

As beautiful as ever

Catherine Deneuve, France's greatest actress, gets animated

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

To an entire generation of movie buffs, a French film means two people arguing passionately while drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. And usually one of those people is actress Catherine Deneuve. And in person? She waves around a cigarette and sips strong coffee. *Quelle perfection.*

One of the most beautiful women in the world, she broke onto the international scene playing a charming shop girl in 1964's "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" and a bored housewife who turned to prostitution in 1967's "Belle de Jour." She's been the face of Chanel No. 5 — turning that perfume into a worldwide blockbuster — and she's been the face of France itself: Deneuve was actually the model for one version of Marianne, the French national symbol (equivalent to the Statue of Liberty) that appears on coins and stamps.

Now 64, Deneuve is as lovely as ever as she talks about "Persepolis," her first animated film and the latest project that champions the social causes she holds so dear. In the film, due out Christmas Day and based on the autobiographical graphic novels by co-writer and director Marjane Satrapi, Deneuve plays Satrapi's mother, who urges her daughter to flee Tehran after the Shah is overthrown in 1979.

"It's very heartbreaking, and she knows she might not see her daughter ever again," says Deneuve. "When Marjane comes back once, the mother says, 'I don't want you to come back here, ever.'"

A film filled with humor and drama, not to mention sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll (Marjane rebels against Iran's leaders by embracing punk rock), "Persepolis" gave Deneuve a chance to focus completely on her voice after a career of being both a great actress and a great beauty.

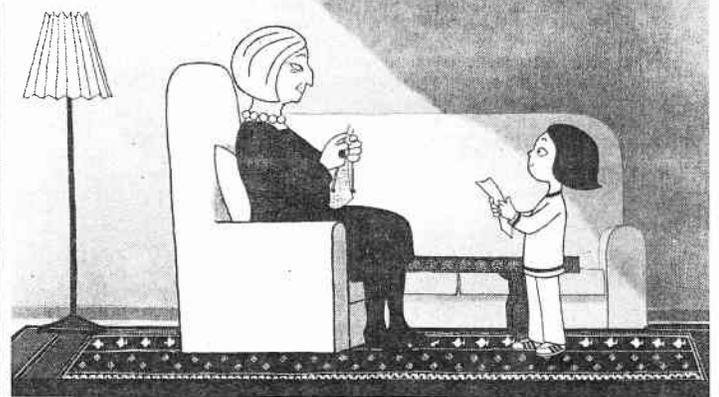


Deneuve was tempting in 1967's "Belle de Jour." Below is, at the Oscars in February; in "Persepolis," she voices mother Tadj.

"But I loved it, just doing the voice," says Deneuve, who has been married briefly but is more notable for long-term affairs with actor Marcello Mastroianni and filmmakers Francois Truffaut and Roger Vadim, among others.

"It's really fun. You can overdo things. You have to play it more because you don't have the face, the expression on the face. You have to be stylized. It's a very interesting job for an actor."

And it's no accident Satrapi took refuge in France or that the real-life Satrapi made her movie there since France has always been a shelter for political refugees and artists, something Deneuve is proud of but fears may be slipping away thanks to ethnic tensions.



"That image is suffering even now," says Deneuve, whose recent credits include the whimsical musical "8 Women" in 2002 and the Lars von Trier drama "Dancer in the Dark" in 2000.

"Yes, France has the image of being open to political refugees and artists, which is the richness of the country. Like America, we let people come from all over. It really helps the country to have that mix. It's very interesting and important to keep the country from being dried out. It's alive." Always lovely, Deneuve's beauty, like her talent, is even richer as she

grows older; she has a complete disinterest in plastic surgery, and seeing younger and younger women going under the knife frightens her, she says. She got

a chance to skewer that obsession with a guest role last year on an episode of the F/X network drama "Nip/Tuck."

Maybe her continental iconoclast take on life and art isn't a fit in Hollywood, but in Europe, the great roles keep coming without a break.

"I work quite regularly, yes," says Deneuve. "It's true it's easier to grow older in Europe than America, that's for sure. There's a cult for youth here that is very oppressive." ♦

Nips and tucks gall a star known for loveliness.



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