

# GAËLLE DENIS

INTERVIEW GUIDES (2021 – 2023)

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**INTERVIEW ONE - LONDON 7/9.11.2021**

## General Themes: Space, Challenges, Role models, Dreams, Fears, Motherhood

Interview in kitchen:

**Centred on roles and space**

- What different roles do you have in your life?
- How have you created space for yourself and your work across these different roles?
- What did it feel like to make that space for yourself? Did you face any resistance?
- Can you describe one positive and one negative space you have been in? What made each feel positive or negative?
- What stops or interferes with you in making your work and fulfilling your plans?
- How do you feel when you can't get done the things you want to do most?
- Do you remember a time when your space was taken from you? How did that feel?

Interview in Kitchen:

**On challenges and overcoming obstacles**

- What have been your biggest challenges and fears in making your work within the film industry?
- Have you ever considered giving up your career to do something completely different? If so, what would that be?
- What are your thoughts on gender in filmmaking and in the film industry?
- You have a son – how do you balance motherhood and your relationship with your filmmaking work?

Interview in Kitchen:

**On role models**

- What were your childhood dreams, and how do they compare to where you are now?
- Have you had role models or heroes throughout your life? If so, who were they then, and who are they now?
- When did you realize you wanted to become a filmmaker?
- Where did you grow up, and how did that place shape you as a person and an artist?
- Are you where you once dreamt of being?
- What are you dreaming of now?
- Which life experiences have had the greatest impact on your work?

I'm going to ask you a few personal questions.

Just answer without thinking too much – go with your first thought:

- What do you love?
- What don't you love?
- Who do you love?
- Who loves you?

## ACTUAL QUESTIONS ON 7.11.21

### Themes:

Her artistic journey, role models, loss of control, dreams, fears, and challenges

- Back when I was a student, I remember you were teaching at Central Saint Martins – what was your path like at that time, and how did you navigate the balance between teaching and your directing work?
- I'd love to hear more about where your path took you after that – how did your transition from teaching into commercial work and eventually filmmaking unfold?
- When you started focusing more on your own personal work, where were you in your career – or even in your life? You mentioned that this was around the time you got pregnant and began to feel the pull toward more personal projects again.
- Who were the people you looked up to at that time? Were there any role models who really influenced or inspired you back then?
- Were your role models important to you both in terms of technical or artistic approach, and also in the kinds of stories they were telling?
- Were there any other role models outside the artistic world – people who inspired you more in terms of how to live your life, rather than just creatively?
- Do you feel like you're following the path you imagined for yourself when you were younger?
- Have you written most of your own films yourself?
- What was it like for you when you were outside your comfort zone? How did that feel?
- So would you say that being out of control is one of your biggest personal challenges?
- You probably have quite a few roles in your life – what would you say are the main ones? And how do you manage to balance them all?
- Can you share a specific story you remember where all your different dreams, ambitions, and responsibilities were clashing – a moment when your various roles came together and really stressed you out?
- What are some of the biggest fears and challenges you face when it comes to making your own work in this industry?
- Have you ever thought about giving up your career?
- You have some thoughts on gender in filmmaking, right?
- Why do you think you're one of the few female filmmakers who's just kept going and doing your thing? What do you think has kept you going all this time?
- What has the experience of becoming a mother been like for you?
- You mentioned your films are like your babies – have you ever faced challenges from people who feel they shouldn't mean as much to you, or that you shouldn't be so attached to them?
- Do you ever feel like your need for control sometimes takes over your life as a mother or partner? Like you're trying to manage everything?
- Do you ever take time off or time out where you completely step away from work to recharge and recover?
- Can you tell me a bit about where you come from and how that place has influenced you as a filmmaker?
- Where do you think your stories come from – the themes and content you explore?
- Is it often more about starting with a feeling you want to express? You mentioned earlier that the first film you saw in the cinema made you feel something – so is it really about capturing that feeling?
- You mentioned that during COVID, sharing your office with your partner was challenging – can you tell me more about that?
- Do you find that you get more or better ideas when you're moving around?
- I have four questions that might feel a bit personal – but feel free to answer however you like or skip anything you're not comfortable with: What do you love? What don't you love? Who do you love? Who loves you?
- Are there any life experiences that have really shaped or influenced your work?

**ACTUAL QUESTIONS ON 9.11.21****Themes:**

Her artistic practice, working methods, workspaces, and sources of inspiration.

- Which room in your flat matters most to you, and why?
- What do your workspaces need to feel like for you to want to work?
- Is there a connection between the fantasy worlds in your films and where you live?
- What's your biggest dream right now?
- How does it feel when you can't resolve a problem right away?
- How do you develop your characters and stories?
- How do you create the world your character lives in?
- What messages do you want to convey in your films?
- Losing control seems to be a recurring theme in your work – would you agree?
- Can you tell me about the drawing course you're taking?
- I read that you did a residency in Boisbuchet, France, where you built a life-size camera obscura. What was it like being inside such a huge camera?
- What do you use it for?
- Let's talk about the theme of water in your films – it's a recurring element. I also noticed the Barbican where you live is surrounded by water, which seems fitting.
- Can you tell me about the strong colors that appear throughout your work?
- How has your work evolved since your time at the RCA? What interested you then, and what interests you now?
- What are the main emotions you aim to convey in at least one of your feature films?
- Do you find inspiration in your own life?
- Where does your fantasy come from?
- Can I ask – those visuals remind me of an animated world, where metamorphosis and magic tricks are easier than in live action. Is that something you think about?

**INTERVIEW TWO - LONDON 8.12.2022****General themes:****Flow/Interruption – recordings only.**

Interview in home studio:

- Can you tell me about one or two dream projects that never materialised?  
Why do you think they didn't happen?
- How do you get into your creative flow – that state when everything clicks and you're fully immersed in your artistic process?
- Besides your art and work, are there other areas in life where you experience flow?
- Do you think you're often self-critical? Do you sometimes stop yourself from doing things you'd love to do because of that inner voice?
- What – or who – can interrupt your creative flow?
- How do you feel when you notice that your flow has been disrupted?
- How does it feel when you're in the flow?
- Are you working on any new and exciting projects? What have you been up to since we last spoke?  
It's been exactly one year.
- When you say "low budget" – how low are we talking? And how do your projects usually begin? Do you collaborate closely with your producer from the start?
- Could you give me a short summary of the painting session you did yesterday at the Barbican? What was it about?

**INTERVIEW THREE - LONDON 12./13.10.2023****General themes:**

Caring for her mother during the transition from her home in Brittany to a care facility in Paris. Denis's shift in focus from filmmaking to painting and the visual arts.

**12.10.2023**

Questions posed while Gaëlle Denis was painting in her studio:

- Do you have any memories from the time this picture was taken? What made you choose to paint it?
- How do you feel when you're painting?
- Can you tell me what you're doing here – and why?
- In our recent call, you mentioned images that feel implanted in your memory, and you spoke about grief. Could you talk a bit more about that?
- You also mentioned that sometimes the boundaries between certain memories – and how they were captured – start to blend with other memories. Can you say more about that?
- Tell me about your grandmother. Has she influenced you in any way?
- You said your grandmother wasn't a professional painter. What does being "professional" or "successful" mean to you?
- Do you ever feel it's too late to start a career in painting?
- Do you have any plans for how you might channel your creativity and passion into a sustainable income? Or would you be okay with your art remaining more of a hobby?
- Looking back, do you have any regrets about the career choices you made earlier in life?
- In our last call, you said, "the real artists are the painters, not the animators." Would you like to become a painter?
- Can you talk a bit about what you meant by "detoxing and rebuilding images – and doing your own thing"?
- Is it ever too late to become a professional painter?

**12.10.2023**

At the Frieze Art Fair outdoor space:

- What are you especially interested in seeing at Frieze this year – and why?
- What does feeling visible mean to you? And how do you make yourself visible?
- Does attending art fairs and film festivals give you a sense of being part of something bigger?
- Do you ever feel like your life is standing still while others seem to be moving forward?
- Are you an artist, a filmmaker, or both? Can you still call yourself a filmmaker if you haven't made a film in several years?

**13.10.2023**

At Gaëlle Denis' living room, looking at photos and objects from her childhood.

- Can you tell me how things have been since last November – both in life and in work?
- How did the project with the female bodybuilder go?
- Do you find it easier to balance artistic work with family life now that you're focusing on painting rather than filmmaking?
- Do you ever feel guilty – not being good enough either as a mother or as an artist/filmmaker?
- What do you think you would have done if your husband hadn't agreed to support your painting until Christmas?
- You probably know Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*. Would you say its message relates to your current situation – renting a studio space to focus on painting over the next few months?
- Could you talk a bit about emptying your mother's house in Brittany? What was that experience like?
- You didn't mention your grandmother in our earlier conversations. Can you tell me when and where you remembered her doing lots of painting when you were a child?
- Tell me a bit about the prospect of turning 50. How do you feel about it.
- What's your future vision of yourself – if you could wish for anything and it would come true?
- Tell me about your role models and inspirations in painting.