

**PRESS KIT**



# THE SUBJECT

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**Patrick Bouchard**

2018 | 10 min

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**Technique : Stop-motion and pixilation**



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# Selections and Awards



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## Description

The act of creating is about delving into the deepest part of one's self. Artists engage in a process of introspection from which they never emerge unscathed — digging and searching within themselves, seeking the source of their fears and, in so doing, yearning to find liberation.

In *The Subject*, animator Patrick Bouchard dares to place himself on centre stage, confronting his alter ego in the form of a life-size cast of his own body. Thus begins a physical confrontation between the human puppet and the clay puppet. Pierced, slashed, chiselled, the body yields its secrets, revealing itself to be an intricate mechanism as it disgorges various objects: a microscope affording views of coursing vital fluids, or a fantastical merry-go-round evoking pleasure and ecstasy — but also fear.

Exhuming his religious heritage first, then the burden weighing heavily on his chest, the artist casts off his past and hurls himself into his creation, which in the end comes to life...

*The Subject* engages the viewer in a uniquely visceral experience. Finely crafted objects and sounds create a tableau textured with myriad sensations, making this Patrick Bouchard's most personal work to date. The director also composed the music for his film, which continues to explore themes found in earlier shorts such as *The Brainwashers* and *Bydlo*.

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## Short Summary

An animator dissects his own body, extracting memories, emotions and fears that will nurture his work. As he cuts into his skin with a scalpel, various symbolic objects recalling his past emerge. Reaching the heart after cracking his ribs, he succeeds in identifying the burden he's been dying to cast off.

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# Interview with Patrick Bouchard

**In some ways, *The Subject* is a direct reference to your first film, *The Brainwashers*. Both involve delving into the body of an artist (a musician in *The Brainwashers*) to “liberate” them. Was this similarity conscious or unconscious?**

While I was thinking up *The Subject*, it was unconscious, but I quickly saw the connection between the two. *The Subject* tackles the body full-on but leaves the head untouched, unexplored. The inverse is true of *Brainwashers*, where everything takes place inside the subject’s head: two chimney sweepers are injected into his brain to clean things up. In this sense, the works complement each other.

It’s often said that filmmakers only ever really make one film. This is tongue-in-cheek, of course, but there’s a grain of truth to it. The body, its role as a receptacle of everything we are, the way our entire lives are in us, embedded in our memories and the unconscious but also in our conditioning, our scars, all our old wounds: these are the questions that fire me up.

**Artistic creation would appear to be a running theme in your work. *Bydlo* involves both the world’s creation and its end. *Dehors novembre* is a song about the death of an artist. What does creating mean to you?**

For me, the creative process is as much unconscious as conscious. If I try to make my process too cerebral — if I overthink things — then I just end up paralyzed. Whatever drives creativity in me isn’t anything to do with rational thought: it’s more like a fire in my gut. Visceral, closer to an emotional state. It’s in the realm of the senses. Other artists may work differently; but in my case, creation is physical, something I need to feel in my body. Rationality and conceptual thought only enter into the process later.

What it means is this: out of all my intuitions, all the ideas that well up, some will generate a kind of excitement. This excitement, or passion, is the fuel that lets me see an idea through to completion. It’s also what turns animation into something other than a mechanical process.

Keeping the passion alive calls for space — space for improvisation, space for expression. You need magic moments, a blueprint that leaves room for flights of fancy... Sticking too closely to plan tends to kill the magic. When the script is too restrictive, there’s no room for nurturing this level of engagement, especially when the production can take years.

In *The Subject*, we developed a process that allowed us to keep the spark alive, maintain the energy at this level. The basis for the project was this cast of my body, plus a range of objects. The film needed to literally spring up from the body.

You need to be obsessive or maybe downright obstinate to get through the filmmaking process.

### **At what point did you decide to make a cast of your own body for *The Subject*?**

I've wanted to work from a full-body cast for a long time. Well before this film, in fact — I was already toying with the idea 15 years ago. I think I can trace it back to the painting by Picasso entitled *The Old Guitarist*. The image has obsessed me for a long time. I'm particularly fascinated by the hands. I think they're beautiful; I love how they move... I dreamed of creating a life-sized "old guitarist" and making him play his instrument. Probably because I see something of myself in him.

The idea of making a cast of my own body occurred to me when we had to decide on the form and it became clear that it couldn't be Picasso's character. It challenged me, since what you see in the film is my own body, age 40. During the two years it took to make the film, my real body aged and transformed while the one in the film stayed the same. This in turn transformed the relationship between this other body and my own...

The lengthy filmmaking process meant that the project was influenced by the passage of time, current events, the state of the world. The only unchanging element is the body, which remains the same even as it is dissected and has its insides thoroughly rummaged.

### **Could you give us an example of how current events affected the filmmaking process?**

The shot showing a wall rising and blocking off the merry-go-round as barbed wire takes shape in the foreground. All of this is directly inspired by Trump's election, particularly his obsession with building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, as well as the situation in Palestine.

### **You say that you worked from a very loose script. But your sources of inspiration weren't limited to the news. What about the objects that became animated?**

Before we even began shooting, my creative partner Dany Boivin and I began gathering objects. In particular, I bought metal items by the basket at flea markets. This is where I got the faucets in the merry-go-round. The objects themselves provide answers to the questions. I found the faucets beautiful and I built the merry-go-round because it was one way to bring them to life. A faucet is utilitarian but a merry-go-round is a mechanical device that serves to entertain. In the film, the merry-go-round rises out of the figure's lower belly, at the level of the genitalia... It became a metaphor. When we began shooting, all of this became evident; but during the building process, it was much more instinctual.

Among the objects I worked with were a microscope and a slide projector. Making the link between them is what gave me the idea to photograph my own bodily fluids — my blood and saliva. I went to McGill University and we filmed them in the lab. In *The Subject*, the images you see are from my body, which adds to the overall unity.

## **And the anvil?**

I'm fascinated by anvils because they stay put. Generations of humans can strike them in turn and they'll still be there. Compared to us, they're just about indestructible, eternal. An anvil is solid, not easily dislodged.

## **In *The Subject*, the autopsy starts off with a strongly religious image, a sort of “de-crucifixion” in which a giant iron nail emerges from the foot.**

The religious aspect is totally unconscious — so much a part of my cultural baggage that it emerges without any thought having to be put into it. An object as banal as an old railroad spike gave me the idea of having it emerge from the foot, amounting to a first “liberation” of sorts for my character. For viewers, this scene quickly takes on religious significance — perhaps the religion the character is in the process of casting off — but this was unplanned. In fact, I was having a bit of a hard time seeing how to begin the dissection. So I made it so that the body gave me the go-ahead: the nail came out of the foot all of its own. After that, dissecting the leg was easier.

That scene, together with the anvil scene, suggests to me that the film is ultimately about liberation. Sure, it's a bit of a dark film; but in the end, the body is freed and comes to life.

*The Subject* isn't meant to convey a message. It's an experience. Making it was an experience and I wanted it to be the same for the viewer.

## **You composed the film's score. Music plays a huge role in your films; *Dehors novembre* and *Bydlo* are essentially musical films. What does music mean to you?**

Music brings forth images. That's how I made *Bydlo*.

Music has been part of my life forever. It's followed me from day one. I wanted to make music long before I ever wanted to make films. A lot of me went into learning how to play guitar, write music... I'm a musician. I didn't make it my profession, but I've never stopped making music.

For me, music and animation are very much alike. Both are built on rhythm. Both involve dividing and organizing time. The beauty of music in relation to animation is the possibility for greater spontaneity. When I was younger, I had much more of an interest in the performative aspect of music. Today, though, I'm far more inclined to seek out simple combinations that bring forth the emotion.

Making *The Subject* was a process of stripping down, laying bare to expose something very personal. In such a context, it would have been difficult for me to work with a musician. All the steps had to align; there was no room for inconsistency.

Directing the film was a leap of faith, dizzying and frightening. And composing the music was as nerve-wracking as the animation process. I had to struggle with my own desire to deliver a performance and instead submit to this process of essentially getting naked. In hindsight, I think the music resembles the film.

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# Team

## Patrick Bouchard

Director



Photo : Mariène Gélinau Payette

Born in Quebec City in 1974 and raised in Saguenay, Quebec, Patrick Bouchard earned an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, where he directed his first stop-motion puppet film, **Jean Leviériste** (1998), as part of his degree. His first professional film, **The Brainwashers** (2002), a comic but chilling look at a musician tormented by his overactive imagination, won a Jutra Award for best animated short. **Dehors novembre** (2005), based on a song by the Quebec rock group Les Colocs, also received a Jutra and was screened in competition at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival. Bouchard followed up with his third stop-motion puppet film, **Subservience** (2007), which depicts a world on the verge of collapse thanks to its callous bourgeoisie and submissive servants. In 2007, at the Off-Courts Festival in Trouville, France, he made **Talon d'argile**, a very short film with constantly mutating clay figures, in just 24 hours. This experiment inspired **Bydlo** (2012), which was selected to screen at both TIFF and Annecy and went on to win Bouchard's third Jutra in 2013. The film received awards at several other film festivals, notably the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, where it won the award for best animated film, and the Fantasia International Film Festival, where it won the Special Award for Technical Achievement. **The Subject** is Bouchard's fifth film with the **NFB**.

## Julie Roy

Executive Producer (NFB)



Photo : ONF

Julie Roy is the Executive Producer at the **National Film Board of Canada's** French Animation Studio. She has produced some 40 animated short films. Julie holds an MA in Film Studies from the Université de Montréal and has written extensively on women and animation. She has also served as a guest programmer at several film festivals.

Her recent productions include Patrick Bouchard's **The Subject** (2018), Justine Vuylsteker's **Embraced** (2018), and Matthew Rankin's **THE TESLA WORLD LIGHT** (2017), which was selected to screen in competition in the Cannes Film Festival's illustrious Critics' Week program. Julie is the executive producer of Theodore Ushev's **Blind Vaysha**, which was nominated for the 2017 Oscar for Best Animated Short. In 2016, she co-produced Franck Dion's **The Head Vanishes** (Papy3D/NFB), winner of the prestigious Annecy International Animated Film Festival's highest honour, the Cristal Award.

She also produced Claude Cloutier's **Carface** (2015), Priit and Olga Pärn's **Pilots on the Way Home** (2014), Tali's **Bus Story** (2014), which received an honourable mention at Annecy, Franck Dion's **Edmond Was a Donkey** (2012), winner of the Special Jury Award at Annecy and some 30 international awards, Dominic Etienne Simard's **Paula** (2011), recipient of the Best Film Award at Interfilm Berlin, and Michèle Lemieux's **Here and the Great Elsewhere** (2012), which garnered the Grand Prize at the Cinanima festival in Espinho.

A firm believer in taking diverse approaches to filmmaking, Julie is currently developing a virtual reality project with Nicolas Brault and working with Chris Lavis and Maciek Szczerbowski (**Madame Tutli Putli**, 2007) on their next short film, tentatively titled **La jeune fille qui pleurait des perles**, which will use a hybrid technique that combines marionette animation, live action and computer-generated imagery. Her special interest in experimental animation led her to produce **Quiet Zone** (2015) by Karl Lemieux and David Bryant, **Reflection** (2013) by Sylvie Trouvé, and **Mamori** (2010) by Karl Lemieux, which won the Grand Prize at the 25 FPS Festival in Zagreb. She is also a producer in the animation sector of the NFB's Aide au cinéma indépendant program.

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# Images



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# Credits

Written, Animated  
and Directed by  
**Patrick Bouchard**

Producer  
**Julie Roy**

Sets and Props  
**Dany Boivin**

Animation and Compositing  
**Pierre M. Trudeau**

Offline Editing  
**Sacha Ratcliffe**  
**Theodore Ushev**

Sound Design  
**Olivier Calvert**

Original Music  
**Patrick Bouchard**  
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of Canada (SOCAN)

Music Director  
**Philippe Brault**

Musician  
**Patrick Bouchard**

On-camera Performer  
**Patrick Bouchard**

Foley  
**Lise Wedlock**

Foley Assistant  
**Thomas Garant**

Sound Recording  
**Geoffrey Mitchell**

Re-recording  
**Serge Boivin**

Online Editing  
**Serge Verreault**

Titles  
**Réjean Myette**

Technical Direction  
**Pierre Plouffe**

Technical Coordination – Animation  
**Yannick Grandmont**

Technical Coordination  
**Jean-François Laprise**

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## About the NFB

**The National Film Board of Canada (NFB)** produces groundbreaking animation at its studios in Montreal and at NFB centres across Canada, as well as via international co-productions with many of the world's leading auteur animators. The NFB is a leader in developing new approaches to stereoscopic 3D animation and animated content for new platforms. The NFB has created over 13,000 productions and won over 7,000 awards, with NFB animation accounting for 7 of the NFB's 12 Oscars, as well as 6 grand prizes at France's Annecy International Animated Film Festival, 4 Palmes d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and 2 Golden Bears at Berlinale. To access acclaimed NFB animation, visit **NFB.ca** or download its apps for mobile devices.

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## Electronic Documents

**Press kit**

Including Promotional Materials and Trailer

<http://mediaspace.nfb.ca/epk/the-subject/>