

SISTER PRODUCTIONS PRESENTE

TU CROIS QUE
YOU THINK
LA TERRE EST
THE EARTH
CHOSE MORTE
IS A DEAD THING

un film de / a film by **Florence Lazar**

Press Kit



Si ou lé la santé,
pa joué !

RETOUR
à nous !



HIER ESCLAVAGISÉES
DE TOUT TEMPS EXPLOITÉES
AUJOURD'HUI EMPOISONNÉES
LES FEMMES DISENT ASSEZ
PÉ BOUCH FINI



A person wearing a yellow high-visibility shirt, a turban, and blue gloves is standing in a dark forest, writing in a notebook. The background is filled with dense, dark foliage and tree trunks.

**IDFA Official Selection 2019
MID-LENGTH Competition
Screenings**

Thursday, 21 November 19:00

Saturday, 23 November 19:45

Wednesday, 27 November 20:30

Friday, 29 November 22:15

Tuschinski 3

Munt 9 (Premiere)

De Balie

Pakhuis de Zwijger



**You think the earth is a dead thing...
It's so much more convenient!
Dead, you thus trample on it...**

Aimé Césaire

A Tempest: Based on Shakespeare's "The Tempest;" Adaptation for a Black Theatre (1969)

We hear all the time, sometimes even against our will, but we only listen at will. The difference between hearing and listening is neither attentiveness, deciphering, nor recording, it is attending to the other, widening one's awareness to the other's mediation, intention, aspiration. More than an encounter, listening is a communion. Capturing listening lies at the heart of Florence Lazar's filmic practice.

Rasha Salti

(independent curator, program director of "La Lucarne" ARTE)

Synopsis

A quarter of the land of Martinique is severely polluted following decades of unregulated use of chlordecone, a highly toxic insecticide used to treat banana plantations, the source of the island's chief agricultural export industry.

Intent

You Think That the Earth Is a Dead Thing evolved out of a photographic work inspired by the ideas of Aimé Césaire and undertaken in the context of a junior high school in the La Chapelle neighborhood in the Eighteenth Arrondissement of Paris, from 2006 to 2016. The work consists of a suite of 35 color photographic prints produced in collaboration with a group of the school's students, who are represented throughout the series presenting a series of archival documents that testify to twentieth-century debates over decolonialization. Several of the archives shown in the series already reveal the convergence of anti-colonial struggles and the exploitation of natural resources. The journal *Tropiques* (1942-1945), which Aimé and Suzanne Césaire founded in Martinique during the Vichy Regime, was, for example, as committed to promoting a Martinican cultural identity and a critique of colonialism as it was to a study of the Caribbean habitat – its flora and its history, language, and oral tradition.



You Think That the Earth Is a Dead Thing looks at the “global ecological crisis” from the perspective of the island of Martinique. In reflecting on ecology, the film not only raises issues concerning nature and damaged ecosystems, but, moreover, focuses on spaces of resistance to the crisis in which women and men acknowledge and act from the historical perspective of colonialism, where ecological struggle and the colonial past are intrinsically linked. It thus examines the ecological and political context in Martinique through encounters with farmers, an ethnopharmacologist, and a local medical herbalist. The context is one of widespread pollution resulting from the intensive use of chlordecone. For over twenty years, the carcinogenic insecticide was used by a small group of descendants of the first colonial slaveholders to settle in the French West Indies, in order to protect the banana plantations that dominate Martinique’s export industry. The resulting pollution has endangered the life of the island’s population and reflects what Martinican political scientist Malcom Ferdinand names in his book *Une écologie décoloniale* a colonial existence [*un habiter colonial*]: “More than a constraint imposed by market forces, ecological domination designates nothing less than the imposition of a toxic life.”

The various protagonists of the film explore alternative approaches in the fight against environmental destruction using ancestral practices and knowledge. Thus, the portrayal of nature constantly shifts: sometimes it appears domesticated and exploited on a massive scale, at other times, contaminated by unseen toxic substances, or, again, as an ally in the struggle for survival.

Historical context

A former French colony, Martinique became a French overseas department in 1946. The same year, Aimé Césaire was elected mayor of Fort-de-France and parliamentary deputy to the French National Assembly. The island is located in the Lesser Antilles, between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, 7,000 km from metropolitan France.

Martinique was colonized in 1635. In 1657, the French deployed troops to force Amerindians from the territory. In 1674, during the reign of Louis XIV, Martinique was subsequently incorporated under the French crown. The production of sugar cane became the island’s principal economic activity and required a significant workforce. The absence of sufficient labor in metropolitan France, led to the beginnings of the African slave trade, which developed rapidly – in 1833, the number of slaves (78,000) outnumbered that of free citizens (37,955) in Martinique. The revolution of February 1848, which brought an end to the July Monarchy, saw the definitive abolition of slavery by French parliamentary decree two months later, on April 27. The French Republican government subsequently awarded financial compensation to the island’s slaveowners for the resulting loss of labor.

In response to the subsequent labor crisis, and in order to sustain the sugar industry, the regime of Napoleon III encouraged a new wave of emigration – not without resemblance to forced labor – from Africa (the “Congos”) and India (the “Coolies”) to the island. During World War



II, Admiral Georges Robert, who represented the Vichy regime in the French West Indies, imposed an economic blockade, a rigorous and repressive regime, on the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. In 1946, the French National Assembly voted to transform Martinique into a French overseas department.

Produced for export, sugar cane dominated Martinique's economy until the second half of the twentieth century, during which time the land devoted to sugar cane production and the number of sugar mills and distilleries declined considerably. Bananas began to be grown commercially on the island at the beginning of the twentieth century and subsequently replaced sugar cane as Martinique's main agricultural export by the 1950s.

Chlordecone

Chlordecone is a synthetic molecule with at least one atom of chlorine (Cl). Since the nineteenth century, chlorine has been widely used as a biocide – notably, to purify drinking water and swimming pools. For industrial purposes, it is used to bleach paper and manufacture paint, plastics (PVC), and solvents. Known for its toxic properties, it was used as a chemical weapon – commonly known as mustard gas – during World War I.

In 1975, an accident in a US chlordecone factory led to an international ban on its use. Despite being outlawed elsewhere, its use continued in Martinique and Guadeloupe until 1993. Environmental contamination has subsequently affected the island's population with high rates of prostate cancer, numerous premature births, and, more recently, children born with genital malformation (indeterminate gender).

In 1979, Hurricane David struck the Caribbean, followed a year later by Hurricane Allen. In their wake, the number of parasites infecting banana plantations increased considerably, which greatly strained Martinique's economy. As a consequence, the French Minister of Agriculture, in 1981, recommended and promoted the use of chlordecone. The company Laurent de Laguarigue, a large Béké* plantation, purchased the patent for chlordecone from DuPont de Nemours in the US and began manufacturing it in Aude, in the south of France, under a new name, Curlone®, for export to the French West Indies and Eastern Europe. In 1990, fol-



Following new studies that confirmed its hazardousness, the French government finally imposed a ban on its production and use. Despite the ban, however, Martinican growers obtained two exemptions allowing them to use remaining stocks of chlordane and to prolong its use in crop dusting until 1993.

In 2002, customs authorities in Dunkirk seized a cargo of sweet potatoes heavily contaminated with chlordane and other insecticides. The event brought the danger of chlordane as a toxic substance to wider awareness in metropolitan France. The French parliament consequently launched an investigation, which revealed the scope of the catastrophe. In 2010, the Grenelle II Environmental Act banned aerial crop dusting of insecticides, and yet again included several exemptions. On December 11, 2011, growers received an exemption from the prefecture of Martinique in order to continue aerial crop dusting against cercosporiosis, a fungus that threatened banana crops. Today 25% of Martinique's farmland is contaminated with chlordane, a classified carcinogenic. It has a half-life (the average time required for 50% of a substance to decay) of 4 to 46 years depending on environmental conditions. The European Council directive of July 15, 1991 (91/414/EEC) prohibits the marketing of plant protection products with half-lives of more than 3 months.

*Creole for a white descendant of early European settlers.



The director

Florence Lazar

Florence Lazar is a French filmmaker and visual artist. For the past 20 years, her videos, photographs, and art installations have been shown in museums and contemporary art centers in France and abroad. Historical inquiry and historical transmission are the principal vectors of her work.

An early video work, *Les Paysans* (2000), made in response to the armed conflict that saw the violent break-up of the former Republic of Yugoslavia, deals with individual and collective responsibility in the face of military conflict and aggression. Documentary cinema has since held a prominent place in Lazar's artistic practice, which relies on extensive periods of research and collaboration.

Like *Les Paysans*, her subsequent films often construct narratives in places that are in crisis, in which subjective accounts are presented from a historical perspective: *Kamen – The Stones* (2014) focuses on the falsification of history in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia in the wake of ethnic cleansing; *Les Bosquets* (2011) follows the process of urban transformation in Les Bosquets housing project in Clichy-Montfermeil on the outskirts of Paris; *Prvi Deo* (2006) examines the legal proceedings of a war crimes trial in Belgrade, following the 1991 Ovčara massacre in Croatia, from the perspective of families of the victims. Lazar inaugurated a public commission in the form of a permanent pho-

tographic installation for the Collège Aimé Césaire in Paris in 2016. A retrospective of her photographic, video and film work was held in the Jeu de Paume, Paris, in 2019. Her film *Kamen – The Stones* won the Institut Louis Marcorelles award at the Cinéma du réel festival, in 2014. Her work has been shown at the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Musée de Grenoble, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Brandenburgisches Landesmuseum für moderne Kunst, Cottbus, Germany, the FIDMarseille, International Film Festival, and the Film Society of Lincoln Center, New York.

Filmography (selection)

YOU THINK THE EARTH IS A DEAD THING

(70' - Sisterproductions, Arte France 2019)

125 HECTARES (32' - Jeu de paume, Sister productions 2019)

KAMEN, THE STONES (66' - Sister productions 2014)

LES BOSQUETS (51' - 2011)

CONFESSIONS D'UN JEUNE MILITANT (32' 2008)

PRVI DEO (85' with Raphaël Grisey 2006)

THE PEASANTS (18' 2000)



The producer

Sister Productions

Having worked for Orange in New York and Paris for 10 years and for several world alterglobalist social forums, **Julie Paratian** created SISTER Productions (an anagram of RESIST) with emphasis on an international, feminist and militant approach. Based in the New Aquitaine region (Bordeaux), SISTER has a rich experience in international co-productions.

SISTER productions has produced around thirty documentary and fiction films noticed in major festivals: from debut films to later works with experienced directors, TV or cinematic pieces as well as art films, all of SISTER's works take strong political stances and explore unique cinematic expressions.

Active in the world of documentary cinema, **Julie Paratian** is a member of the EURODOC and ACE networks, and president of *Les Amis du Cinéma du Réel*

You Think That the Earth Is a Dead Thing is SISTER's second collaboration with Lazar, their previous coproduction KAMEN - THE STONES won the "Grand Prix" award at *the Cinema du Réel* festival in 2014.

Filmography (selection)

Documentary

DAYANA MINI MARKET by Floriane Devigne (Visions du Réel)
INTO BATTLE by Eve Duchemin (Magritte for the Best Documentary)

SOUTH TO NORTH by Antoine Boutet (Locarno)

KAMEN, THE STONES by Florence Lazar (Grand Prix, Cinema du Réel)

DEMONS IN PARADISE by Jude Ratnam (Official selection, Cannes Film Festival, 2017)

THE DEMOCRATIC HYPOTHESIS by Thomas Lacoste (to be released)

Fictions

THE CHALLAT OF TUNIS by Kaouther Ben Hania (Acid Cannes)

NIGHT SONG by Raphael Nadjari

HER JOB by Nikos Labot (TIFF)

IF THE WIND DIES by Nora Martirosyan (to be released)

Team

70' / HD 16/9 / French, creol
English subtitles

DIRECTED BY **FLORENCE LAZAR**

WRITTEN BY **FLORENCE LAZAR** WITH **JEAN BRESCHAND**

PRODUCED BY **JULIE PARATIAN**

PHOTOGRAPHY **ROLAND EDZARD, JULIEN LOUSTAU**

SOUND **TERENCE MEUNIER, DIDIER ANDREA**

EDITING **JULIEN LOUSTAU**

SOUND EDITING **JOSEFINA RODRIGUEZ**

MIXING **EMMANUEL CROSET**

COLOR GRADING **SEBASTIEN DESCOINS**

GRAPHISM **MARC TOUITOU**

WITH THE SUPPORT OF
ARTE FRANCE - LA LUCARNE
LE CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINEMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
LE FONDS IMAGES DE LA DIVERSITÉ, COMMISSARIAT GÉNÉRAL À L'ÉGALITÉ DES TERRITOIRES - CNC
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L'ALLOCATION INDIVIDUELLE À LA CRÉATION - DRAC ILE-DE-FRANCE
LE JEU DE PAUME

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ANGO



JEU DE PAUME



PROCIREP
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Links

Teaser

<https://vimeo.com/367800994>

Film clip 1

<https://vimeo.com/373888988>

Film clip 2

<https://vimeo.com/373901427>



www.sisterprod.com