



# WILD PARISIAN GIRL

## Léa Seydoux's bright blue views on art, poetry and musical comedies

Interview by Silvia Bombardini, photography Bryan Adams  
coat *Prada*, jeans *Levi's*, shirt and shoes *Céline*

There is a certain gracious, effortless regality, raw and untamed sweetness in the gentle way in which Léa Seydoux enters the set. Barefoot in smoky tights, she walks in silently and absorbed almost as if we wouldn't notice that she fills up the room like the morning light. The red lace of her robe brightens up and melts in with her perfectly pearly skin. The golden cascade of her hair captures the gleam of the wardrobe's richest embroideries. She's beautiful in the way we would image pagan deities to be: wild, sophisticated, resolute yet innocent and unreachable.

The voluptuous lavishness of her Parisian upbringing shows up in her refined delicate manners. She has the inquisitive and cultivated gaze that is the privilege of those children who were lucky enough to have grown up within an atmosphere of superb majestic architecture and intense cultural magnetism. But in her fluid instinctive movements and passion, we can perceive as well the rough landscapes and magical wisdom of the city of Dakar in Senegal. This is where she used to go visit her mother who founded the *Empire Des Enfants* center for homeless children. Her unique and precious double-perspective of life has certainly influenced the marvelous kind of

woman and actress that she has become. "I didn't grow up in Africa, but I used to go there very often," she says. "And in a way, inside, I feel a bit African too. I am very happy that I had the opportunity of this diverse, parallel vision."

It was in Paris where her grandfather Jérôme Seydoux and her great uncle Nicolas were holding the reins of French cinema at the Pathé and Gaumont movie studios. In spite of this, she doesn't feel like her decision to start acting came across as any more obvious than any other choice that she could have made. Despite her renowned surname, she has had to work hard to get where she is today. The increasing popularity she's currently experiencing comes after more than 25 roles that she has polished and perfected with her natural talent. With an impressive versatility, sensitivity and devotion to balance her beauty, her blooming career is hardly surprising. "I think that there are many different things that make a great actor," she tells me. "and it's always, also a question of luck."

In her case, it was her compelling visceral interpretation of Junie in *La Belle Personne* that drew attention and won her significant critical acclaim for the first time. This was along with a

nomination for the César Award for Most Promising Actress back in 2009. "Junie was tough because she's like an icon," she recalls. "We don't see through her eyes, she's more like an object of fascination. It's difficult to play characters like that because she's that sort of static." Even so, Seydoux is not the kind of person who walks away from a challenge and in spite of her young age and candid appearance, her ideas about her job are determined and crystal clear. "Fellini said that only the truth comes to the camera. I tell the truth. Art, for me, is about truth," she states firmly.

Last year we loved her in *Midnight in Paris*, an exquisite essay on the city's magic from Woody Allen's distinctive American and dreamy point of view. She was Gabrielle, the girl selling vinyl records at the flea market. It was a short but very meaningful part that suited her Parisian allure perfectly. Her character represented the appeal of the present era. It was an ultimate, self-conscious grip on reality and a refreshing awakening from nostalgia. "Midnight in Paris is an American view, for sure, I mean, it's not a French view, not Paris as we see it. But a movie is always a vision, a subjective vision. This is Woody's vision and I like it. I like to be part of somebody's world. It was Woody's world, and

it's great to have been part of it for a moment." says Seydoux. Allen's somehow modest, slightly shy and tentative approach to Paris glows with the intimate and bizarre tenderness that's present in all of his masterpieces. *Midnight in Paris* might definitely be considered one of them. In January 2012, the film won the Golden Globe Award for Best Screenplay and received four Academy Award nominations for Best Picture, Best Direction, Best Original Screenplay and Best Art Direction.

More recently, we've even seen Seydoux playing the part of the villain in the latest episode of the *Mission: Impossible* series. It's an unexpected and yet truly incredible interpretation by the actress. Seydoux was Sabine Moreau, a ruthless French killer with a soft spot for diamonds. They say it was Tom Cruise himself who chose her for the role. But when I ask her if there's a movie she's particularly proud of, she tells me about *Belle Épine* (also known as *Dear Prudence*). It was the feature debut of writer and director Rebecca Zlotowski. "It was the first time that I got extremely emotionally involved," says Seydoux. *Belle Épine* is the raspy, fierce and mesmerizing coming-of-age portrait of Jewish teen Prudence Friedman played by Seydoux. Prudence rebelliously and angrily deals with the loss of her mother. Zlotowski was so fond of her performance that she requested her once again for her new film *Grand Central* to be produced in 2013. In the director's words, the film is "an intense love story, set in the daunting world of nuclear nomads, because of its visual and dramatic appeal."

Luckily though, we won't need to wait too long to enjoy Seydoux on the big screen once again. With two movies just about to be premiered in Berlin, Benoît Jacquot's *Farewell, My Queen* and Ursula Meier's *Sister*, the actress is already excited about her future plans. She will be working with Abdellatif Kechiche in *Le Bleu est une Couleur Chaude*, a passionate same-sex romance from Julie Maroh's graphic novel. There is also Michel Gondry's *The Foam of Day* where she will play a naive and romantic young lady next to Audrey Tautou and Romain Duris. In fact, Seydoux has the proven ability to easily charm the most influential American directors such as Quentin Tarantino, Brad Pitt and Woody Allen who are just a few of her fans. Despite this, she seems rather more oriented towards some of her very talented, sophisticated and fairly profound compatriots for her upcoming projects. "You can be more selective when you have the opportunity to be more selective," she admits. However, it's too early to say that we won't be seeing her in an action movie ever again. "Because I think that action movies could be deep too. I mean, I like deep movies, I love deep people, and everything that has a soul. I'm really attached to that. I am always looking for the meaning of what I'm doing. I try to work with directors who have an original and poetic vision of life and I need to admire the director I work with. But there are many reasons why I can admire him."

And while the lyrical and subtle melancholy of tragic French cinema could hardly be achieved anywhere else, America is still alluring. For Seydoux, who was born in 1985, America is an inviting place with its aura of super heroes and its vibrant glamour. "For me it's very exciting. For example, if I'm working in America, to actually be with Americans and get involved in a new world. Maybe because I spent time in Africa when I was a child, I really enjoy the opportunity to experience diverse visions. It is thrilling to be immersed in very different universes," explains Seydoux.

Undoubtedly she will have all the chances to do just that. So far, she has shown a penchant for historical movies and their radiant and voluminous attire. There have been the 19th century era films *The Last Mistress* and *Mysteries of Lisbon* and the 1940s *Inglourious Basterds*. We're looking forward to her performance in *Farwell My Queen* which is set in the troubled France of 1789. She will be Madam Agathe-Sidonie Laborde, the Queen's devoted reader. But if she dreams of any particular role in her future, she prefers not to tell and enjoys the element of surprise. "There definitely are many characters that I would love to play, but I don't want to talk too much about them. I like the fact we never know what's going to happen and everything comes along as a surprise. It's the same for directors. There are many directors that I really love but I love to be chosen just as much," according to Seydoux.

There is a peculiar and graceful cadence in her gestures along with a gentle harmonious quality that no one seems to be immune to. Her fight scene with Paula Patton in *Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol* felt just like a dance. While other times next to Benjamin Millepied in *Time Doesn't Stand Still* or in the campaign film for Prada Candy perfume directed by Jean-Paul Goude, her dancing often comes up as a noted reference. And even when it's not plainly so, her motions and movements on screen have that perfect amplitude and resoluteness with riveting elegance that we happen to praise in ballets. "I love to dance, and I would love to do a musical comedy. When I was a child, I was always singing, always. Spending my life singing. it was my way to express myself," says Seydoux. She has dreamt of becoming an opera singer. It's clear we would absolutely love to see her in theater.

It looks like there's nothing that she couldn't do. Still, she's always quite demanding of herself and is never really indulgent. She says, "Seeing myself on the big screen, sometimes it's terrible. And sometimes it's annoying, too. I'm very critical with myself." At least, Seydoux seems like the only one to be critical of herself. While she is very carefully to keep away from the tabloid press and gossip, film experts have had only fond and promising praise for her.

Aside from her flourishing acting career, her sensual and iconic ad campaigns for Levi's, American

Apparel, Uniqlo and Prada are certainly worth mentioning. In 2007, Seydoux was the girl in the unforgettable Levi's spot *Dangerous Liaison*. After the success of its perfume commercial in which she played the part of an audacious piano student seducing her tutor with a slightly aggressive Apache dance, Prada wanted no one but her to promote their 2012 Resort line. It is no wonder that Prada has grown very fond of her. In a series of images and in a fashion film both shot by Steven Meisel, Seydoux's diaphanous neckline, ears and wrists blossomed with a profusion of precious crystals and lacquered sparkling rosebuds.

In spite of this demand and success, she doesn't consider herself a model. "I was walking down the street when somebody asked me if I wanted to be photographed, so I did. But if you look at all the girls in the American Apparel ads, they're not models. They are like, real women," she says. "But for me, at the end, it's a bit the same thing. I like to do pictures because in them I feel like a character. But my job is to be an actress, for sure. And when I see real models, I know that I'm not one of them. But I love doing pictures all the same."

Moreover, even if she admires the mellow eloquence of nudity in films and is not averse to the idea, there needs to be a very good reason for Seydoux to undress. "On the one hand I don't really like to get naked on set. Directors often ask actresses to get naked very randomly and I think that's just too easy. But at the same time, I think that nude it's beautiful. I really love for example the statues of Praxiteles from ancient Greece, I think that those statues are absolutely amazing and that the body is something that's absolutely fascinating. So that's why I like it, sometimes. Maybe I prefer to see actresses naked rather than models because they do have more real bodies in a way. I like reality and I like it when it's imperfect," she says.

It sounds somehow odd coming from someone who has flawless and breathtaking curves. Yet, we might as well believe her. While we talk, her turquoise eyes wander around the room. They are curious and light. They briefly focus on everyone while taking everything in. And I suppose that this is what real actors do. They absorb emotions and reality so that they can show us later just how beautiful they are. And if it's emotion that she's looking for, the studio is fairly soaked in it. That wooden chair between the spotlights is still glistening from the previous flashes. Everyone has stayed in there just a little longer to admire for one last time the ravishing pictures looping on the screen. This is just before getting back to their work and Paris.





~Léa Seydoux~

photography Bryan Adams

top **Balmain** tights **American Apparel**



dress *Isabel Marant*  
tights *American Apparel*









top and coat **Prada** tights **American Apparel**







jumper **Isabel Marant** tights **American Apparel** shoes **Giuseppe Zanotti**









body Prada tights American Apparel







blouse and trousers **Lanvin**

Model: **Lea Seydoux** Styling: **Lotta Aspenberg**  
Hair: **Bruno Silvani @ Jed Root** Makeup: **Maria Olsson @ Jed Root** Stylist's assistant: **Hanna Besirevic**