

THE DEATH OF LOUIS XIV

(La Mort de Louis XIV)

A film by Albert Serra



France/Portugal/Spain 2016, 115 min., French with English subtitles

Cannes Film Festival 2016, Official Selection, Special Screening

Certificate and release date tbc

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SYNOPSIS

August 1715. After going for a walk, Louis XIV feels a pain in his leg. The following days, the king continues fulfilling his duties and obligations, but his sleep is troubled and he has a serious fever. He barely eats and gets increasingly weaker. This is the start of the slow death of the longest serving King of France from gangrene, surrounded by his doctors and closest advisors, speaking in frantic, whispered tones about their options, in an era in which little is known of such illnesses.

Albert Serra's new film, *The Death of Louis XIV*, is adapted from contemporary memoirs, especially those of the Duc de Saint Simon, and features Jean-Pierre Léaud as the Sun King. The cult actor, who worked with most of the major directors of the Nouvelle Vague after being discovered in Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, plays the dying king who can barely move from his bed in the Château de Versailles. His relatives and his closest counsellors come in turns at his bedside, but he attends only a few meetings and can barely rule his kingdom. He passes on some wisdom to his 5 year old great-grandson, the future Louis XV. His secret wife, Madame de Maintenon, and his doctor Fagon, dread his last breath and try to hide it from the public, to preserve the future of France.

Jean-Pierre Léaud, though barely speaking, fully embodies the last few days of the greatest King of France, who, with his seventy-two years in power, changed the face of the monarchy and of France.

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CAST

Louis XIV	Jean-Pierre Léaud
Fagon	Patrick d'Assunção
Blouin	Marc Susini
Mme de Maintenon	Irène Silvagni
Marechal	Bernard Belin
Le Tellier	Jacques Henric
Le Brun	Vicenç Altaió

CREW

Director	Albert Serra
Screenplay	Albert Serra & Thierry Lounas
Photography	Jonathan Ricquebourg
Camera	Julien Hogert, Artur Tort
Sound	Jordi Ribas & Anne Dupouy
Editing	Ariadna Ribas, Artur Tort, Albert Serra
Music	Marc Verdaguer
Visual Effects	André Rosado, Xavier Pérez
Production designer	Sebastian Vogler
Costumes	Nina Avramovic
Hair	Antoine Mancini
Assistant Director	Maïa Difallah
Producers	Thierry Lounas, Albert Serra Joaquim Sapinho, Claire Bonnefoy
Executive Producers	Claire Bonnefoy, Montse Triola
Production Manager	Sandra Figueiredo
Produced by	Capricci Production
In coproduction with	Rosa Filmes, Andergraun Films, Bobi Lux
With the support of	Région Aquitaine Limousin Poutou-charentes Région Des Pays De La Loire, Département de la Dordogne
In partnership with	Le CNC, República Portuguesa - Cultura, ICA, Instituto do Cinema e do Audiovisual Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals
With the participation of	Agence Régionale Ecla, Arte Cofinova 12, Ciné+, Kino Filmes Rtp Rádio e Televisão Portuguesa and Televisió de Catalunya

France/Portugal/Spain 115 mins

ALBERT SERRA

Born in Banyoles in 1975, Albert Serra is a Catalan artist and director. After studying philosophy and literature, he wrote plays and produced different video works. He gained an international recognition with his first feature film, *Honor de Cavalleria* (2006), a free adaptation of *Don Quixote* played by non-professional actors from his village. For his second film, *Birdsong* (Cannes Directors' Fortnight 2008), Serra took inspiration from a traditional Catalan Christmas song, *El cant dels ocells*, and worked with the same group of people to tell the story of the Three Wise Men who followed their guiding star to Jesus. In 2013, the Centre Pompidou in Paris organized a full retrospective of films and installations and gave him a *carte blanche* to programme a season of films. The same year, he received the Golden Leopard in Locarno for his film *Story of my Death*, inspired by Casanova's memoirs. In 2015 he was invited to show his 5 screen work *Singularity* at the Venice Biennale, in the Catalan Pavilion, and he also had a full retrospective of his films at Tate Modern.

The Death of Louis XIV, his new film starring Jean-Pierre Léaud as the Sun King, was presented in the Official Selection of the Cannes Film Festival 2016 to great critical and public acclaim.

FILMOGRAPHY

Feature-length films

The Death of Louis XIV (2016) – Cannes Film Festival Special Screening
Story of my Death (2013) - Locarno Film Festival – Golden Leopard
Els Noms de Crist (2011) – Locarno Film Festival
El Senyor ha fet en mi meravelles (2011) - Locarno Film Festival
El Cant dels ocells (Birdsong) (2008) - Cannes Directors' Fortnight
Honor de Cavalleria (2006)

Shorts

2013 Cubalibre
2010 Lectura d'un poema
2009 Bauca
2008 L'alto Arrigo
2007 Russia
2006 Sant Pere de Rodes
2006 Super 8 (co-directed with Christophe Farnarier)
2003 Crepia

More details on his films and artworks: andergraun.com

ALBERT SERRA – INTERVIEW

For your fourth feature film, you have dealt again with a famous historical figure.

The Death of Louis XIV is an indoor movie that happens exclusively in the room of the King. The film's object and timeframe are these two weeks of total confinement where Louis XIV sees courtiers, members of the church and ministers come to his bedside. It's really not about how France is going to survive the loss of its King. The film is about a man preparing for his own death, living in pain every day despite being the King.

What material did you work with, to write the script?

Two books, which are both literary and historical works: the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon and those of the Marquis de Dangeau. Both of them were courtiers who attended the last days of Louis XIV and wanted to record and describe, almost make a collection, of every part of the last moments as they were lived by the King. Part of what he said was reported word for word, just like the successive states of his diseased leg were described with all the sordid details that go along with it...

Here, the agony of the King is treated like a monotonous and repetitive spectacle. Why?

Saint-Simon and Dangeau's texts have a precision and an exhaustiveness that tend toward saturation. Through their eyes, agony (even a King's agony) isn't a diversified and beautiful spectacle, actually it's not a spectacle at all. I didn't want to dramatize the texts I was working with. On the contrary, I chose to respect conscientiously their chronology, including their repetitions. I'm opposed to the idea of agony as it is usually showed in cinema, which is to say in a very dramatic and psychological way, meant to emphasize the very last word, the very last breath. Here, during these two weeks, pain reigns supreme, it inflates, every part of it is suffered in length. The film shows how death is lived, how the disease conquers new territories each day. The pain wins over the body and spirit, day after day, one hour after the other.

Does that mean you refuse to dramatize your cinema?

That's not how I see things. For this project, what matters most are anecdotal things, not the story, which in itself is boring. I started from the dichotomy between death as it is dramatized by the King for others - the representation of his death - and as it is lived from inside. Showing the death of a King comes down to evoking a myth in its relation to the ordinary, the intimate. My approach consists in working on a legendary figure until I get into the flesh and bones. That's why I need to bring back the myth to its banality, to show how history can swing from something so small, so human. I force spectators to reject their preconceived ideas related to a historical figure. They also have to get rid of the codes of dramaturgy, and the so-called true moments of an agony.

Jean-Pierre Léaud is a myth in himself. What did it mean for you to shoot this film with him today?

Until then I had always worked with non-professional actors. Here, the starting point remained the same: I have to like the people I work with, their age doesn't count. Jean-Pierre and I got along very quickly, the first time we met. We share an aesthetic and moral approach to life. I like his integrity - I really admire him. So everything happened very naturally, and at the same time I felt no pressure due to his incredible past works as an actor.

How did your collaboration take place?

Like in my previous films, with faith and a certain distance. We didn't do any tests before the shooting. I think Jean-Pierre was rehearsing alone in his house. The first time I saw him wearing his costume was during the first day of shooting. From then every day was different. He came up with new ideas constantly, and I didn't want to control, I wanted everybody to have fun.

As opposed to your previous films, which you shot with people from your village, here you're working with both professional actors and total strangers that you cast on the shooting location.

Yes, that's something I like to do. It makes things easier and more natural. It also brings a little heterogeneity to the film, and a certain sense of irony. Even if my conception of cinema is formalist, I don't take myself seriously. During the shooting, I forget everything and try to mix opposites. It's like in dreams, the logic can't be the same as when you're awake. You have to be a troublemaker.



JEAN-PIERRE LÉAUD – SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016** : *LA MORT DE LOUIS XIV / THE DEATH OF LOUIS XIV* — Albert SERRA Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 2016 / Honorary Palm for Jean-Pierre Léaud in recognition of his entire career
- 2015** *M* — Sara FORESTIER
- 2011** *CAMILLE REDOUBLE / CAMILLE REWINDS* — Noémie LVOVSKY
- 2010** *LE HAVRE* — Aki KAURISMÄKI
- 2008** *VISAGE / FACE*— TSAÏ Ming-Liang
- 2004** *FOLLE EMBELLIE* — Dominique CABRERA
- 2001** *ET LÀ-BAS, QUELLE HEURE EST-IL ? / WHAT TIME IS IT THERE?* — TSAÏ Ming-Liang
- 2001** *LÉAUD L'UNIQUE* — Serge Le PÉRON
- 2000** *LE PORNOGRAPHE / THE PORNOGRAPHER* — Bertrand BONELLO
- 1999** *MARCORELLE N'EST PAS COUPABLE* Serge Le PÉRON
- 1996** *IRMA VEP* — Olivier ASSAYAS
- 1996** *POUR RIRE !* — Lucas BELVAUX
- 1992** *PARIS S'ÉVEILLE* — Olivier ASSAYAS
- 1992** *LA NAISSANCE DE L'AMOUR* — Philippe GARREL
- 1991** *LA VIE DE BOHÈME* — Aki KAURISMAKI
- 1990** *J'AI ENGAGÉ UN TUEUR / I HIRED A CONTRACT KILLER* — Aki KAURISMÄKI
- 1984** *DÉTECTIVE / DETECTIVE* — Jean-Luc GODARD
- 1982** *REBELOTE* — Jacques RICHARD
- 1978** *L'AMOUR EN FUITE / LOVE ON THE RUN* — François TRUFFAUT
- 1973** *LA MAMAN ET LA PUTAIN*— Jean EUSTACHE
- 1973** *LA NUIT AMÉRICAINE / DAY FOR NIGHT* — François TRUFFAUT
- 1971** *LES DEUX ANGLAISES ET LE CONTINENT / ANNE AND MURIEL* — François TRUFFAUT
- 1970** *DOMICILE CONJUGAL / BED AND BOARD* François TRUFFAUT
- 1970** *OUT ONE* — Jacques RIVETTE
- 1969** *IL PORCILE / PIGSTY* — Pier Paolo PASOLINI
- 1969** *LE LION À SEPT TÊTES / THE SEVEN-HEADED LION* — Glauber ROCHA
- 1968** *LE GAI SAVOIR / JOY OF LEARNING* — Jean-Luc GODARD
- 1968** *BAISERS VOLÉS* — François TRUFFAUT Prix Louis Delluc
- 1967** *LE DÉPART* — Jerzy SKOLIMOWSKI
- 1967** *LA CHINOISE* — Jean-Luc GODARD
- 1967** *WEEK-END* — Jean-Luc GODARD
- 1966** *MADE IN USA* — Jean-Luc GODARD
- 1965** *MASCULIN FÉMININ* — Jean-Luc GODARD Silver Bear, Best actor, Berlin Film Festival 1966
- 1965** *LA CONCENTRATION* — Philippe GARREL
- 1962** *ANTOINE ET COLETTE / ANTOINE AND COLETTE* — François TRUFFAUT
- 1961** *L'AMOUR À VINGT ANS / LOVE AT TWENTY* François TRUFFAUT
- 1960** *LE TESTAMENT D'ORPHÉE / TESTAMENT OF ORPHEUS* — Jean COCTEAU
- 1959** *LES 400 COUPS / THE 400 BLOWS* François TRUFFAUT

DEATH OF THE SUN KING

The agony of Louis XIV starts on August 9th 1715, and lasts until September 1st. It marks the end of a personal reign that lasted 72 years – the longest in French history. The official *Diary of the Health of the King*, which was held by its successive doctors, reveal that Louis XIV had a fragile health and almost died on numerous occasions: from syphilis at the age of five, from a malign fever at thirty-five, from a fistula at forty-five, and from diabetes with gangrene complications at seventy. This time, at the start of August 1715, Louis XIV suffers from an embolism in his leg due to cardiac arrhythmia, which will start the gangrene.

CHRONOLOGY

9 August

The King comes back from hunting in Marly, and looks worn out. The next day, he complains about a pain in his left leg. His doctor Fagon diagnoses sciatica and prescribes some camphoric spirits dressings and donkey milk baths. In the following days the King keeps working despite the pain, but his nights are troubled, he barely eats anything and weakens more and more each day.

16 August

During a reception, the King appears visibly exhausted in front of the public. He refuses to let the doctors stay in his room. The next day he seems to feel better: he grants an audience and then works with his counsellors. However, as the night comes, his fever doubles, and from this point on Fagon forbids Louis XIV to travel from Versailles to Paris. Word of the illness of the King starts spreading in the Court, and some courtiers start breaking away from him to get closer to the future Regent, the Duc d'Orléans.

20 August

The health of Louis XIV suddenly worsens, but the Royal family lies to the public by spreading false news about his condition.

21 August

The King accepts a collective consultation by four doctors from the Paris Faculty of Medicine. They confirm the diagnosis of Fagon, despite the King being consumed by fever and his leg presenting some dark spots. The treatment is completed by frequent enemas, but has no effect whatsoever.

24 August

The first Surgeon of the King, Georges Marechal, makes an incision in the leg and finally announces to the King that he has contracted a form of gangrene, which leaves him no option but to cut his leg. The King refuses the amputation and, from this moment on, starts preparing for his death in the Christian tradition. He starts by confessing to Father Le Tellier, who stays at his side from this point onward.

25 August

The 25th is the day of St Louis, and the King wants to respect the etiquette. He attends the concert of drums, oboes and violins that is given in front of his windows. To prepare his testament, he receives Madame de Maintenon and the Duc de Maine, who make him sign a *codicil* giving the duke full control over the civil and military possessions of the King. The King then receives the Holy Viaticum and the Extreme Unction from the Chaplain General, Cardinal of Rohan, before letting the Court pay homages to his bedside.

26 August

Louis XIV appoints the Maréchal de Villeroy as the governor of his great-grandson, the Dauphin and future King Louis XV, who receives his last recommendations: not to follow his taste for expensive buildings, to live in peace with his neighbours and try to ease the pains of his people. He tells him these words that remain famous today: "I am going away, but the State will always remain".

28 August

Some charlatans suggest that they can save the life of Louis XIV. One in particular, called Le Brun, is from Marseille and gives the King ten drops of a miraculous elixir made of "the body of an animal". His remedy seems to work for a short instant, but in the evening the gangrene has made some progress and the King's health worsens again.

30 & 31 August

The King sinks into coma. Gangrene has climbed up to the hip, and his two legs are completely black.

1 September

He dies at 8:15am. His body is examined post-mortem, and his inner organs are moved to the Notre-Dame Cathedral in his coach by two of his chaplains. Following his last wishes, his heart is then given to the Jesuit director of the Église Saint Louis des Jésuites, rue Saint Antoine in Paris, where the heart of Louis XIII had also been brought. The rest of his body is embalmed before a public presentation for tributes, and on 9 September he is buried in the basilica of Saint-Denis.

