



COHEN MEDIA GROUP PRESENTS

# G A G A R I N E

A FILM BY FANNY LIATARD AND JÉRÉMY TROUILH



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2020





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ALSÉNI  
BATHILY

LYNA  
KHOUDRI

JAMIL  
McCRAVEN

FINNEGAN  
OLDFIELD

FARIDA  
RAHOUADJ

DENIS  
LAVANT

# G A G A R I N E

A FILM BY **FANNY LIATARD** AND **JÉRÉMY TROUILH**

FRANCE - 2020 - 97 MIN - 2.39 + 5.1 - FRENCH

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A young man with dark hair, wearing a red jacket with blue stripes on the sleeves and blue pants, is floating in a dark, starry space. He is positioned in the center of the frame, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. Below him is a complex, futuristic structure made of dark, metallic-looking panels and railings, resembling a space station or a large-scale architectural project. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong blue and purple hue, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall atmosphere is one of high-tech sci-fi and social commentary.

# SYNOPSIS

Youri, 16, has lived all his life in Gagarine Cité, a vast red brick housing project on the outskirts of Paris. From the heights of his apartment, he dreams of becoming an astronaut. But when plans to demolish his community's home are leaked, Youri joins the resistance. With his friends Diana and Houssam, he embarks on a mission to save Gagarine, transforming the estate into his own "starship" - before it disappears into space forever.

The film was shot on the cusp of the actual demolition of the Cité Gagarine housing project in collaboration with its residents in Ivry-sur-Seine.

The huge, red-brick Cité Gagarine housing project, boasting 370 apartments, was built in the early sixties in Ivry-sur-Seine, one of the communist municipalities that formed a “red belt” around Paris. At the time, highrise buildings were shooting up in order to clear the slums on the outskirts of the French capital. In June 1963, Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, came to inaugurate the Cité that bore his name.

Within decades, however, these collective utopias had become neighborhoods that were often stigmatized and slated for sweeping urban renovation. In 2014, the decision was made to demolish Cité Gagarine. The inhabitants were gradually rehoused, leaving Cité Gagarine as an empty shell. The families left, taking their stories of lives of toil, migration, hope and disappointment with them. On August 31, 2019, the demolition machines moved in, watched by the former inhabitants.

# CITÉ GAGARINE





## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS

It feels like there are two main characters in the film—a teenager and a building.

Fanny: Yes. In our minds, Youri, the teen, and Gagarine, the building, are in a non-stop dialogue with one another.

Jeremy: When we came up with Youri, we pictured his parents moving into the housing project before his birth, and being inspired to name him for the place. Youri was raised there and developed an imagination the equal of the massive highrise. The prospect of its disappearance means, for him, the death of his childhood memories and dreams. It also means losing his beloved community.

Fanny: We wanted to give a positive vision of a place and generation that are often caricatured. Youri loves his neighborhood. For him, Gagarine Cité is not an outdated utopia, it's his present, and the soil of his future. Leaving means losing everything: abandoning his family and his imaginary world. So he takes up resistance.

To alter our perception of the place and people, it's as if you chose duality. Everything about Yuri has another side: loner but always connected to people, attached to the past, but steeped in hyper-modernity.

Fanny: Yes, ***Youri is balanced. Roots in the housing project, but head in the stars, constantly navigating between dream and reality, between the place's past and present.***

Jeremy: One of the locals told us one day that Yuri Gagarin came to inaugurate the project in the sixties. A completely surrealist scene, with the first man in space returning from his mission and winding up in a housing project on the outskirts of Paris. We dug out archive footage of his visit. You see the new inhabitants' eyes, their outsize hopes of this place and this man. The cosmonaut and the building are symbols of hope and progress. That footage opens our film.

Fanny: We wanted Youri to be impregnated by that, steeped in that heroic past, so that his space dream was born out of his home. We wanted to film a young hero, a child of Gagarine in an epic adventure. Symbolically, the building is his mother's belly, which he refuses to leave. Our film is the story of a demise and a birth.

In writing the film, which of the two characters fell into place first.

Fanny: The location triggered everything. In 2014, we rocked up in Paris passionate about making movies.

Some architect friends had been commissioned to study the possible demolition of Gagarine. They asked us to shoot some documentary portraits of the building's tenants.

Jeremy: We were immediately sucked in by the place and people. From our very first visit, we were thinking of setting a film there. We'd never made fiction, but it was self-evident that this was where we had to begin. We started writing a short, which became the basis of the feature, which we developed over time with the inhabitants, at the same time as they were saying goodbye to their building.

What reception did you get?

Jeremy: In 2014, the only footage of Gagarine came from mainstream broadcast news. The project had a terrible reputation, and that image really hurt the inhabitants. When we arrived with our camera, they were wary. The first people we met were some youths outside the building, who immediately asked to see our ID's and credentials. (laughs).

Fanny: We soon made contact with a recently founded nonprofit, Neighbors Without Borders, an umbrella organization of women who were super active in community life. They were its cement, a real engine of collective life. They are in the film, in the dance on the roof. They're amazing. They led us right into the heart of the place.

Jeremy: We spent years recording people's reminiscences, forging strong friendships with people

of all ages and backgrounds. We asked them all to recount their initial experience of Gagarine. It was very exciting to listen to the tenants expressing what they wanted and their plans for the future. ***Politically, it's urgent to revisit how people see this bountiful and diverse younger generation***, which is often portrayed with negative images, as having no future. Those clichés do a lot of damage. They must be torn down!

Fanny: Grandparents, their children and grandchildren—three generations and multiple views on life and a single location. When you demolish a place, you destroy family histories. Everybody loses a home.

Did those encounters with residents lead to the creation of Youri?

Fanny: Like when a love affair comes to an end, as the prospect of demolition loomed ahead, there was a spurt of activity throughout the project. We witnessed the inhabitants unfurling their wings. We discovered a deep-rooted sense of community that we wanted to infuse into our protagonist. It's Youri's family, it's Houssam, his best friend, it's Fari, a neighborhood activist who looks out for tenants around her, and it's lots of people from one window to the next, who are connected, and whose lives echo up to Youri on the roof through the chimneys. He is full of very restrained love for them.

Jeremy: That energy was also there in the video workshops we organized, some with tenants of all ages, and some with maybe a dozen people ages

12-25. Some of these young people had just arrived from Syria, others had been there forever. We talked with them a lot about their lives and dreams. We asked them how they pictured themselves later on. Those conversations shaped Youri. Deep down, what developed in those discussions was the necessity of the film, and the engine that drove it: to say ***that young people who are habitually viewed from a statistical or spectacular angle can have immense dreams and imaginations.***

Did Alséni Bathily, who plays Youri, add something to his character's duality?

Jeremy: It's fair to say that before we met our actor, we pictured a pretty frail Youri, keying into our idea of a character with one foot still in childhood. Judith Chalier, our casting director, got to work, starting in the actual building, and expanding out from there. It took six months. Then Alséni Bathily walked in. He'd seen a flyer for auditions in his high school. He'd never acted before. Alséni is really sporty, tall, with an adult's body, the complete opposite of what we imagined. But the contrast between his physique and his gaze, smile and gentle nature accentuated the boyish component of the character. We had found our Youri.

Fanny: Yes, it was him. We were just sorry that he wasn't from Gagarine, to put a kind of seal on it. But as life is full of surprises, we later found out, when Alséni's father came on the shoot, that he had lived at Gagarine. One of his cousins lived there, and it was the first place he stayed when he arrived in France. Magical! (laughs)



Magic is an important aspect of the film, impregnating the story and picture.

Fanny: Jeremy lived in Colombia, and me in Peru. Magical realism, which is everywhere in South America, totally spoke to us, and continues to inspire us. ***The tempo of our directing is driven by that balance between realism and oneirism.***

Jeremy: The magical dimension allows us to approach reality and its violence from another angle. What Yuri is experiencing is tough. He symbolizes excluded youth, hurt by that abandonment, and withdrawing in on itself. Part of Yuri's struggle with growing up comes from his circumstances sapping his confidence. It interested us for the harshness of his context not to be hidden, but to be approached in a slightly offbeat way.

Fanny: Introducing a form of magical realism facilitated the creation of a back-and-forth between the real and the imaginary, and navigation between the collapse (of the character and the building) and zero-gravity.

Yuri sees his home as a spaceship. How do you bring that vision to life?

Fanny: That really is how the building appeared to us the first time we went there—an immense spaceship. The big issue was working out how to film the architecture so we could play on that dual reading.

Jeremy: To get a clearer handle on it, we went for a residency at the National Space Studies Center, where we sat in on talks that really helped us in firming up our vision of what a spaceship is, and what living in space means. One talk in particular on “Inhabiting Space.” That enabled us to give our character a solid, technical approach.

Fanny: All those elements meant we could dream up our very own spaceship. We didn't want it to be too sterile or clinical, but alive, grimy, and organic, because Yuri builds the capsule with found objects. He goes through deserted apartments, collecting things the tenants left behind, anything that might come in handy. Each object is repurposed to become part of the capsule. It's riffing on this idea of Yuri walking a high wire between celestial bum and astronaut.

Jeremy: Once again, life informed art. We'd come up with the object-collecting angle when we were writing but, on the shoot, reality caught up with us. Before our very eyes, the housing project was experiencing exactly what we had imagined. When we started shooting, Gagarine was empty, but the departing inhabitants had left things they didn't want in their apartments—furniture, objects, posters on the walls... Lives standing still. It was striking and moving.

Fanny: Yes, on the shoot, reality and fiction interconnected. Everything was mixed up. Since the demolition crews were getting to work just as we were starting to shoot,

Yuri's story kind of became ours. We experienced in real time the destruction of Gagarine. We had to negotiate with the crews to shoot in one part of the building while they worked in another. Before demolition begins, they gut the building and remove any asbestos. We saw men walking past wearing masks and white protective suits. Astronauts! (laughs)

This idea of life seeping through in spite of everything seems to underpin the film. Visually, of course, but also through the sound design.

Jeremy: ***Yuri's a resistance fighter.*** Despite the building's scheduled demise, he tries to keep it alive at all costs. When he gives up, other forms of life step up. In the capsule, there are all kinds of plants. The vegetable world takes over. Through them, the visual and aural universe evolves into something more aquatic. A lot of noise disappears, replaced by sounds that are transformed, becoming increasingly strange until they disappear.

Fanny: Sound does not travel in space. Our idea was to follow a trajectory that starts with roiling reality and moves toward silence. Telling a story of life up to the ultimate moment of Yuri's ejection from his building into the cosmos. There, in the vacuum, there is no sound. Symbolically, a journey in sound from life to death.

Jeremy: To relate the journey between real space and dream space, even when we were writing, we planned to work on real-life sounds of the projects. Then, in editing, it occurred to us that sound could reveal Yuri's passion before there is any visual indication.

Fanny: Same with the music—the idea of playing the sounds of what's real like notes, and playing the notes as if they were the sounds of what's real. The Galperine brothers and Amine Bouhafa turned to old electronic instruments, such as the theremin, which evokes fairly distant female voices, embodying lost vestiges of life.

Yuri is a loner but not alone. Women play an important role in the film, and a very different role than the one usually accorded them. Through them, Yuri accesses technology. The example of Diana (Lyna Khoudri) springs to mind.

Fanny: It's not something we really thought about, but I feel that our characters, both male and female, diverge from expectations. Like Yuri, Diana wants to understand how things work. That guides her. Compared to him, however, she has a very practical and concrete vision of things. She's a mechanic. She can fix anything.

Jeremy: The character of Diana came out of something that struck us very forcefully. At the foot of the Gagarine tower blocks, there were Roma camps stretching out. Vertical and horizontal planes that never intersected.



There were no points of crossover between those two worlds. We wanted to witness an encounter between two people from those two places. Two characters rejected by society, who nonetheless affirm themselves by fabricating their own world and their own tools.

Among the female figures in the film, there is also astronaut Claudie Haignéré, in the videos that Youri watches to plan his life in space. These videos are one of several incursions of archive footage in your film.

Jeremy: In all our shorts, we included shots taken from photos or videos of the inhabitants of the neighborhoods we were filming. We don't see archive footage as dead images, but as movement that allows us to continue developing the story in the editing room.

Fanny: With Daniel Darmon, who has been our editor from our very first shorts, we like to create a dialogue between drama and archive. The archival footage is like an encounter that takes place in editing. It gives the audience pause, shifts the narrative, introduces another dimension. **Archival footage shines a light on the drama, and drama adds depth to the archival footage.**

Gagarine Cité has now been demolished. It exists only in your film. Gagarine housing project is archive/drama.

Fanny: In our minds, the film is also a tool of remembrance, bearing witness to the architectural vision of the period, and above all to the people who brought the place alive. They are everywhere in the film—in visual and sound archives, on screen and behind the camera. A group of female former residents even formed a nonprofit, *Simmering Beauty*, to feed the cast and crew for the two months of the shoot.

Jeremy: We try to show that the building is important but in the end what's left is the people. Their relationship to the place endures whatever happens. That's what we tried to capture and convey. Holding out a mirror that reflects the beauty and complexity of those lives. We believe in the power of images to sway people's visions of themselves. It's what opens up imaginations.

*Interview by Tania De Montaigne*





# FANNY LIATARD & JÉRÉMY TROUILH

Before making their first film, **FANNY** and **JEREMY** studied together at the School of Political Science in Bordeaux. They switched to filmmaking later through traveling and meeting people who made the dream more accessible: after graduation, Jeremy traveled to India, then South America, from where he decided to apply to a master's program in creative documentary-making at Lussas in the Ardèche region. Meanwhile, Fanny went to Lebanon, then worked in Marseille on arts projects linked to urban renewal. She pitched a short film idea to La Ruche de Gindou Cinéma, a screenwriting course for the self-taught.

Eighteen months after these respective experiences, they met up in Paris with the shared desire to write and direct films of fiction. In 2014, they won a screenwriting contest that allowed them to make their first short, **GAGARINE**, which screened at numerous festivals (Message to Man, Flickerfest, Sundance Channel). Then came **LA RÉPUBLIQUE DES ENCHANTEURS** (Palm Springs, Clermont-Ferrand) and **CHIEN BLEU** (César Award nomination 2020, UniFrance International Critics Award), all made with the inhabitants of working-class neighborhoods. **GAGARINE**, their debut feature, evolved out of their first short with the inhabitants of this rapidly-changing swath of Paris housing projects.





## MAIN CAST

### ALSÉNI BATHILY

Born in 2001, Alséni Bathily makes his screen debut in **GAGARINE**, Fanny Liatard and Jeremy Trouilh's debut feature.

### LYNA KHOUDRI

Lyna Khoudri trained at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg. While still at drama school, she co-starred in Sofia Djama's **THE BLESSED**. For her performance as a young woman in Algiers after the civil war, she was awarded the Best Actress prize at the Venice Festival and a nomination for the 2018 César Awards. In 2019, she appeared in **SAVAGES**, a series by Rebecca Zlotowski for Canal+, co-starring alongside Roschdy Zem, Marina Foïs and Amira Casar. That same year, she co-starred with Vincent Cassel and Reda Kateb in Olivier Nakache & Eric Tolédano's **THE SPECIALS**, and in Mounia Meddour's **PAPICHA**, for which she won the César for Most Promising Actress. In 2020, Lyna appeared in Wes Anderson's new film **THE FRENCH DISPATCH**, alongside Benicio del Toro, Timothée Chalamet, Bill Murray and Frances McDormand, and in **GAGARINE** by Fanny Liatard and Jérémy Trouilh. Both films were selected for the Cannes Festival.

### JAMIL MCCRAVEN

Born in 2000, Jamil McCraven made his acclaimed screen debut in Bertrand Bonello's **NOCTURAMA**, starring opposite Finnegan Oldfield and Vincent Rottiers. In 2019, he won the Best Actor award at the Cabourg Festival for his performance in **BYE BYE LES PUCEAUX**, before being cast as one of the leads in Fanny Liatard and Jérémy Trouilh's **GAGARINE**.

### FINNEGAN OLDFIELD

Finnegan Oldfield's acting career began at an early age, making a name for himself with his performances in **MINEURS 27**, alongside Jean-Hugues Anglade, **LA MARCHE**, and Clément Cogitore's **NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH**. In 2015, Thomas Bidegain's **LES COWBOYS**, in which he co-starred opposite John C. Reilly and François Damiens, marked a turning-point in his career. His performance earned him his first César Awards nomination. Finnegan has no hesitation taking risks in his choice of projects. He has starred in films by Eva Husson (**BANG GANG**), Bertrand Bonello (**NOCTURAMA**), and Katell Quillévéré (**HEAL THE LIVING**). In 2018, he was once more nominated for a César Award for his performance as the lead in Anne Fontaine's **REINVENTING MARVIN**. In 2020, he co-starred in Fanny Liatard and Jérémy Trouilh's debut feature, **GAGARINE**.



## FARIDA RAHOUADJ

Farida Rahouadj started out as an actress on stage, working with France's most acclaimed directors, such as Patrice Chéreau, Antoine Vitez, Lucian Pintilie and Jean-Claude Fall. In the early 90s, Farida began to work in movies, for Catherine Corsini in *LOVERS*, Gabriel Aghion in *RUE DU BAC*, and Nicolas Klotz in *LA NUIT SACRÉE*. In 2003, Bertrand Blier cast her as one of the leads in *LES CÔTELETES*, alongside Michel Bouquet and Philippe Noiret, starting a long collaboration with the cult filmmaker that continued in 2005 with *HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME*, then *THE CLINK OF ICE* in 2010, and *HEAVY DUTY*, starring Gérard Depardieu and Christian Clavier in 2019. Farida has worked with a wide range of directors, taking risks on debut features, such as *SILENT VOICE* by Léa Fehner, and *DES LENDEMAINS QUI CHANTENT* by Nicolas Castro. In 2019, she played one of the leads in Rebecca Zlatowski's series for Canal+, *SAVAGES*. In 2020, she co-starred in Alain Guiraudie's latest film *VIENS JE T'EMMÈNE*, and *GAGARINE* by Fanny Liatard and Jérémy Trouilh.

## WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF DENIS LAVANT

After training at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, Denis Lavant became a ground-breaking and powerful figure in French cinema. As an acclaimed stage actor, he has worked with directors such as Pierre Pradinas, Hans Peter Cloos, Bernard Sobel, Dan Jemmet, James Thierrée and Jacques Osinzki. After developing a taste for poetry very early on, he has also become the voice of numerous poets by giving public recitals of their work, which is too rarely heard and celebrated. On film, he has been the emblematic star of the work of Leos Carax since *BOY MEETS GIRL* in 1983 right up to *HOLY MOTORS*, which set the Cannes Festival alight in 2012, in which Denis Lavant plays no less than eleven characters. His other credits include films by Patrice Chéreau, Diane Kurys, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Claude Lelouch, Claire Denis, Harmony Korine, Arnaud des Pallières, Wolfgang Becker, the Larrieu brothers, and more recently Dominique Rocher in *THE NIGHT EATS THE WORLD*, Pierre Schoeller in *ONE NATION, ONE KING*, Emily Atef in *THREE DAYS IN QUIBERON*, and Philippe Lacôte in *LA NUIT DES ROIS*. In 2020, Denis co-starred in *GAGARINE* by Fanny Liatard and Jérémy Trouilh.



# CREW

Directed by **FANNY LIATARD & JÉRÉMY TROUILH**  
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Editor: **DANIEL DARMON**  
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Sound re-recording mixer: **MELISSA PETITJEAN**  
Sound editor: **MARGOT TESTEMALE**  
Dialogue editor: **MAXIME ROY**  
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