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CANNES 2026

GABIN

A FILM BY MAXENCE VOISEUX



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A FILM BY **MAXENCE VOISEUX**

2026 | FRANCE/GERMANY/SWITZERLAND | IMAGE 4:3 | SOUND 5.1 | COLOR | 105 MIN

Filmed across a decade, GABIN follows a boy caught between the life his father has planned for him and the one he slowly starts to imagine, in a region where leaving feels like betrayal and staying comes at a cost.

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SYNOPSIS

In northern France, Gabin, the youngest of the Jourdel family, finds himself destined to take over his father's butcher shop. Torn between family loyalty and a desire to break free, his dreams lie elsewhere: to train a contest cow, to become a dog breeder, and to save his mother's farm from financial ruin. Spanning a decade, GABIN immerses us in this young boy's world, following his journey from age 8 to 18.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

My documentary unfolds in a countryside fractured by globalisation, split by motorways lined with slag heaps and abandoned factories. In this neglected territory, I turn my camera towards what remains of that heritage: men who have rarely been rewarded by life. The Artois region, like neighbouring Flanders, is a forgotten land, its landscapes often washed in a pale and unsettling light. My relationship with this region has always been complex. As a child, I saw it as bleak and austere. Only much later did I begin to see it as a genuine film set, its inhabitants as living, novelistic characters. The Artois region is where I first envisioned becoming a filmmaker, and I pay particular attention to its working-class roots. It became my filmmaking territory. From one film to the next, familiar landscapes, voices, and sometimes even the same faces appear like echoes.



My parents come from working-class families. My mother is the daughter of Polish immigrants who arrived in France just before World War II. My father is the son of a cleaning lady and a modest agricultural salesman. They met, married, and loved one another in a small village of the Artois. However, they also promised that one day they would leave the region they found confining, unlike their parents, who preferred a simple life close to the village, stability over ambition.

This emancipation was unsettling. Their new life brought them into contact with more privileged circles. When they moved to Paris, my mother immersed herself in study, determined to offer her children a different kind of life. My father worked constantly, often absent and exhausted. He became a respected director of private hospitals, and our family followed his career across France – from the North to Paris, from Paris to Orléans, then Lyon.

Only later did I understand what my parents had sacrificed to give us the life they believed we deserved. For years, I couldn't comprehend the disregard, almost a rejection, they felt toward their own origins.

Emancipation often hides its darker side. Leaving one's homeland and family, even willingly, is a form of rupture, sometimes a loss of identity. Through my parents, I got a glimpse of that pain: the uncertainty of no longer knowing where you come from, only what you've become. I've always wondered how they coped. How can you live peacefully when you have chosen to forget your roots?

While my parents distanced themselves from their culture, language, and class, I did the opposite. Since I was sixteen, I've sought to rediscover the land and people they left behind. Although they had severed ties with their families, they insisted that my siblings and I maintain those relationships. As teenagers, we became the bridge back to their native Artois.

I first explored the region through a camera. Visiting silos, farms, cattle markets, and slaughterhouses, I began to see the Artois not just as a backdrop, but as a source. Those unplanned encounters marked the start of my documentary journey.

MAXENCE VOISEUX

INTERVIEWED BY JOURNALIST MANON MARCILLAT

How did you meet Gabin's family?

In 2014, for my graduation film, I chose to make a portrait of a place. I am originally from Northern France and had often heard about the livestock market in the city of Arras, a true institution in the agricultural world, where deals were still negotiated in old francs. It is a highly cinematic place where everyone puts on a show, but it is also a very closed environment because livestock traders are often secretive about their relationship with money. So, I went there alone several times, without success, before a man took an interest in me and offered me to join him at the market. It was Gabin's grandfather, and that is how I joined this family to direct my first short film, 'Des hommes et des bêtes' ('Of Men and Beasts'). I then met his three sons, with whom I shot 'Les Héritiers' ('The Heirs'), my first mid-length documentary, where I met Gabin.

In 'The Heirs', you filmed his father's siblings around the issue of inheritance. Why did you choose to focus solely on Gabin, without his two brothers, in this film?

When I met Gabin, I really wanted to make a film in the form of a family saga. He was eight years old and immediately stood out because he was funnier and more irreverent than his brothers and cousins. He spent a lot of time with his father, with whom he had a very special relationship, full of tension and things left unsaid, but also underlying love. He already dared to express his feelings, his desires, and to cry, which is rare in this family. But above all, he quickly understood that as the youngest, something was crystallizing around him and his father's butcher shop. Interesting things happened from the very first day I shot scenes with him for 'The Heirs', even though he was only eight years old at the time.



But the real turning point happened the day I went to visit them at the butcher shop and Gabin told me he had signed up for a breakdance class. I then saw this slightly chubby little boy, quite uncomfortable in his own skin, showing us the few steps he had learned. It was a moment that was both deeply touching and a bit absurd: him being so happy to experience something new, while his father was demanding his help in the butcher shop. For me, all the symbolism was there, and I told myself that I absolutely had to make a film with Gabin.

In a long-term documentary, how do you anticipate a potential change in personality or a refusal to be on camera as the protagonist grows up?

In documentaries, you never know, but in reality, I never doubted Gabin. I quickly formed a very strong bond with him, and this project was fundamental to our relationship. The film sometimes annoyed him, shook him up, or made him question things, but we always took the time to discuss it together, renewing the unspoken agreement that binds us. Gabin has always been very curious; for him, every day of shooting was a little adventure, and he looked forward to it. Also, in the agricultural world, a person's word is very important, and Gabin has a very strong commitment to keeping his word. For Dominique, his father, it was also important to honour this commitment, as if we had a contract. I doubted myself and my ability to finish this film more than I doubted Gabin.

How was the 10-year shoot organized?

The film takes place between his 8th and 18th birthdays, but I had shot the first sequences during 'The Heirs'. So, when we started filming Gabin, he was eleven years old. The film was never conceived as an immersion; I always approached it knowing there would be ellipses because I wanted Gabin to be able to grow up «outside» the film. I went there three to six times a year and filmed for a solid week. If you set aside the break I had to take because of Covid, we shot for about a hundred days in total.

Did the film and the camera help this family come to terms with its desires?

Totally, and that is exactly the exhilarating part of the film. On set, something was always happening; there was never a lack of real events. However, the preparation and writing were more complex because the film belonged to them just as much as it did to me, and very quickly, they used it to move their lives forward. The film acted like a catalyst that allowed them to dream. They are very modest with each other, but in front of the camera, they owned everything: Gabin wanting to leave, Patricia wanting to do genealogy, and Dominique being exhausted. In fact, he shared with me that he was interested in enrolling in a retreat at an Orthodox monastery, but since he works all the time, he didn't have the time to organize it. So, I helped him with his research so we could do it together. Thus, I found myself acting as a kind of mediator between them and their desires, with the film being both a place to protect themsel-

ves and a place to assert themselves.

The father's religious exile is completely unexpected, as if elements of fiction are infusing the documentary. Did you have a precise idea of the film's narrative structure, or did it take shape during the shoot?

I could have devoted much more time to that exile, because we shot for a week at the monastery. But this butcher leaving to do a retreat in the Gard region with Orthodox nuns was already so powerful, I didn't want it to become a disjointed tangent in the film.

Our relationship of trust is such, both with Gabin and his parents, that over the years I have become a sort of confidant. The talking sequences are always initiated by conversations I've had with each of them. For the film, the staging work consisted of bringing the protagonists together around a subject they needed to talk about. I didn't have a precise idea of the narration, but I had the intuition that these major talking sequences would be fundamental for the film's structure.

Gabin grows up and emancipates himself in front of your camera, but there is a kind of linearity in his trajectory and personality; he keeps that same gentleness, sensitivity, and maturity. How did you choose to make us feel the passage of time?

We pre-edited the film as the shoot went along, and then we spent eight months in the editing room. It was very long, and it was over time that the film shaped itself.

Weaving Gabin's life was fairly simple: as the film was written alongside the shooting, I gradually identified the main elements that marked his childhood, but then we had to delete a lot of material because the film was becoming far too long and lacked tension. Specifically the part about fabricating time was truly fascinating.

I accepted quite early on that there would be scenes without Gabin, even though it would always be about him. In the editing room, my most radical choice was to relegate the fact that he was growing up to the background. I didn't want any editing effects to be used to show that he was changing; I wanted us to discover his evolution through the narrative, in the tensions with his father, through his escapes, or even through an interplay of echoes with other sequences, to achieve a kind of purity in editing.

Gabin decides not to follow his parents' path, but you show this choice without any real conflict, almost without us noticing. How did you achieve such fluidity with the material of a lifetime?

It was a real struggle because in a film about a young man looking for his path, you expect those exact scenes of conflict. But neither Gabin nor I operate like that. We both share a natural modesty, which is reflected in the restrained style of my filmmaking. The only sequence where his mother, Patricia, and he yell at each other was the maximum I could film in terms of conflict. Also, what moves me about Gabin is his loyalty to his territory. It's easy to fall



into caricatures when talking about the North and imagine that the only desirable thing is to leave, yet he left without slamming the door. To have that maturity about where you come from, I find it very beautiful at his age; it requires real emotional intelligence.

But this promise of documentary cinema is a real gamble because the narration is inevitably somewhat delicate and underground. You have to find the balance to give the viewer enough elements to understand what is at stake, without over-emphasizing things, and that can come down to a word, a look, a shot.

We find common protagonists, settings, and even shots between 'The Heirs' and 'Gabin'. How do you approach these two films and how has your perspective evolved?

The repetition of certain sequences is a way of transcribing this life of hard labour, which is very ritualised, but also of telling the passage of time, especially with these breakfast scenes that repeat within the film but also between the two films. However, I chose to change the framing. 'The Heirs' is shot in 16:9, and I wanted to change the ratio for 'Gabin'. Initially, there was more anger from Gabin toward the adults, so I chose to film him in 4:3 to put him at the center of the frame and leave the rest of the world off-screen before he opens up to others and breaks that frame.

The last scene of 'Gabin' is a tight shot on his mother's face. Is this mother-son relationship the true heart of the film?

The film opens on his father's gaze at breakfast. Some people are devastated by the relationship with the father; others find the relationship with the mother heartbreaking, and it is not a gender issue – everyone has their own perception. Personally, I am touched by both for very different reasons, but this final shot is a conscious choice of editing and staging because there is a double movement in the film: the one with the father, then the one with the mother. Once he frees himself from the connection to the butcher shop and therefore to his father, he must detach



himself from the farm and therefore from his mother. Initially, I wanted to end the film on a shot of Gabin walking away into the distance, but I finally chose to conclude it in Patricia's eyes.

How did you approach the film's music, which is very present for a documentary?

The reference was 'Burning' by Lee Chang-dong, a wonderful film that has nothing to do with rural life or emancipation. Yet, I felt the music was naturally right, in terms of texture and nature, to tell the story of both this territory and Gabin's inner self. There are a lot of brass instruments and strange noises that I associated with the connection to the earth and to labour. Nicolas Rabaeus, the composer, thus created several main themes: a first, rather haunting one that opens the film, another to accompany the mother's theme with more wind instruments, and a final one illustrating the father's theme, with a more melancholic touch.

In both fiction and documentary, you focus on the Artois. What is your connection to this territory?

Artois is the old name used by the people I film to refer to the Pas-de-Calais region and a corner of the Somme. Although I didn't grow up there, my family is originally from this region and I now live there. It is a territory with a very strong identity where the inhabitants defend a rather popular culture. There is a certain homogeneity in how people relate to others, to truth, to generosity, but also to modesty. This territory has shaped me, but I have no trouble admitting that people there can also be very tough.

For now, it's my cinematic territory; I don't know how to film anything else because I need territorialized, social, and concrete elements to then fictionalize. I meet a lot of people through documentaries, and they give me glimpses of what I might enjoy shooting in fiction. I like telling family sagas, stories of transmission, of inheritance, of the relationship to agriculture, to food, and I now want to continue digging this furrow in fiction, from another angle – perhaps even through the prism of genre film.

Have Gabin and his family seen the film?

I didn't show them any rushes during all those years, but I recently went to see Gabin to show him the film. We rented a movie theater to watch it together on the big screen. He finished the screening in tears and recognized its accuracy regarding who he truly is. Since I've been filming him since he was very little, he has totally internalized the relationship to representation; he «created»



a documentary persona, and the Gabin in the film is not quite the same as the one in real life.

As for his parents, I wanted them to see the film separately. I showed it to Patricia, who initially gave me somewhat standard feedback before breaking down and speaking very intimately about the film's effect on her and her family. Dominique, for his part, didn't want to talk about it immediately, but I saw that he had been touched, almost physically even, and he eventually told me that the film had produced something essential within him.

translated from French

BIOGRAPHY OF THE DIRECTOR

Maxence Voiseux was born in the Ardennes in 1988. He studied science before switching paths to join the Documentary Cinema programme at Paris VII University, where he trained in directing and editing. GABIN is his first feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2026 | **GABIN** (documentary, feature film)
- 2023 | **ULTRAS** (documentary, mid-length film)
- 2021 | **SHE IS ONE OF US** (short film)
- 2019 | **LE CRACK** (documentary, mid-length film)
- 2017 | **THE LAST SOCIALIST** (documentary, mid-length film)
- 2015 | **THE HEIRS** (documentary, mid-length film)



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FEATURING

Gabin JOURDEL
Patricia JOURDEL
Dominique JOURDEL
Lilou DUFLOS-LAMOTTE
Catherine RANSON

CREDITS

WRITER, DIRECTOR **Maxence VOISEUX**
CINEMATOGRAPHY **François CHAMBE
Martin ROUX**
SOUND **Elton RABINEAU
Ilù SEYDOUX**
EDITING **Pascale HANNOYER
Natali BARREY**
SOUND DESIGN **Henry SIMS
Ilù SEYDOUX**
SOUND MIXING **Maxence CIEKAWY**
ORIGINAL MUSIC **Nicolas RABAEUS**
PRODUCTION **Cécile LESTRADE
Elise HUG
(ALTER EGO PRODUCTION)**
CO-PRODUCTION **Ulla LEHMANN
(AMA FILM)
Palmyre BADINIER
(RITA PRODUCTIONS)**
IN CO-PRODUCTION **SWR/ARTE and RTS RADIO
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