

BUFFALO FILMS PRESENTS

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A SHORT FILM
BASED ON
THE LIVES OF
JEANNE DUVAL &
CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

DIRECTED BY
ANTOINE PALEY

WRITTEN BY
NAÏMA HEBRAIL KIDJO





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April 27, 1842: a day in the life of Jeanne Duval and Charles Baudelaire. In their Paris apartment, Charles gets to writing poems about Jeanne, his mixed-race partner and muse, while Jeanne memorizes in the hopes of performing on the cabaret stage. But, as the day goes on, the weight of Charles' words and needs becomes increasingly difficult for Jeanne to bear. When Charles returns with news of the abolition of slavery and twists this historical moment to demand yet more from Jeanne, she snaps, finding strength and inner freedom in her anger. Her unwillingness to stay erased resonates through the ages, shining through even her erasure from Courbet's iconic painting, "l'Atelier du Peintre."

The Team



ANTOINE PALEY

Director

Antoine Paley is a writer, director and editor. After obtaining a double major in History & Cinema Aesthetics and Social Sciences, he attended the Ecole de la Cité in Saint-Denis where he trained in writing and filmmaking with Luc Besson. He began his career on large-scale productions such as Valérian & the City of a Thousand Planets and Taxi 5, where he worked as a camera technician.

Antoine has written, directed and edited numerous short films, many of which have won awards in competition. Most notably “Le gros et la pute,” his end-of-study thesis film, which was selected in more than fifty international festivals; or Taste of Life, an animated concept short, that won the Nespresso Talents at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival.

Showcasing an eclectic style, Antoine is particularly fond of conceptualization and developing stories that adapt to their subjects and to his collaborators’ needs. Antoine attaches capital importance to narrative. The story is a vehicle for emotions and the aesthetic serves the story.

Accompanied by his agent Laurence Coudert, director of Arc-en-ciel, Antoine is currently developing two feature film scripts. Antoine's work can be seen here: www.antoinepaley.com

Why Jeanne? To tackle heartbreak head-on.

The Team



NAÏMA HEBRAIL KIDJO

Writer, Actress, Associate Producer

Naïma Hebrail Kidjo is Franco-Beninese actress and writer who grew up between Brooklyn and Paris. She is a graduate of the School at Steppenwolf and of Yale University, where her play Pixel Souls won the Berkeley College Arts Prize.

She wrote the book and lyrics for an original musical, which premiered at Mass MoCA in 2022 and was performed at UC Berkeley, the Broad Stage in Los Angeles, and the Kennedy Center, and the Holland Festival in Amsterdam. Recently, Naïma wrote and starred in Jeanne, a short art-film about Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire's long-forgotten mixed-race muse. Up next, she is re-writing a new version of her musical, developing a feature and a TV series.

As an actor, Naïma has inhabited a wide range of roles on stages across the US, working at iconic theatres such as Williamstown Theatre Festival and Steppenwolf. Favorite credits include: Iseult et Tristan (IAMA Theatre, Los Angeles & LaMama, New York), Square Circle Plays (Murmurs LA & MOCA Geffen, Los Angeles), Rachels (Pussy Grabber Plays, Los Angeles), The Crucible (Steppenwolf, Chicago), Rutherford's Travels (Pegasus Theatre, Chicago), and Dracula (Williamstown Theatre Festival). On-screen, she's recurred as a Paramedic on Chicago Med and PD, throughout 7 combined seasons. Up next, you can see Naïma in DogMan, directed by Luc Besson, and Au Fil des Saisons, alongside Catherine Deneuve and Andrea Riseborough, both set to release early 2024.

Why Jeanne? Because I too often have felt unseen & unrepresented.

The Team



IMAN PEREZ

Producer, Buffalo Films

Iman Perez is a young French actress, model and producer. She was always passionate about acting and cinema. She starred in her first movie at 9 years old in “A butterfly kiss” which built her passion more and more.

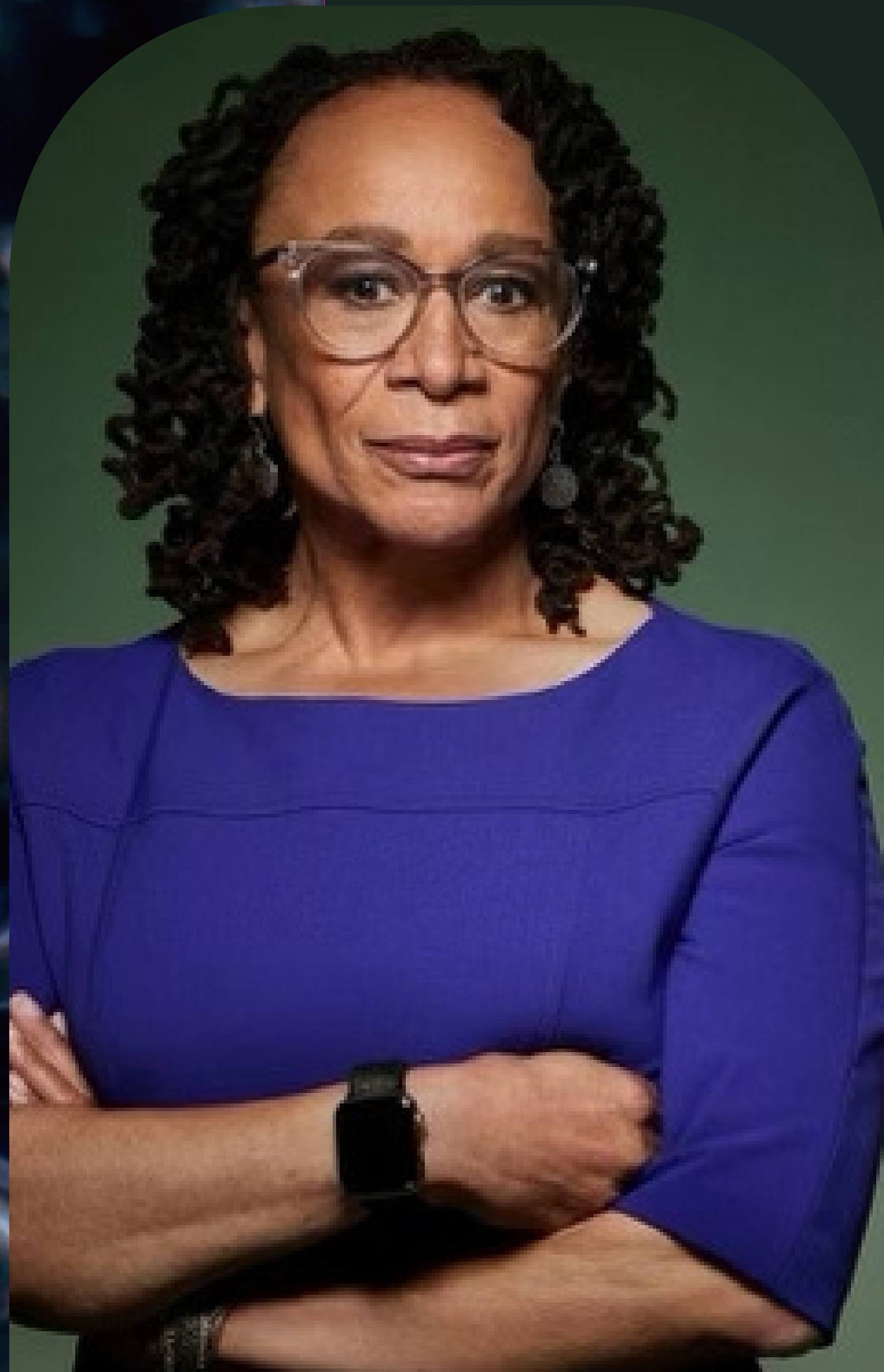
She then got scouted at the age of 15 for modeling and focused on that to build her own name. She quickly got tapped on the shoulder by Jean Paul Gaultier and became his muse for a couple of years.

During Covid She decided she was ready to start acting again after 1 year at the conservatory in Paris, she quickly booked the movie “Les amandiers” by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi that was in competition in Cannes.

Then quickly signed an ambassador contract with Chanel. She followed by Filming “Le petit blond de la casbah” by Alexandre Arcady and “The Edge of the Blade” by Vincent Perez that both came out at the end of 2023. She has 2 confidential movies that she is filming in 2024. She also naturally started producing movies, including the documentary feature Co produced by Chanel called “Métissage” distributed on Arte.

Why Jeanne? Because her story matters.

The Team



S. EPATHA MERKERSON

Co-Producer

S. Epatha Merkerson is an American actress and producer. She has received accolades for her work, including an Emmy Award, a Golden Globe Award, a Screen Actors Guild Award, four NAACP Image Awards, two Obie Awards, and two Tony Award nominations.

She is known for her portrayal of NYPD Lieutenant Anita Van Buren on the NBC police procedural drama series *Law & Order*, a role she played from 1993 to 2010, appearing in 388 episodes of the series. She is also known for playing Reba the Mail Lady on *Pee-wee's Playhouse* and Sharon Goodwin in the NBC medical drama *Chicago Med* since the series premiered in November 2015 (and in crossover appearances on *Chicago Fire* and *Chicago P.D.*)

Why Jeanne? To help uplift stories not often told in America.

The Real Jeanne Duval



Jeanne Duval was a mixed-race actress living in France in the 19th century. Thought to be born in Haiti around 1821, she met Charles Baudelaire, renowned French poet, in 1842 Paris and the rest is history.

She is woven through Baudelaire's life, his body of work, and is at the core of his poetic imagery. Their relationship was tumultuous and passionate. Despite their love being in defiance of the times, their connection lasted through both their lives.

We catch glimpses of Jeanne through Baudelaire's verses – her hair, her skin, her “deep eyes so fervid and so tender,”[1]... Thus Jeanne's formidable shape takes form in the shadow of her lover's quill.

Jeanne was portrayed on canvas as well! Eduard Manet painted her in *Woman with a Fan*, also known as *Baudelaire's Mistress*. Jeanne Duval is also in Courbet's *Atelier du Peintre* near where Baudelaire is depicted – but Courbet erased her. Fifty or so years later as the paint aged, Jeanne's silhouette seeped back into the *Atelier du Peintre* in an phenomenon called a *pentimento* (“repentance” in Italian).

Unfortunately, it's only through Baudelaire and accounts given by those around him that we find most information about Jeanne Duval. Even seemingly simple details such as when and where she was born or died are unconfirmed. And in some cases, there was a willful erasure of her impact on his life. For example, when Charles Baudelaire died his mother burned all the letters Jeanne had written him. But what is clear is that Jeanne, apart from being “the only woman [Baudelaire] ever loved,”[2] was a passionate, willful, powerful modern woman.

Through extensive research and generous imagining, we've tried to peek beyond the veil of the male gaze and go beyond hearsay to imagine Jeanne and give back some of the spotlight that is her due.

[1] *Un Fantôme* (a Phantom) by Charles Baudelaire

[2] Letter to M Ancelle - June 30 1845 by Charles Baudelaire

L'ATELIER DU PEINTRE





Baudelaire's Mistress by Edouard Manet

We wanted to infuse painting and poetry at the core of our film. The beauty of these three mediums combined underscores the theme of Jeanne's "gilded cage." She is immortalized through art, but erased in life.



A still from *Jeanne*

Our Journey

2019, at the Orsay Museum Naïma sees the “Modèle Noir” exhibit and the seed of this story is planted.

Three years later, after many drafts and collaborators, Antoine & Naïma joined forces to make *Jeanne* a reality. With generous support from S. Epatha Merkerson and under the guidance of Iman Perez and Buffalo films, the project began to take form.

We wanted the process of filming *Jeanne* reflect the message of empowerment in the script. We made a concerted effort to hire crew both experienced and new - so the shoot could be a chance for people to learn and grow. What's more, with a team composed of over 50% women, 9 female department heads and three Black women producers, *Jeanne* is about making a place for women to thrive - both on screen & off.

Bringing this story to life wasn't always easy, so we're incredibly proud to share it with you, our audiences. We hope some *Jeanne*'s strength in the face of erasure stays with you & spreads through you.

Why Jeanne? To be a bigger part in telling our own stories.



*“Beneath you slippers of satin,
Beneath your enchanting silken toes
I place the sum of my joys,
My genius, and my destiny”*

*“Sous tes souliers de satin,
Sous tes charmants pieds de soie
Moi, je mets ma grande joie,
Mon génie et mon destin”*

Sed Non Satiata, Charles Baudelaire

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