



## L'Apollonide

### House of Tolerance

Bertrand Bonello

FRANCE, 2011  
French

125 minutes ■ Colour/35mm  
Production Company:  
Les Films du Lendemain/My New Picture  
Producer: Kristina Larsen  
Screenplay: Bertrand Bonello  
Cinematographer: Josée Deshaies  
Editor: Fabrice Rouaud  
Sound: Jean-Pierre Duret, Nicolas Moreau,  
Jean-Pierre Laforce  
Music: Bertrand Bonello  
Principal Cast: Noémie Lvovsky,  
Hafsia Herzi, Jasmine Trinca,  
Céline Sallette, Adèle Haenel

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Canadian Distributor: IFC Films  
US Distributor: IFC Films  
International Sales Agent: Films Distribution  
(see page 436)

Bertrand Bonello's highly stylized look at the final days of a *fin-de-siècle* brothel in Paris conjures up the languid beauty and frank sexuality of French Romantic painting. Its visual sumptuousness lands somewhere between Ingres and Renoir but with stylistic provocations worthy of a time-travelling Baudelaire.

In the nineteenth century, much of the Parisian sex trade was confined to *grands maisons*, populated by elegant madams and a vetted clientele. They were akin to social clubs, with the gentleman participants expected to be as charming and witty as they might be in more respectable drawing rooms. The ladies were provocatively dressed and, upstairs, occupied numerous boudoirs ready for carnal pleasures. Even in such a controlled environment, dangers still lurked: disease was rampant and lethal, and sometimes even a gentleman might lose his temper and harm one of the women.

*House of Tolerance* immerses us in this long-abandoned world, awash with opium, champagne and the inevitable rush of semen. The film's pace accentuates the languor of the place, its many personages slowly revealing their life journeys like an old-fashioned striptease. Several of the stories are grim: country girls desperate for money, dumped from failed relationships or, most difficult to watch, slashed with a knife for little apparent reason.

And yet there is grace, especially in the daytime moments of sisterly camaraderie and the casual yet oddly affectionate deceptions

of the madam (in a stern turn from the formidable Noémie Lvovsky). This spirit carries into moments when modernity intrudes, most notably in a penultimate dance — as the brothel is about to be closed under order of the mayor — to the tune of an oddly appropriate "Nights in White Satin."

■ Noah Cowan



Bertrand Bonello was born in Nice and currently lives between Paris and Montreal. His short films are *Qui je suis* (96), *The Adventures of James and David* (02), *Cindy: The Doll Is Mine* (05), *My New Picture* (06) and *Where the Boys Are* (10). His feature films are *Something Organic* (98), *The Pornographer* (01), *Tiresia* (03), *On War* (08) and *House of Tolerance* (11).