

LA
CINÉMATHÈQUE
FILM CLUB



Cinéma du Look
Spring 2021

Luc Besson
b.1959

Nikita
1990

Movie movements that defined cinema: Cinéma du look

By Phil De Semlyen, Ian Freer, Ally Wybrew • 8 Aug 2016

Article sourced from Empire: <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/cinema-du-look-movie-era/>

Key filmmakers: Jean-Jacques Beineix, Luc Besson, Leos Carax

Key dates: 1980-1991

What is it? Like an '80s techno riff on poetic realism, Cinéma du Look located the exact midway point between Max Ophüls and Max Headroom in an often electrifying decade of French cinema. Its trinity of directors, Jean-Jacques Beineix, Luc Besson, Leos Carax, turned out punky visions of a French underground (literally, in the case of Besson's *Subway*) filled with pop promo visuals, skittish electro scores by Eric Serra and others, and a lovelorn fatalism strangely reminiscent of Marcel Carné and Jean Vigo.

The oddball romances between Christophe Lambert's puckish Métro-dweller and Isabelle Adjani's mysterious siren in *Subway*, Juliette Binoche and Denis Lavant in Carax's *Mauvais Sang*, or even Anne Parillaud and her civvy boyfriend (Jean-Hugues Anglade) in *Nikita* betray the romantics behind the explosions, shoot-outs and amazing-bizarro visuals. Brainy types would point out that the political regime of François Mitterrand sunk the country into the kind of funk that so often breeds exciting art. We'd just point out that *Nikita* features several political types getting whacked.

The movement blew out like a candle flame as Besson headed to Hollywood, Beineix turned to documentaries and Carax went to ground, only resurfacing with *Pola X* in 1999.

What to watch: *Diva* (1981), *The Last Battle* (1983), *Boy Meets Girl* (1984), *Subway* (1985), *Mauvais Sang* (1986), *Nikita* (1990) (*pictured top*), *Les Amants Du Pont-Neuf* (1991)

What did it influence? Michael Mann's nightscapes share a high-gloss aesthetic with Cinéma du Look films. Pop indie filmmakers like Tom Tykwer and Doug Liman have dipped into its box of editing tricks to frizz up urban flicks like *Run Lola Run* and *Go*.

Trivia: Denis Lavant injured his thumb tying his shoelace on the set of *Les Amants Du Pont-Neuf* causing filming to be suspended.

What to say: "It is up to industry to adapt to art, and not art to adapt to industry." (Jean-Jacques Beineix)

What not to say: "I love that *Nikita* film with Bridget Fonda."

Luc Besson Filmography as Director

Anna	2019/II
Cara Delevingne: I Feel Everything (Video short) (uncredited)	2017
Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets (directed by)	2017
Afflelou: Moi c'est Afflelou (Video short)	2015
Lucy	2014/I
The Family (directed by)	2013/I
The Lady	2011
Arthur 3: The War of the Two Worlds	2010
The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec	2010
Kery James Feat. Béné: L'impasse (Video short)	2009
Arthur et la vengeance de Maltazard	2009
Madonna: Celebration - The Video Collection (Video) (video "Love Profusion")	2009
Arthur and the Invisibles: The Making of the Year's Greatest Adventure (TV Movie documentary) (uncredited)	2007
Arthur and the Invisibles	2006
Angel-A	2005
Le Court Des Grands (Video documentary short)	2005
Madonna: Love Profusion (Video short)	2004
The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc	1999
Chanel No. 5: Le Loup (TV Short)	1998
The Fifth Element	1997
De Serge Gainsbourg à Gainsbarre de 1958 - 1991 (Video documentary) (segment "Mon légionnaire" 1988")	1994
Léon: The Professional	1994
Mylène Farmer: My Soul Is Slashed (Video short)	1992
Atlantis (Documentary)	1991/I
Nikita	1990
Serge Gainsbourg: Mon légionnaire, B&W Version (Video short)	1988
The Big Blue	1988
Richard Berry: Black Out (Video short)	1985
Subway	1985
Isabelle Adjani: Pull marine (Video short)	1984
The Last Battle	1983
The Penultimate (Short)	1981

Cinéma du Look

Article sourced from Guide to Cinema: [http://guide.to.cinema.enacademic.com/342/Cin%C3%A9ma du look](http://guide.to.cinema.enacademic.com/342/Cin%C3%A9ma%20du%20look)

The *cinéma du look* is a term used to describe films that emphasize visual style—or *le look*, as well as image, color, and youth. Critics trace the beginnings of the *cinéma du look* to **Jean-Jacques Beineix's** 1981 film, *Diva*. Additional examples of films that fall into this category include Beineix's *La lune dans le caniveau* (1983) and *37°2 le matin* (1986), **Luc Besson's** *Subway* (1981) and *Le Grand Bleu* (1988), and **Leos Carax's** *Mauvais sang* (1986) and *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991). One might also consider **Jean-Pierre Jeunet's** *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001) as part of this trend.

The *look* films of Beineix and Besson were at first derided by intellectual French film critics, especially those at *Cahiers du cinéma*, for their alleged fetishism of the image at the expense of artistic, political, or psychological substance. Beineix and Besson both worked in advertising prior to their directing debuts, and *le look* was mocked as the embrace of consumer culture and advertising over intellectual depth and art. Critics argued that the characters in these films—especially those of Besson's *Subway*—were depicted as objects rather than complex individuals. They also objected to what they perceived as meaningless borrowings from, or recycling of, previous film images. The *look's* perceived reliance on spectacle, surface, the sensual, and the romantic initially repelled critics who valued character development and social commitment. Carax, who had written for *Cahiers*, escaped the critical establishment's denunciations. He was instead regarded as a director who worked artfully with the cinematic image, and as a cinéaste who used the visual in order to convey social meaning.

Beineix countered that his films, in contrast with what he characterized as outdated, albeit beloved *Nouvelle Vague* or New Wave films so closely associated with *Cahiers*, connected with contemporary film audiences. Indeed, the majority of spectators in the early 1980s were under twenty-five, and both *Diva* and *37°2 le matin* became cult films. Critics point out that Beineix's charge mirrors accusations by former *Cahiers* critics that the *cinéma du papa* was irrelevant for young audiences in the 1950s. The *cinéma du look* does have its champions. Respected scholars maintain that *look* directors engaged in the creation of an innovative cinematic language derived from popular culture and influenced by technological advancements. The *look's* play of images, seemingly detached from any clear significance, in addition to its mélange of high art with popular culture, has led to associations between the *cinéma du look* and the postmodern. Indeed, one of the foremost theorists of the postmodern, Frederic Jameson, selected *Diva* as France's first postmodern film. Regardless of one's position on the value of the *cinéma du look*—and the earlier critical responses have been challenged and reevaluated—it is difficult to deny that Beineix, Besson, and Carax created landmark films.

Historical Dictionary of French Cinema by Dayna Oscherwitz & Mary Ellen Higgins