

# Legendary French star Juliette Binoche to chair Cannes Film Fest jury

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**T**he #MeToo Movement got organisations and celebratory events to take note of how poorly women were being represented in them. The Cannes Film Festival – considered the star among all such events the world over (although I have begun to feel that Venice, which takes place in late August on the picturesque island of Lido off mainland Venice, is proving to be a tough competitor) – took this movement seriously.

This year, for the second time in succession, a woman, brilliant French actress Juliette Binoche, would head the prestigious main competition jury. She will succeed American director Greta Gerwig, who chaired the jury last year.

A Festival press note points out, and rightly so, “The burst of all-pervading laughter, an ideal of commitment to her art and her times — Binoche has won over audiences and critics alike, bringing together today’s greatest filmmakers in her world-class filmography. Exactly 40 years

after her first appearance on La Croisette (Cannes’ beachfront where the Festival takes place), she will preside over the Jury of the 78th Festival de Cannes, which will award the Palme d’Or on 24 May, Saturday.”

A recipient of innumerable accolades – including an Academy Award, a British Academy Film Award, and a Cesar Award – she has been seen in over 70 movies, mostly in the French and English languages. She has often said that she was born at the Cannes Film Festival. Indeed so. Her first major role was in Andre Techine’s *Rendez-Vous*, which premiered at the 1985 Cannes exactly four decades ago.

There was, as they say, no looking back for the star. Her movie roles have straddled across continents, with a mind-boggling number of directors putting her before the camera. The list reads like a who’s who in the world of cinema:

Michael Haneke (Austria), David Cronenberg and Abel Ferrara (USA), Olivier Assays, Leos Carax and Claire Denis (France), Amos Gitai (Israel), Naomi Kawase and Hirokazu Kore-eda (Japan), Krzysztof Kieślowski (Poland), and Hou Hsiao-hsien (Taiwan) to name but some.

One of the films that still remains etched in my memory is Abbas Kiarostami’s *Certified Copy*, a beautiful Iranian work. A story set in Italy’s Tuscany, it was all about art and love and how they mixed and mingled to help Binoche’s

(1993). If her performances are par excellence, the subjects she picks underline her commitment to people’s problems and the unusual way her screen characters attempt to resolve them.

She is also a great activist. Once, she led a protest in Cannes against Iranian director Jafar Panahi’s imprisonment. And when she came on stage that evening, she carried a placard with his name on it! Finally, she has also been creating awareness about the ecological dangers threatening the very existence of mankind.



(the name of her character is never revealed) screen relationship with a British opera singer. He is in Tuscany to talk about his new book, *Certified Copy*, which says that every piece of art is original and authenticity does not matter. For, even the original is a copy of another form. A French antiques dealer (Binoche) attends the book launch and leaves her phone number with the singer’s assistant/translator.

Watching her in so many movies, I have often thought how the camera seemed to be in love with her. Or was it the other way around? She was in love with it! As French helmer Louis Malle once said, her presence and intensity were stupefying. She mesmerised the hundreds of viewers who watched her perform with passion. We see this, for example, in *The English Patient* (1996), *Chocolat* (2000), and *Three Colours: Blue*

Sometimes, she is compared to the late actress Olivia de Havilland, best known for her character, Melanie Hamilton, in the 1939 *Gone With The Wind*, set against the backdrop of the American Civil War. Playing along with her were the illustrious Clarke Gable and Vivien Leigh, an impressive cast.

After a delayed start as far as shooting was concerned, the film went on to become a great classic, much like the book, with the same title, that was penned by Margaret Mitchell in 1936. She only wrote one book and earned the title of “one book wonder”. But what a wonder it was, and very interestingly, when pressed to write a sequel, she famously quipped, “What would I call it? Back with the Breeze”!

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