



LOVE
THYSELF.

SAINT- NARCISSE

A MOVIE BY BRUCE LABRUCE



FILM MOVEMENT

CO-PRODUCED BY ANDREAS APPEL



101 MIN

CANADA

2020

1:1,85

DOLBY 5.1

ENGLISH

Directed
by **Bruce
LaBruce**

— SAINT- NARCISSE

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SYNOPSIS

Canada, 1972.

22 year-old Dominic has a fetish... for himself. Nothing turns him on more than his own reflection and he spends much of his time taking Polaroid selfies. When his loving grandmother dies, he discovers a deep family secret: his lesbian mother didn't die in childbirth, like he has been told, and he has a twin brother who was raised by a depraved priest in a remote monastery.

The power of destiny brings the two handsome, identical brothers back together. After being reunited with their mother, they are soon entangled in a strange web of sex, revenge and redemption.



— INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE LABRUCE

What was the inspiration behind the story in SAINT-NARCISSE ?

B I've always had a fascination for twins. When I lived with my best friend during my university years, I hung out with her and her twin sister and observed their uncanny psychic connection. More recently, narcissism has obviously become the default psychological state, the ideological white noise, of the new millennium, evidenced by selfie culture and social media solipsism. So I thought it would be high time for a more contemporary reinterpretation of the Narcissus myth.

The film deals with many classic cultural elements, both from the Mythology or from the Christian iconography. How did you approach these?

B Saint-Narcisse is an amalgam of references to classical mythology, organized religion, and the lives of witches and saints. But I was mostly interested in the way these myths have been interpreted historically in cinema. I was thinking of Cocteau's contemporary interpretation of the Orpheus myth, for example, or Derek Jarman's supremely gay interpretation of Saint Sebastian, or the way that lesbians are often coded as witches in mainstream movies. My representation of Catholicism in the movie is largely based on the way it has been interpreted in movies, from Pasolini's "Salo" to Russell's "The Devils." In other words, my interpretation of mythology is based on how I see it in my imagination based on cinematic influences.



You managed to create such an old school 70's atmosphere in the film, a tribute to 70's B movies? Do you have a particular relationship with this era?

B I have a particular fondness for cinema from the late sixties to 1980. It was a period when filmmakers were deconstructing the myths of Hollywood, and by extension, the USA, debunking them and challenging them. There was a revolutionary spirit in both form and content, and an emphasis on individual expression and political intervention. The gay, black, feminist and sexual revolutions were all in full swing, and it was reflected in cinema. The seventies is also aesthetically my favourite decade of the 20th century. My DP, Michel La Veaux, who came out of that era, used lenses and a lighting kit and style of the period to recreate that particular aesthetic in camera, as opposed to in post.

Can you talk about the theme of duality and a missing piece at the core of SAINT-NARCISSE?

B There are a number of dualities in the film: city/country, Wiccan/Christian, male/female, gay/lesbian, mother/father, English/French. The world of Beatrice, the Earth Mother - the house in the woods, nature, witchcraft, DIY art, smoking weed, Sapphic desires - is set in contrast to Father Andrew's world - the monastery, artifice, the mystical lives of Saints, classical art, chemical drugs, gay male desire. There are two sets of twins in the film - Dominic and Daniel, the literal twins, and Agathe and Irene, the identical mother and daughter, both of whom are the object of Beatrice's desire. The film is ambivalent about these dualities, celebrating and critiquing aspects of both, and ultimately suggesting that in some

ways they are two sides of the same coin (coins featuring prominently in the narrative - the coin Dominic gives back to Beatrice paralleled to the coin of Saint Sebastian that Father Andrew has given to Daniel to wear around his neck). If there is a

piece missing in the film, perhaps it is the notion of morality. The film doesn't so much pass judgment

“I started out wanting to make a film about “twincest” (it was the working title)”

— Bruce LaBruce

on the characters and their contravention of conventional morality as explore its potentialities. Are there limits to how self-absorbed a person can become? And is the absence of the twin brother the reason for the main character's self absorption?

B Even a casual perusal of social media would suggest that there is no limit to how self-absorbed a person can become. Everyone is Narcissus now, the screen, the smartphone, standing in for the mirror. The film suggests that Dominic's unconscious desire for his other half, the twin brother that he was torn away from at birth, is a void that has to be filled in order for him to become a whole person. In that sense, his Narcissism is understandable and justified - not “toxic Narcissism.” On the other hand, Father Andrew tells Dominic (disguised as Daniel) that it was “a void in him that couldn't be filled” that made him so attractive to him when he was a boy. The film is full of mirror imagery, but the Narcissism is perhaps more Freudian - the child not being able to distinguish between itself and the (sexual) objects it encounters.

It seems you're having fun with the importance of one's self image these days. The selfies, the filters, the altered self reflections...

B The Polaroid SX-70 camera that Dominic, the modern Narcissus, uses to capture his own image was introduced in 1972, the year in which the film is set. It was a new tech gadget, allowing for the instant gratification of seeing the photograph immediately develop before your eyes. In that way it's analogous to today's smartphone camera. But there is a reason for his Narcissism - the shadow of the part of him that is missing, his doppelganger - which is perhaps not as sinister as today's unbridled, selfish egocentricity. However, you could argue that the narcissism exhibited by Mother Beatrice and Father Andrew is more akin to the contemporary “toxic” variety: they both selfishly pursue their own sexual desires without acknowledging the ill effect it may have on their objects of desire or the people around them.

You are tackling two big taboos : incest and priest's homosexuality, which nowadays has transformed into an issue of the shockingly real sexual abuse by catholic priests. Why did you choose those themes?

B I started out wanting to make a film about “twincest” (it was the working title), the phenomenon of sexual relations between twins, which is not that uncommon both in everyday life and in the world of fetish and porn. Twincest is probably the least controversial and most socially accepted form of incest owing to the fact that twins are unusually close emotionally and often identical physically. It's as if the desire to make love to yourself, to a projection of your own image, is somehow more acceptable. Beatrice's sexual desire for Irene, the daughter of her former lesbian lover, Agathe, who is the spitting image of her mother, is also somewhat understandable and acceptable, although still socially taboo. There is also a frisson of incest between Dominic and Irene, who are configured somehow as brother and sister. Finally, there is the suggested “incest” between the Father figure, Andrew, and his symbolic son, Daniel, which contravenes the additional taboo of sexual relations between priests and the boys under their tutelage, silently condoned by the Church, the systemic sexual exploitation of minors within the institution. If you add to this the fact that the history of Catholic saints is full of examples of extreme sexual fetish, and you have the recipe for a potent cocktail of perversions, the stuff of melodrama from Peyton Place on down.



Your films are often accompanied by your trademark sense of humour. Tackling these serious and at times heavy themes, SAINT-NARCISSE still comes with that tongue-in-cheek humour. How did you approach these two sides? What came first, the serious themes or the comic side?

B I have been told frequently that as a filmmaker I have a light touch with very heavy and extreme subject matter. Melodrama and dark humor allow me to tackle taboos and fetishes with a kind of delicious irony, hopefully not a cynical or jaded one. I can somehow find romance in fetishes that others find repugnant. My films often have a strong strain of the camp sensibility, a very queer, political strategy that allows a filmmaker to approach extreme subject matter with a kind of irreverent reverence, an appreciation of taboos that can only be expressed by those that have been marginalized or reviled for their difference and sexual otherness. But as well all know, the best camp is played perfectly straight, so it was crucial to have the actors dig into their roles dramatically and play it with a certain sincerity and honesty. Saint-Narcisse is also a genre film of sorts - B-movie, Melodrama, Mystery, Romantic Comedy, Horror Movie - so it affords a certain ironic distance from the heavy material.

How did you work with Félix-Antoine Duval? Was it a challenge to make him play two different characters?

B Felix was just so ready for a big challenge and to throw himself into a difficult role, so it was an absolute pleasure to work with someone who approached the subject matter with such an open mind and with so much generosity. Because French is his first language, we had him working with a coach so that he would be more comfortable with English. He told us in the audition that he could ride a motorcycle but of course he couldn't, which I loved, so we also gave him motorcycle lessons. But the biggest challenge was creating the two distinct characters, which we worked together on quite a lot in rehearsals, and with an acting coach. Ultimately, I think he totally nailed it. On top of that, as

someone who identifies as heterosexual, he was so open to exploring the homosexual aspects of the characters, and he was fearless in expressing his physical intimacy with the body double and with Father Andrew, played wonderfully by Andreas Apergis.

SAINT-NARCISSE is your second feature made in Quebec following GERONTOPHILIA. What is your relation to Quebec and to Quebecois cinema ?

B Well, without mentioning the fact that for some reason I couldn't get financing for my feature films in my home province of Ontario, I've always had a strong appreciation for Quebecois cinema since I was a kid. In fact, both "Gerontophilia" and "Saint-Narcisse" are homages, in a sense, to films made in Quebec in the late sixties and early seventies such as Jutra's "Kamouraska" and Paul Almond's great trilogy of "Isabel," "The Act of the Heart," and "Journey." Because of the "two solitudes" mentality inherent in the Canadian psyche - the Anglo majority versus the Franco minority - Quebec has developed a very distinct culture and cinema that is arguably more political and more aesthetically rigorous, evincing perhaps a more European-influenced sensibility. So I love working with Quebec casts and crews that regard cinema as so essential to their cultural experience.





— BIOGRAPHY BRUCE LABRUCE

Bruce LaBruce is an internationally acclaimed filmmaker, photographer, writer, and artist based in Toronto. Along with numerous short films, he has written and directed eleven feature films, including *Gerontophilia*, which won the Grand Prix at the Festival du Nouveau Cinema in Montreal in 2013, and *Pierrot Lunaire*, which won the Teddy Award Special Jury Prize at the Berlinale in 2014. As a visual artist he is represented by Peres Projects in Berlin, and has had numerous gallery shows around the world, including *Obscenity*, a photography exhibit that caused a national ruckus in Spain in 2011. His feature film *L.A. Zombie* was notably banned in Australia in 2010 after having been programmed at the Melbourne International Film Festival. It later premiered in competition at the Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland that same year.

LaBruce has written and directed **three theatrical works** at the Hau Theater in Berlin, including a production of Arnold Schoenberg's avant-garde piece *Pierrot Lunaire* at the legendary Hebbel am Ufer Theater. He adapted the latter project into an experimental film, incorporating footage from the stage production combined with additional material shot on location in Berlin. He has also directed theatrical works at the Theater Neumarkt in Zurich, Switzerland, and he participated as a director in the Hau Theater's ambitious *X-Homes* project in Johannesburg, South Africa.

LaBruce has written a **premature memoir** called *The Reluctant Pornographer* (1998), and a more recent one called *Porn Diaries: How To Succeed in Hardcore Without Really Trying* (2016), and has had **two books** published about his work: *Ride, Queer, Ride*, from Plug-In Gallery in Winnipeg, and *Bruce(x)ploitation*, a monograph from his Italian distributor, Atlantide Entertainment. LaBruce has **contributed to a variety of international magazines, newspapers and websites** as both a writer and photographer, including *index* magazine, for which he also acted as a contributing editor, *Vice*, *The National Post*, *Purple Fashion*, *The Guardian UK*, *Fantastic Man*, and many others. He has also been a **regular columnist**

over the years for *Eye*, *Exclaim!* and *Vice* magazines. He currently writes a film column for the website *Talkhouse Film*.

Additionally, LaBruce has directed a number of **music videos**, two of which won him *MuchMusic Video Awards* in Canada.

Most recently, LaBruce has been honoured with **film retrospectives** at both *TIFF/Bell Lightbox 2014*, and at the *Museum of Modern Art* in New York, 2015. The *MoMA* retrospective featured all nine of LaBruce's features released to that point as well as a program of short films. All of the films will now become part of *MoMA's* permanent film collection. *Faggotry*, a retrospective of LaBruce's photographic work over the past 25 years, has been mounted in the past several years in Los Angeles, Madrid, and London, and is currently available as a limited edition at the *Tom of Finland Store*.

In 2017, LaBruce completed **three films**, a short called *Refugee's Welcome*, an experimental feature called *Ulrike's Brain*, and a feature length fiction film called *The Misandrists*, which is currently touring the festival circuit, and which has been named one of the 15 greatest lesbian films of all time by *Indiewire*.

LaBruce's **porn project**, *It Is Not the Pornographer That Is Perverse...*, an anthology comprised of four short films done in collaboration with *Cockyboys*, had its world premier at the *Guadalajara International Film Festival* in 2018. His latest porn film, *Service Station*, presented by the *Tom of Finland Foundation* and *Men.com*, was released in early 2020.

LaBruce's latest feature, ***Saint-Narcisse***, will be released in 2021. He will also have an exhibition of his photographs to be called *FIXATIONS* at the *CASSTL Gallery* in Antwerp in 2021.

FILMOGRAPHY

BRUCE LABRUCCE



FEATURES

2020	Saint-Narcisse
2018	It Is Not the Pornographer That Is Perverse...
2017	The Misandrists
2017	Ulrike's Brain
2014	Pierrot Lunaire
2013	Gerontophilia
2010	L.A. Zombie
2007	Otto; or, Up with Dead People
2004	The Raspberry Reich
1998	Skin Flick
1996	Hustler White
1994	Super 8 1/2
1991	No Skin Off My Ass

SAINT-NARCISSE

SHORTS

2020	Tom of Finland's "Service Station"
2019	Homage to Blow Job
2018	Valentin, Pierre & Catalina
2018	Scotch Egg
2017	Refugee's Welcome
2013	Defense de Fumer
2012	Offing Jack
2010	Weekend In Alphaville
2009	The Bad Breast; or, The Strange Case of Theda Lange
2008	Give Piece of Ass a Chance
1988	I Know What It's Like to be Dead.
1988	Slam!
1987	Boy/Girl
1987	Bruce and Pepper Wayne Gacy's Home Movies





CAST

The Twins Felix-Antoine Duval

The Mother Tania Kontoyanni

Irene Alexandra Petrachuk

Father Andrew Andreas Apergis

CREW

Director Bruce LaBruce

Screenplay Martin Girard & Bruce LaBruce

Producers Nicolas Comeau, Paul Scherzer

Director of photography Michel La Veaux

Production designer Alex Hercule Desjardins

Costume design Valérie Gagnon-Hamel

Editor Hubert Hayaud

Production sound Marcel Chouinard

Sound designer Ryan Birnberg, Keith Elliott

Mixer Keith Elliott

Composer Christophe Lamarche-Ledoux

Production Company 1976 Productions, Six Island Productions

Production manager Michel Croteau

1st AD Marc Larose

Country of production Canada

Canadian distributors Raven Banner & AZ Films

International Sales Best Friend Forever

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