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## CAST

**Béatrice Dalle** Béatrice Dalle  
**Charlotte Gainsbourg** Charlotte Gainsbourg  
**Abbey Lee** Abbey  
**Clara 3000** Clara  
**Claude-Emmanuelle Gajan-Maull** Claude-Emmanuelle  
**Félix Maritaud** Félix  
**Fred Cambier** Fred  
**Karl Glusman** Karl  
**Lola Pillu Perier** Lola  
**Loup Brankovic** Loup  
**Luka Isaac** Luka  
**Maxime Ruiz** Maxime  
**Mica Argañaraz** Mica  
**Paul Hameline** Paul  
**Stefania Cristian** Stefania  
**Tom Kan** Tom  
**Yannick Bono** Yannick

## CREW

Written and Directed by **Gaspar Noé**  
Produced by **Anthony Vaccarello, Gaspar Noé, Gary Farkas,**  
**Clément Lepoutre** and **Olivier Muller**  
Line Producer **Jean-Pierre Crapart**  
Assistant Director **Claire Corbetta-Doll**  
Director of Photography **Benoît Debie**  
Production Designer **Samantha Benne**  
Film Editor **Jérôme Pesnel**  
Costume Designer **Fred Cambier**  
Visual Effects Supervisor **Rodolphe Chabrier**





# I APOLOGISE FOR THIS CHAOS: GASPAR NOÉ'S *LUX ÆTERNA*

by Neil Mitchell

Making its premiere as one of two out-of-competition midnight screenings (along with Lee Won-tae's *The Gangster, the Cop, the Devil*) at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Cannes Film Festival in 2019, Gaspar Noé's mid-length film, *Lux Æterna*, was portrayed by its director as being "a modest essay about beliefs and the art of filmmaking". This description of *Lux Æterna* is amusingly understated given that its Cannes screening reportedly saw medical officials on stand-by in case any audience members fainted due to Noé's extreme use of strobe lighting effects during the film's potentially epilepsy-inducing dénouement. Even those familiar with Noé's fondness for strobing effects may not be prepared for quite how intense their deployment is in *Lux Æterna*, a project whose origins sidestepped the more traditional routes from page to screen. Commissioned by Anthony Vaccarello, the creative director of Saint Laurent, to produce a fifteen-minute commercial for the luxury fashion house, Noé instead took drastic creative liberty and concocted a fifty-one-minute, decidedly un-modest visual essay on the eternal clash between the industry and the art of filmmaking. It also afforded Noé the off-the-cuff opportunity to explore religious beliefs, religious persecution and witchcraft, themes that had long since appealed to one of modern cinema's most confrontational filmmakers. Noé did eventually deliver on the original assignment a year later, producing an eight-minute short for the brand entitled *Saint Laurent – Summer of '21*, which featured Mica Arganaraz and Stefania Cristian, two model/actresses featured in *Lux Æterna*, alongside Charlotte Rampling, the iconic figure of the modelling and







film industry worlds. Noé's artistic urge to go off-script and into the unknown clearly appealed to Vaccarello, given that he part-produced *Lux Æterna* as well as the initially commissioned project for his employers.

An audience-and-critic-baiting love letter to filmmaking written with a poisoned pen, *Lux Æterna* may not be as visceral and ambitious as *Irreversible* (2002) or *Enter the Void* (2009) but it is, in its own ways, as dizzying, challenging and divisive as any of the director's full-length features. In terms of Noé's oeuvre, *Lux Æterna* bears the most comparison to the Argentine agent provocateur's LSD-fuelled *Climax* (2018), the winner of the Art Cinema Award at the Cannes Film Festival the previous year. Both films feature large ensemble casts, unfold in one location – an abandoned school in *Climax* and a film set in *Lux Æterna* – and follow emotional and psychological trajectories that transports the characters from Rabelaisian playgrounds to Dantean hellscape by their respective conclusions. *Climax* and *Lux Æterna* were also both shot in short spaces of time, with the former comprising a fifteen-day shoot and the latter five days. With basic story treatments conceived by Noé, *Climax* and *Lux Æterna* similarly involved extensive on-set improvisation from the respective cast members, many of whom were first-time actors, work primarily in other fields or – in the case of the latter – played versions of themselves. Though an LSD-spiked bowl of Sangria provided the narrative catalyst for *Climax*'s descent into violent chaos, in *Lux Æterna* it is the off-screen artistic pressures, dysfunctional inter-personal and working relationships and the often toxic, male-dominated machinations of the film industry that propel the narrative to its own psychologically – if not physically – violent climax. In *Lux Æterna*, physical violence is replaced by emotional torment and substances make way for hubris, jealousy and Machiavellian desires, with the effects equally as corrosive to the minds and bodies of those involved.

Clearly inspired by Pier Paolo Pasolini's "La Ricotta", the third segment of the 1963 collaborative omnibus film *Ro.Go.Pa.G.*, *Lux Æterna* stars Béatrice Dalle and Charlotte Gainsbourg (who have previously appeared for Saint





Laurent) as partly fictional versions of themselves employed as the director and lead actress, respectively, of a modernised tale of witchcraft entitled *God's Work*. All of the film's supporting cast members play their not-quite-real selves, including Karl Glusman, the star of Noé's *Love* (2015), Australian model-actress Abbey Lee and multi-media artist Claude-Emmanuelle Gajan-Maull. Noé's scabrous film joins a relatively small but distinctive sub-genre of films about filmmaking, with François Truffaut's *Day for Night* (*La nuit américaine*, 1973), Tom DiCillo's *Living in Oblivion* (1995) and H.C. Potter's *Hellzapoppin'* (1941) being diverse reference points for *Lux Æterna's* own portrait of the individual agendas, personal dramas and technical challenges that can plague film productions. Either consciously or not, *Lux Æterna* also recalls the metafictional worlds of Olivier Assayas' *Irma Vep* (1996) and Wes Craven's *New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994). Federico Fellini's *8 1/2* (1963) and *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (Eleanor Coppola, George Hickenlooper, Fax Bahr, 1991) the jaw-dropping documentary on the making of *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) are also brought to mind as Dalle's debut directorial production goes seriously astray.

Taking place on the day of the shoot where the film-within-a-film's witches are to be burnt at the stake, *Lux Æterna* encompasses the majority of Noé's artistic proclivities and idiosyncrasies and many of the thematic concerns witnessed in his previous works. In its increasingly chaotic running time, the film acts as an ode to the artform while being an attack on the industry that seemingly symbiotically enables and hampers those that work in it. This is a world akin to a toxic relationship, with all of the players vying for control while sucking the lifeblood from each other. Emotions are toyed with, egos are bruised, and bodies are symbolically controlled – emotionally, artistically and contractually – onscreen and off. An ostensibly simple but crucial day's shoot collapses into something like mass hysteria, with even *God's Work's* lighting rig malfunctioning, mirroring the individual and collective breakdowns of the cast and crew.









Regardless of the improvisational liberty afforded the cast, and as is expected with a Noé film, the director's puppet mastery of proceedings is overt from the get-go. All surnames are dispensed with in the credits, inter-titles appear quoting Carl Theodor Dreyer, Jean-Luc Godard and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and the Steadicam work either remains static or voyeuristically roams the film set's backstage corridors and rooms. Strobing effects, the use of split-screen and references to Benjamin Christensen's *Häxan* (1922, aka *Witchcraft Through the Ages*), and Dreyer's witchcraft-themed drama, *Day of Wrath* (*Vredens dag*, 1943), are all utilized to enhance the collage-like qualities of style and form, while the narrative draws specific parallels between the historic persecution of women perceived to be witches, their subsequent representation onscreen, and the treatment of women in the film industry on both sides of the camera. *Lux Æterna's* metaphorical, backstage 'witch-hunt' revolves around those wishing to see Dalle replaced as *God's Work's* director for perceived inadequacies and the constant demands on Gainsbourg's emotional space and physical form.

While this may sound like an arduous and dour viewing experience on paper, in actuality *Lux Æterna* has a vivid strain of black humour at its heart. Speaking to *Film Comment* magazine, Noé credits his cast for this as he had "wanted to make it a horror movie" but was taken aback when "people started to be funny", with the finished project existing as it does "because of the people who are involved". This is a film in which producers are deemed to be "stereotypical pricks", actresses have "an expiration date" and the various on-set hangers on – journalists, wannabe filmmakers etc – are classed as "parasites". At one point the entire production team are angrily derided as being "the crew from hell", cementing the fact that no one is immune from wrath in *Lux Æterna's* disturbingly oppressive world. An early extended scene captures the tone perfectly, as Dalle and Gainsbourg amuse themselves by regaling each other with tales from their respective careers. Bonding over memories of appearing in trashy films, dealing with demanding, possibly unhinged, producers and of how they've "either been a beauty queen or





burned at the stake”, their private conversation and relaxed bonhomie are shattered by the entrance of Luca (Luca Isaac) and Glusman, who want Dalle and Gainsbourg’s attention for their own respective ends. Shot largely in split-screen, this scene acts as the calm before the storm, as once Dalle and Gainsbourg’s moment of tranquillity is invaded, *Lux Æterna* begins its path towards the eventual aural and visual meltdown witnessed at the conclusion. Noé reintroduces split-screen periodically throughout, with dual scenes vying for the viewer’s attention in a similar way to those seen in another tale of filmmaking, that of Mike Figgis’ *Timecode* (2000). Noé may not employ four cameras and a screen divided into quarters à la *Timecode*, but the effect is the same as the viewer’s attention wanders between conflicting images, dialogue and camera angles in disorienting fashion. In one particularly effective deployment of split-screen, Tom (regular Noé collaborator Tom Kan) is seen following and filming Dalle in the left of the screen, with the ‘director’ appearing in the right side. Charged by the film’s producer, Yannick (Yannick Boro), with recording Dalle’s every movement in order to find evidence to support her firing from the project, Tom’s intrusive behaviour is watched by the viewer as he watches her, with all made complicit in the voyeuristic persecution of Dalle. This is auditory and sensory chaos by design as Noé experiments with the medium’s form and style to compliment the individual human dramas unfolding and the collective unravelling because of them.

In an enlightening interview with the Barcelona-based, biannually published *METAL Magazine* conducted after the film’s Cannes screening, Noé’s personal thoughts on the industry of filmmaking offer a clear indication as to its presentation in *Lux Æterna*. On the subject of financing, Noé states that “people who pay think they’re the bosses, and whoever gets paid is the slave”. Noé went on to opine that in the art-film world, “people still believe in cinema almost like a religion”, highlighting the comparisons between the onscreen and offscreen action during the production of *God’s Work*. Shot by Noé’s regular cinematographer, Benoît Debie, and distributed by UFO Distribution and Potemkine Films, *Lux Æterna* proved to be popular with







audiences on its theatrical release in Paris before gaining a wider release in numerous other territories. Writing for The Hollywood Reporter, Leslie Felperin amusingly stated that the match between Saint Laurent and No   was in some ways ideal as they both “exude a certain decadent excess and poisonous beauty”, while for Steve Pond, writing for The Wrap, the end result is “kind of mesmerizing in its perverse single-mindedness”. One notable detractor less than impressed with *Lux   terna* was The Guardian’s Peter Bradshaw, who saw the film as “an insufficiently diverting anti-climax” and No   of “reverting to self-parodic silliness”. An admitted lover of the opprobrium with which his films are sometimes met, No   would no doubt be satisfied with the positive and negative critical reactions to this truncated slice of provocative cinema. After all, when Dalle exclaims “fuck entertainment cinema” while bemoaning the industry’s demand for commercial films catering to mainstream audiences, it’s abundantly clear that she is tapping into No  ’s *raison d’  tre*, perhaps never better realised than it is in *Lux   terna*.

**Neil Mitchell is a writer and editor based in Brighton, East Sussex. He is the author of *Devil’s Advocates: Carrie* for Auteur Publishing and the editor of the London, Melbourne and Sydney editions of Intellect Books’ *World Film Locations* series.**





## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*Lux Æterna* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with French 5.1 and 2.0 stereo audio. The High Definition master was provided by Wild Bunch.

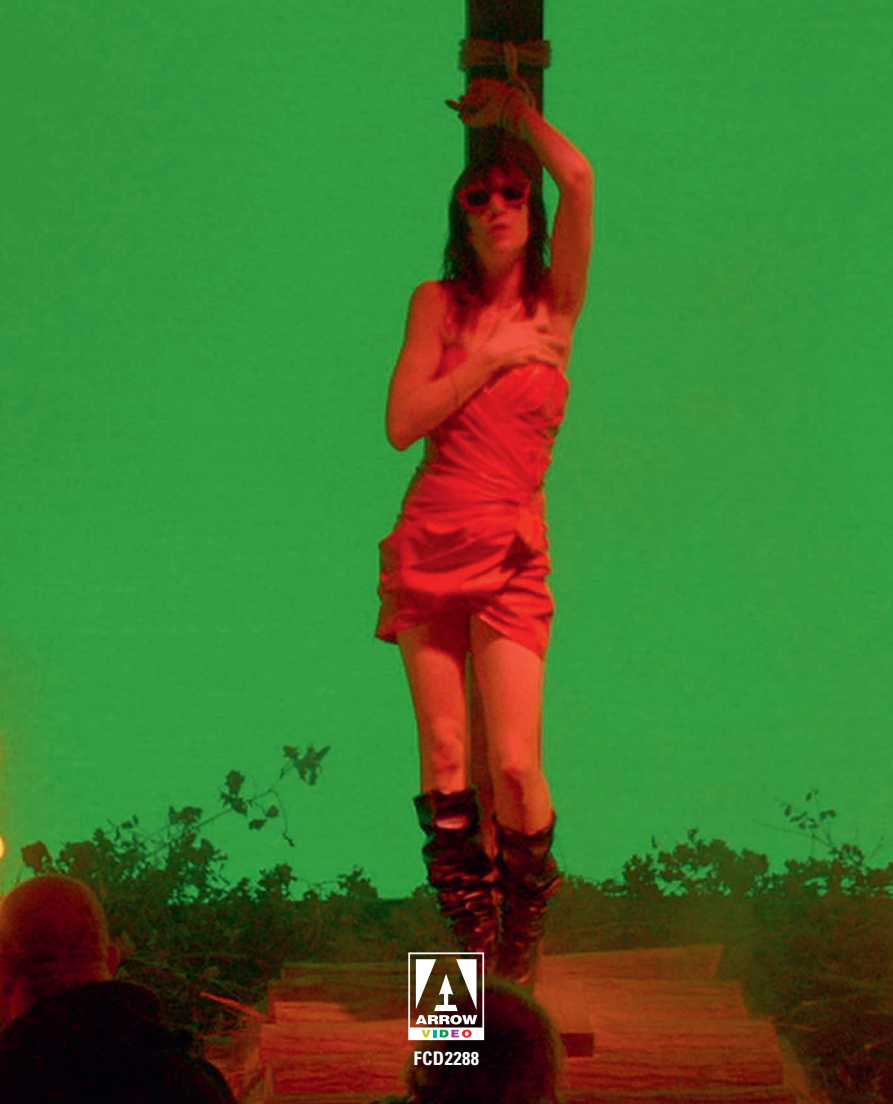
## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**  
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer **James White**  
Technical Assistant **James Pearcey**  
QC **Aidan Doyle**  
Production Assistant **Samuel Thierry**  
Disc Mastering / Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**  
Design **Obviously Creative**

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