

Daaaaaali!



Daaaaali!

A FILM BY QUENTIN DUPIEUX

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77 mins. / Comedy / France / French and Spanish with English subtitles / 2023

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LOGLINE

A young journalist's assignment to interview Salvador Dalí is a great opportunity – if only he would agree to sit still and answer a single question in this surrealistic comedy about art and ego from Quentin Dupieux.

SYNOPSIS

For journalist Judith Rochant (Anaïs Demoustier) the assignment to interview renowned artist Salvador Dalí is a great career opportunity—if only he would agree to sit still and answer a single question. What begins as a 15-minute conversation blows up into a bonafide cinematographic documentary portrait, provided the world's most enormous cameras are available to film it. As Judith's interview is delayed, detoured, disrupted, and deranged by Dalí's inexhaustible self-regard, the journalist finds herself becoming the subject. The legendary painter's artistry and ego know no bounds, and *Daaaaaalí!* dutifully casts no less than five actors (Edouard Baer, Jonathan Cohen, Giles Lellouche, Pio Marmai, and Didier Flamand) as Salvador Dalí in this prismatic portrait. The prolific Quentin Dupieux's latest comedy is an exercise in dream logic and surrealist homage, with the rug pulled out from under you again and again before you even manage to get up off the floor.



DIRECTOR'S BRIEF COMMENT ON THE FILM

To write and direct this tribute, I connected with Salvador Dalí's cosmic consciousness and let myself be guided, eyes closed.

First, the Master ordered me to summon several brilliant actors to play his character (too complex for just one man), then together we visited Buñuel to steal a few images and ideas, then he led me by force into the depths of his morbid anguish and into his dreams to guide me, and finally I just about regained control of my film, to simply make it a declaration of love to this man.

As Dalí himself said, his personality was probably his greatest masterpiece. My film modestly tells that story.



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR QUENTIN DUPIEUX

This new film appears to be a Dalí biopic. Was that the initial plan?

No, obviously not! And that's the whole subject of the film: The impossibility of telling Dalí's story. I don't mean this in an abstract or poetic way. If my first film was called *Non Film, Daaaaaali!* it's a non-biopic. It's definitely not Dalí's life. We follow this journalist who wants to interview him and then make a film about him. But at every encounter, every attempt to get the master to talk, he escapes and so does the film. It's an infinite loop, a film that feels like an aimless treasure hunt that makes you dizzy. Dalí is everywhere and nowhere. When I dreamt up this film, I quickly realized that I shouldn't make a film about Dalí, but with Dalí. To try and find a form of freedom that his work inspires in me. I'm not interested in telling the story of Dalí in art school, explaining his frustrations and ambiguities, or filming the artist at work. I like Dalí as a man, as a genius of communication, almost more than Dalí as an artist. I love the way he constantly tried to escape his image by playing with it. That's the film's tribute to Dalí. A non-film about Dalí for a guy who would never have wanted to be put in a box. To do that, you'd have to look into the cosmos, as he did, and venture not far from madness. A mad film for a genius.

The film opens with a shot that reproduces one of his paintings, "Necrophilic Fountain". Why? There are few such direct references to everything we know about Dalí in the film. Did you do any research on the artist before writing the film? What remains of Dalí in *Daaaaali!*

I don't know if there's much left of Dalí in people's minds today. For many, it's at best the melted watches, the thing you've seen a hundred times and the Lanvin chocolate advert. Opening the film with this painting is a way of bringing the viewer back to his work and setting the rules of the game. To warn viewers: "we're entering a world where pianos are infinite fountains, where trees grow, against a golden landscape". It's also a way of playing on the distance between painting and cinema. You can hear the water flowing, watch the movement, whereas painting freezes everything. For me, it's a way of telling viewers to get on board. From here, you're in for a ride. A Dalí roller coaster. I really didn't want a cushy, museum-style guided tour. I wanted a film that would shake you up, turn your head upside down, take sharp turns, stop and start again. I wanted it to be deeply playful and generous. There are references to his paintings in the film, but never directly, yes. They're details, a skull on a donkey's head, a landscape, a posture, a signature. But it would have been silly to remake his work. What interested me more was imagining the world that might have produced these works. As if Dalí lived in his paintings. I'd read a few books about him, which were interesting, but I didn't see what I could do with them. Instead, I went looking for images, his television appearances. Dalí had a sense of the punchline, a way of appearing only to disappear. He'd say anything and everything. He understood that the media were a playground for his art. Even old and tired, he was phenomenal in interviews. I've kept that: the idea that Dalí's greatest work of art is his personality.

What does he represent to you? Why dedicate a film to Dalí?

It's several things. I have the feeling that Dalí is a utopia that has disappeared. Both as a man and as an artist. When I think of him, I see a world where art is at the center. Where artists are at the heart of society, you see them on TV and in the newspapers. They're not afraid to be provocative, absurd, even embarrassing. Dalí would sometimes say something completely stupid, and we'd just shrug and move on. I show this in the film. But art has disappeared from our daily lives. These crazy artists used to be everywhere. And Dalí is the subconscious empowered. He was one of the first artists to assume and promote his freedom as an art form. And all this at the very heart of the system. There's a kind of sincerity in his madness that moves me. He respects no rules, he searches, invents, sometimes fails. But it's always new. In the way I make films, I try to get closer to this laboratory aspect, this playground. I'm constantly looking for a new way of doing things. By summoning Dalí, I gave myself the right to really let my unconscious take control of the writing. *Daaaaaali!* is a very written film, very structured but free from the need to "tell". It's a film that metamorphoses. It's the image that tells the story. It provokes things in us, surprises us, moves us. With this film, I tried to imagine a dialogue between cinema and the image. I don't have Dalí's genius. So, in all modesty, my film is an attempt to pay him the craziest, freest homage possible.

The film works like a loop, with dreams within dreams, films within films, films within dreams, dreams within films... It doesn't take long for us to become totally lost, yet we let ourselves be carried along. You invent a purely visual form of comedy, with framing gags, editing breaks, repetition and echo effects. It's as if the form takes control...

The film is as much a tribute to Dalí as it is inspired by Buñuel's cinema - which makes sense, given their relationship. But also anachronistically, it's a tribute to the cinema of the Monty Pythons. There's a freedom in their films that has always delighted me. It's comedy that's at once demanding and completely idiotic. As with Dalí and Buñuel, there's a search for a new language, a refusal of decency, a taste for provocation, but also a kind of tenderness and humanity that moves me. All three are haunted by the fear of death. I absolutely wanted to convey this, particularly through the Dalí played by Didier Flamand. A lost, worried Dalí, who no longer knows whether he's in the past or the present. Dalí never really made a film of his own. But he would have been, I think, a great filmmaker. He did make a few small films, very much inspired by Méliès, which already show his desire to play with cinema. There's a little quote from those films in the scene where the eggs disappear from the pan. I like his idea, as well as Buñuel's or Monty Python's, that cinema is a craft that allows for anything.

Why several actors to play Dalí?

It's part of my desire to break with the biopic. In this kind of film, everyone expects a performance. How is so-and-so going to play this guy or that guy that everybody knows? It can be stunning at times. But only for ten minutes. No more than that. And then what? Mixing up the Dalí's and asking several actors to play him keeps it fun. You can't get bored. You're always surprised. I let each performer invent his own Dalí, taking on his own distinctive French phrasing. The spectator can use them as reference points. Prefer one Dalí to the other, think that one is younger than the other, meaner, more melancholic, etc. In the film, you might almost think it's a competition between them. But on the contrary, I was looking for something more harmonious. Everyone thinks of Dalí as two moustaches in the air, big eyes and an accent. Dalí managed to invent a disguise for himself. I wanted the film to show that too. Everybody is Dalí and nobody is Dalí.

Why these five actors? What do they have of Dalí in them?

Initially, there were many more. I had imagined a very complicated film with even more Dalís. Then, spontaneously, some of the actors dropped out of the project. Almost naturally, they felt they had nothing to contribute to Dalí. That something wasn't working, that things were stuck. Only those who had somehow connected with Dalí remained. This is the first time, I think, that Edouard Baer has really composed a character, for example. He, the king of improvisation, really took on the costume, trying to get as close as possible to the text. With the others, it's the same thing. They all understood the demands of the character, the way his madness, creativity and melancholy blend together. On the set, everything is very precise. But as soon as I felt we were slipping back into banality, as soon as we were making "cinema", I knew I was on the wrong track. During one scene, Jonathan Cohen had to get up from the table and say "See you soon". It was a transition scene, completely lame. Very flat. It irritated me. I couldn't shoot that in a film called *Daaaaaali!* It wasn't up to standard. So I suggested shooting it upside down. And onscreen, everything becomes more exciting and strange.

This is your fourth film with Anaïs Demoustier. She's our guide in the film. What do you like about her?

Anaïs has become like my little sister. From film to film, we've tamed each other and now we have no barriers. Directing actors is tricky. You have to adapt to them, find the right way to talk to them, understand them. With Anaïs, now, we tell each other things. She's understood my way of working. I like what she suggests, I like her seriousness, I like her sense of humor. She's an actress who doesn't watch herself play. She has a way of accepting the unexpected, the unlikely, of being in the scene, never above it. That's important for this film. We follow her, and she keeps us going through the film, even when we don't know which way it's going. Opposite her, Romain Duris plays an obnoxious film producer. It was a real encounter. I offered him the role and he accepted straight away, letting himself in without question. He does some crazy things in the film. All the people who came on this project, for appearances or roles, seemed to connect with Dalí's spirit. They let themselves go, agreed to change the rules of the game.

Would you call *Daaaaaali!* a surrealist film?

Absolutely not! It's a word that no longer means anything. Surrealism meant something back in Dalí's day. It was a battle, a desire to change the world, a way of looking at it differently. Today, everything is surrealistic in people's mouths. As soon as they don't understand something, they use that word. Or worse, "absurd". If *Daaaaaali!* is trying to be something, it's certainly not a label that's already been attached. It's a game, an experiment, an attempt to make cinema differently. It's a way of summoning up the spirit of Dalí and refusing to take things too seriously. It's an attempt to propose art at its most physical, its most irrational. It's the least we can do when tackling an artist like him.





CAAAAAAST

Anaïs Demoustier (Judith)

Gilles Lellouche (Dalí)

Édouard Baer (Dalí)

Jonathan Cohen (Dalí)

Pio Marmaï (Dalí)

Didier Flamand (Old Dalí)

Romain Duris (Jérôme)

DIRECTOR'S SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Born in Paris on April 14, 1974, Quentin Dupieux discovered cinema and bought his first synthesizer at the age of 18. Under the name Mr Oizo, he released his track *Flat Beat* and albums. In 2007, Dupieux directed, photographed, edited and composed the music for his first feature film, *Steak*. He went on to direct the absurdist horror film *Rubber* (2010) and comedy *Wrong*, followed by *Wrong Cops* (2012), *Reality* (2014), *Keep An Eye Out* (2018), *Deerskin* (2019), *Mandibles* (Venice 2020), *Incredible But True* (Berlinale 2022), and *Smoking Causes Coughing* (Midnight Screening - Cannes 2022). In 2023, *Yannick* is presented Locarno in competition while *Daaaaaali!* is in Venice a month later.

AAAAAAABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is the prestigious North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary feature films. Recent releases include Giuseppe Tornatore's epic documentary *Ennio*; Tom Gustafson's Indigo Girls jukebox musical *Glitter & Doom*; and in collaboration with Brainstorm Media, *Limbo*, Ivan Sen's stunning crime drama starring Simon Baker. Current and upcoming releases include Sophie Dupuis's vibrant and alluring queer love story of two rising drag performers, *Solo; Just the Two of Us*, the Cannes Film Festival psychological thriller by director Valérie Donzelli; and the winner for Best Foreign Film at the César Awards, *The Nature of Love*. Since its formation in 2007, Music Box Films has distributed award-winning films and art-house favorites that include Academy Award winner *Ida*, *Meru* (from Oscar-winning filmmakers Jimmy Chin and E. Chai Vaserhelyi), Christian Petzold's *Transit*, the popular Swedish comedy *A Man Called Ove*, and the original *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premier venue for independent and foreign films. For more information, visit www.musicboxfilms.com.

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