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Willem Dafoe, Charlotte Rampling's 'Sculpt' Admitting One Guest Per Screening



Courtesy of Nickolas Lorieux

According to filmmaker Loris Greaud, the movie showing at LACMA is designed to be watched by only one person at a time. "My intention was to make a Hollywood film that will constantly lose money," he said.

French conceptual artist Loris Greaud's latest work is a 50-minute film titled *Sculpt* starring Oscar nominee Charlotte Rampling (in a Grumpy Bear-style costume), an intense Willem Dafoe, and fashion muse Betty Catroux, that is now showing inside LACMA's Bing Theater — if you're lucky.

Greaud's creation, an eye-popping journey (the entire film is soaked in Blood Moon-style red) without a traditional narrative structure, is only being shown to one audience member at a time despite the fact that the Bing can accommodate up to 600 guests. The film screens daily (except for Wednesdays, when LACMA is closed) including four showings on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays; five showings on Friday; and six screenings on Saturdays and Sundays.

The logline for the film on LACMA's website states that *Sculpt* "is a social science fiction movie that depicts unprecedented shapes and experiences, along with obsessions and fantasies." If that sounds confusing, it's fine by Greaud.

"I tried, maybe I failed, but I tried making something that has no center," he says of the film, shot over 30 months in locations from Vietnam to New Zealand. "It's not linear but it's something that you could grasp, which is maybe more interesting from my point of view."

No word on when the exhibition ends as that, too, is part of the mystery. Greaud has granted that right to Queen Priestess Miriam of the Voodoo Temple in New Orleans. The priestess, who appears in the film as well, has "loaned" the work to LACMA for an unspecified time (a rarity in the museum world) and can pull it at any time.

Though reports claim that the film cost \$1.5 million, Greaud refutes that claim to *THR*. But what he won't deny is that he made the film and will be involved in releasing it to hackers he hopes will disseminate it on the dark net. "My intention for the project was to make a sort of a Hollywood film that we will constantly lose money because nothing is for sale. We won't sell the rights of [distribution] of it and it will disappear."

What he hopes won't disappear is people's reactions.

"The worst for me is when you came out from a show or you came out from the theater and say, 'Well, that was OK. I think it's the worst, and this is what I call the gray feeling,'" says Greaud, who produced a headline-grabbing reaction at his 2015 show "The Unplayed Notes Museum" at Dallas Contemporary where nearly half of his artworks were destroyed by a group of actors he hired. "So I didn't want to make a gray thing. I wanted something to produce a real contrast."

Mission accomplished. He accomplishes much more in a wide-ranging conversation with *The Hollywood Reporter* outside the Bing Theater over espresso and sunshine.

After I saw the film, you said that you hoped I had an "experience." That's a very good way to describe it. Is that what you set out to create with *Sculpt*?

Well you know, more than an experience. I was expecting that you can go out from it...and you love it or you hate it or you feel disturbed. But you feel something. The worst for me is when you came out from a show or you came out from the theater and say, 'Well, that was OK.' I think it's the worst. This is what I call the 'gray feeling.' So I didn't want to make a gray thing. I wanted something to produce a real contrast.

Have you ever been in a theater by yourself? Have you ever gone, paid to see a movie in the theater and been the only person who has purchased a ticket?

No, no.



Loris Greaud and Charlotte Rampling discuss a scene in '*Sculpt*'

So when you set out to create this experience of being the only one in the theater, how did you know what that would feel like? Or what feelings were you hoping to spark from that experience?

It came from several ideas. I wanted to do a movie that becomes a tête-à-tête – you have a meeting with the movie. And if you noticed, there is a scene when an actor looks at the camera, (normally) you cut this kind of thing. But then I left it in the movie that you saw because suddenly the fact that the actor looked at the camera, it looked at you and nobody else in the theater. It becomes something else. Cinema is a kind of an authoritarian form of art. You have a duration that is imposed, you have a narration that is imposed. So I wanted to change this idea of being able to displace yourself in a sort of a cloud of a narration and to be in an encounter in the tête-à-tête with the film. That is one aspect. The second aspect is because I am not a filmmaker. When you saw the trailer, you see that it's a weird film but it could be a sort of a blockbuster because there is Willem Dafoe and there is Charlotte Rampling. But then you know that there is only one theater that will administrate it and only one viewer. ... I wanted the project to be a constant periphery, like the film is not automatically what is in this center of it. I tried, maybe I failed, but I tried to make something that has no center. ... It's not linear, but it's something that you could grasp, which is maybe more interesting for my point of view.

And is it true that you will rely on hackers to distribute it to the dark net?

Yes. And some of the hackers I am waiting until the last moment to give them the copies because you can't impose rules to those people because their work is about not respecting any rules. So they will distribute on the dark net some samples of film that I will give to them, creating a score that people will orchestrate, hopefully.

You're not giving them the whole version, just pieces of it that hopefully somebody will put together?

Yes.

And when does that happen?

Well you know there is this interesting fact that the LACMA is that for example there is no opening of this show, which I am really proud about. And there is also no closing. And it was not a struggle but it was really a discussion with the museum to have an end date that is not administrated by the museum but by a voodoo priestess. When the voodoo priestess will claim back the work, the film, then the projection will end. And I kind of like that.



Loris Greaud poses for a photograph.

Do you have any guesstimation of how long that could be? A week, a month, or two months?

Yeah I don't know. I have no idea.

How did you find the voodoo priestess?

Well I didn't know anything about voodoo but when I wrote the script of the film, because I wrote a script, it's organized as a constellation in a cloud of different stories, but I was finding that there is this cool story inside the film of somebody bringing spirits on 16-mm cinema rolls. I was asking myself how I could do that in reality and then I thought about the voodoo. And then I take information of who was incarnating today the most powerful and respected voodoo and it's the Mambo Queen Voodoo Priestess Miriam Chamani. I got in contact with her and I started exchanging with her for.. it took about 20 months for her to take me really seriously, to see that I was really respectful of her knowledge and what she is doing. I explained the project and its intention to her and She said yeah, it's something that I could do. So I took the rolls and the crew

Most people would say that it's a crazy strategy to make a movie that is designed to lose money. What would you say to that?

Well I don't think it wastes money because first of all it's really reassuring that I've been able to meet people, to meet producers, that were able to put some money on something that only makes sense and will not make a profit but only makes sense. Let's be clear with that, it's not some sort of a communism statement or this kind of stuff, it's just a gesture of resistance about an industry and an economy. And it's not a criticism, right? It's a position. I mean what it's saying to the people from Hollywood and what it's saying to the industry, it's the viewer to tell. I mean I believe that it's the space of art.

What did you learn about the process of filmmaking or storytelling that you didn't know before this process?

I'm not a filmmaker but I studied cinema. This is where I come from actually. I made a film before with Charlotte Rampling and David Lynch, which I worked with David Lynch at his place in the Hollywood Hills. I have to say one thing that might be productive is that I hate it. I mean the process of it, it's so complicated. There is such a weight of production. That's maybe why the object is good in the end. It's so complicated, it's such a complicated process of producing an image or form. The more you want it to do the thing freely, the more complicated it can be. You cannot do a film on your own. You have to think about the light, you have to have engineers, you have to have a postproduction. It's about, the mechanism of cinema is about the distortion to arrive to an image, going through all this mechanism of distortion of your ideas. It's not like being in a studio and working on a sculpture, for example, which I believe this film is close, really close, to a sculpture. So yeah, I really don't like it and that's maybe why it's good in the end.

I've seen the budget reported at \$1.5 million. Is that correct?

I don't know where that comes from because I'm not allowed to reveal the thing really. I can tell you we shot with a really, really reduced budget. And again, without the commitment of the artists such as Willem Dafoe and Charlotte Rampling, because I could not afford their regular fee, without their involvement I couldn't have done it. But I cannot tell you if it's the budget that I used or not, and I don't think that it's really relevant information.

One thing I didn't expect to experience while watching the film was the feeling of exclusivity. Did you design it in that way as well or was that just something that comes from being the only person at the theater is that you sort of feel privileged or..?

I really wanted the project to be as inclusive as possible, and I want everybody to be able to see the film. So what we did at LACMA is everyday in the morning you can reserve your seats for free. The access is free, you just have to show up and make a reservation. But anybody could access the project. And in the end, maybe you won't experience what you experienced yesterday but in the end, the movie will come to you because basically the distribution will not be done by a major, but by pirates. I kind of like the dynamic and the synergy with the Guillermo del Toro show, which is a real blockbuster. I love the balance that it created in the museum to have the theater available for one person at a time and to have this huge blockbuster at the same time.

This is your first major show coming off of Dallas, which snagged a lot of headlines. Now that you've had some distance from that experience, what do you think about what happened there?

The destruction of my public image and my show. Well this was very successful and I'm very sorry if some people have been shocked about it, very, very sorry, but I would do the exact same thing because sometimes, you know, I think that's what artists should ask themselves about: What are you ready to lose to make sense? And I think this statement that I just made also joins this project here. What are you ready to lose is a real aesthetic artist's question. ... I believe in the USA we have a complicated approach with art. I think that this genius of Andy Warhol has ruined the whole thing with pop art because basically now sometimes in the United States people are expecting an immediacy of an artwork. But if you look at the past 20 years of contemporary art, you can see that an artwork is not automatically immediate. Sometimes you have to wait for art to be revealed or transformed.

You're here in Los Angeles for the opening. Where do you like to spend your time in the city?

I'm a suburban kid. I was born in a Paris suburb, I grew up and I still live in the suburb. So I drive a lot. So here is like a hometown, no? Spending time in car, I am really happy about it. I am really excited about it.

You're one of the few.

Yeah but I am enjoying every aspect of Los Angeles. I just love it.