

SHORT SHOT: LE ROUGE AU SOL By Claiborne Smith



Le Rouge au Sol, Montreal filmmaker Maxime Giroux's 16-minute short, hits close to home — which is slightly frightening. *Le Rouge au Sol*, which translates literally as *Red on the Floor*, is about a dissolute man in his early thirties who gets wasted one night, smashes his head through a wall of glass to get back in to his apartment, and spends the night on top of the cracked glass until his mother comes the next morning to take him to Ikea, the furniture store.

"I'm always drunk," he tells his mother during the ride to Ikea. "It's like I'm a barfly. Everybody pisses me off. Old people piss me off; young people piss me off. People caught

up in their own little routine piss me off. People have no more backbone. People shit on their own principles and it pisses me off. I piss myself off too. I'm pretty disgusted with myself, actually."

Giroux, who made one short before *Le Rouge au Sol*, is not the same person as his protagonist. But his protagonist is strangely similar to the actor who plays him. "That's the kind of thing he will do in real life," Giroux said of Martin Dubreuil, who is not a professional actor. Giroux was unable to conduct a rehearsal because Dubreuil was hungover. "We were driving and after two minutes, he said, 'Stop the car,' so we didn't really have a rehearsal. When he gets drunk he's always doing that, hurting himself but at the same time ... I think he's pretty sad about it, too."

Le Rouge au Sol is an assured and visceral short that has a dark but not entirely bleak humor. "I see life as a sad thing personally," Giroux said, "but it's not sad to say that." The 29-year-old filmmaker loves the sadness of life. "I'm pretty much a happy person," he acknowledged, "but at the same time when I look at life as a global thing, I think it's pretty sad — we're here, we're working, in competition all our lives and then we die." In fact, dying may be the most wonderful part of life there is.

Giroux's protagonist seems to be heading right in that direction: "There's something in my head that just won't go away," he tells his mother, "like I'm always in fog or something, I feel empty, I feel empty, ma." But Giroux, who co-wrote the screenplay with a friend, has inserted a short but significant possibility of hope at the end of the short — his protagonist's mother confesses that things have not been so great for her, either.

The moment is left unexplained, but Giroux said that "things are not going well for her because her son is not doing well," adding that "like a lot of people that age, they've raised their family and they've forgotten what they wanted to do."

By casting two non-professional actors to play the son and his mother (Monique Pion), Giroux avoided a crucial problem he has with actors in Quebec: they are so accustomed to acting in theatre that they have "difficulty" adjusting their performances for film. He went through many auditions for the role of the mother but the actors were "not subtle," Giroux said. His own actors "don't overdo it," he explained. "I don't like it when it's not subtle."

For the son to confide in his mother at all seems like something of a breakthrough for the character. "He's at a point where nothing matters," Giroux said, and he wants to start over. "What's strange with parents and children is that we don't really want to know if our parents are doing well because it's better for us if we don't know."

Giroux will not be making shorts for long. "It's pretty important for me to be honest — I don't like short films," he confessed. "I can't wait to do a feature." Most shorts, he said, have a cloying punch at the end. It is preferable to have the audience use their imagination and work a little bit. "For me, the most interesting part of cinema is when the audience imagines most of the movie in their heads, so for me it's important to not add a real beginning and not add a real ending," he said. "What is sad in movies today is that everything is explained and for me, it's impossible to explain everything, because I try to understand what life is and I don't think I ever will." ■

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