

## **Adjani and other stars**

### **New photos by François-Marie Banier**

\*\*\*\*\*

**François-Mare Banier**  
**Writer and photographer**

When one meets François-Marie Banier, who is like some character from a novel with a still adolescent face, it is impossible to avoid being irritated by his casual, apparently blithe attitude. But then one is quickly amused by his excesses, moved by his outbursts, and touched by his enthusiasm. The photos he has taken over the past 25 years are like him; it's as if the celebrated author of *Balthazar*, *Fils de Famille* has managed to use his little Leica to recreate, in black and white, all the magic inspired by his profession as a writer. The portraits reproduced here are taken from an album published by Denoël; they will be presented to the public in an exhibition at the Pompidou Centre from 13 November to 27 January. In the following pages, Isabelle Adjani and Hector Bianciotti offer their own portraits of the elusive Banier.

\*\*\*\*\*

## WHY I LIKE BANIER

By Isabelle Adjani

I like him a lot. Lots and lots. Lots and lots and lots and lots. He's completely crazy. He has the most unbearable cheek it's possible to encounter. Even the cheek to come and help you out. (I've never met anyone as brave as him).

During one of our hilarious nocturnal outings, we stumbled into a fight between bad-tempered refuse collectors. I'm not yet a green belt in karate like our friend Johnny Depp who was escorting us that night along with Sal Jenco, and I wondered what was going to prevent the iron bar that was bearing down on our windscreen from permanently disfiguring us. That's where the impossible Mr. Banier works his miracles. He leaped out of the taxi like a devil out of a bottle and brandished some kind of card (Council of Museums) emblazoned with a ridiculous red, white and blue band which, in a stroke of genius, inspired him to bark "Police!"

With his camera in one hand, complete with flash, and his false police ID in the other, he used his remaining hands to grab the iron bar and save – guess what? – our lives.

Before doing your portrait, François-Marie Banier saves your life. Afterwards as well. All the time. He seems selfish at first...he's already left me in the lurch in the middle of a concert and during dinner parties. He doesn't make a fuss, he just stands up and says "I'm bored to death, I'm leaving". Bad manners? He does it all the time. Such freedom is infuriating.

He's no guide to etiquette. And when he follows a guide...I recall a visit to a lovely place near Nîmes called the Anduze bamboo garden, during which he made the most extraordinary performance, playing court jester to this man who thought he was king of this little world.

He has the purity of a true artist. He is gifted with eccentricity, and he is an inventor. He has no limits. And if you impose limits upon him, he'll do as he does with me: he'll call you *mon pou* ("my louse") instead of *mon chou* ("my darling"). He'll bite your foot. Or he'll wash his hair in your washbasin using household bleach. He'll jump into your bath with all his clothes on and dry his money on the rim of the bath saying it's not dirty any more.

In the courtyard of your building, he'll get the telephone repair man to come down from his ladder so that he can, with great fanfare, decorate him with the Legion of Honour, embracing him three times and making two side-splittingly funny speeches.

No, he's not a clown. He's a poet. He writes about lamps. On everything. And about everything. And photography? He's the one who should talk about that. I don't know if he's more a photographer than a writer, or more a writer than a photographer. He applies himself to what he is able to do best. Tomorrow it might be something else. After all, I've seen him whistle at horses that no one else dared approach and ride them bareback like a man from the wilds; shell walnuts with his bare hands; dance bare-chested in Paris; force me to get onto his motor scooter to brave one-way streets; insult the world at large with his booming voice – that's also typical of him; make bad people cry; make dishonest people pay; make children laugh; and spend time with people in distress. Oh yes, ladies and gentlemen, ultimately he's just impossible to understand!

**“HE’S LIKE GUITRY AND PREVERT ROLLED INTO ONE”**

James Dean would have liked him a lot, and today’s James Deans have everything to envy him for.

I called him the other evening. Or rather the other night. At three in the morning. Canal Plus was showing “Le Comédien” by Sacha Guitry, a tribute to his father Lucien Guitry. This phenomenal dialogue, this texture of voices and friendly and hateful exchanges, is my daily experience of François-Marie. If we were clever, as we all complain about the lack of poetry, humour, wit and craziness in French cinema, we should pursue François-Marie Banier with our pockets full of tape recorders, super 8 cameras and pencils to record him, catch him, and collect him: he’s never short of new ideas or inspiration.

So I called him to give him my hybrid key to what he is, in the form of a composite list of seven magic names: Lucien and Sacha Guitry, Charlie Chaplin, Alain Cuny, Jerry Lewis, Antonin Artaud and Jacques Prévert; a kaleidoscope of the personality of François-Marie Banier whom I have known for about ten years, whom I never cease to rediscover, and whom I never cease to discover.

Post-scriptum: his book of photographs? A masterpiece of modernity and humanity. It is perhaps a way of looking at us as a painter might. No posing. No fuss. Just the moment, as it is.

My little Banier calls this the truth; he calls it emotion; he calls it the person.

\*\*\*\*\*

**LOUIS ARAGON**

**rue de Varennes, October 1979.**

“At the end of his life, without Elsa, Aragon was no longer quite himself. He had reverted to the Surrealist “peasant of Paris” who would wander through the city at night talking to statues and lampposts about his friends Picasso, Breton, Hugo and Holderlin. He could hear Arthur Rimbaud singing on his roof, and counted the footsteps of Mallarmé who supposedly came to visit him”.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **BANIER: THE EYE AND THE HEART**

**by Hector Bianciotti**

Banier? Eyes that capture before they look; eyes whose singular intensity one does not at first see, so strong is his presence wherever he appears: everything, people, furniture, trees, seems suddenly to surround him, without his seeking to attract attention or to take up a particular position. If he discovers you with his left eye, and renders you transparent: he has instantly gathered what is yours and yours alone. And words and expressions come to mind: posture, poise, a way of holding his head above the crowd. If he talks to you, you are seized by the cleverness of his words, which seem to precede his own thoughts. But suddenly, nothing resembles the intransigence you thought you noticed than the melancholic perplexity he exudes. You have discovered his other self, the one who wishes he was elsewhere, not here where Banier has dragged him, and who is crouching in the right eye whose gaze is inward-looking. The one who stands alone behind the window of childhood, and whom Banier – in his most personal novel – called Balthazar: the fifteen-year-old kid who thinks too much in silence; who, wracked by a pang of anxiety, stops in the middle of a football match, not knowing why he is running, where he is going; it hits him in the hollow of his chest like a fist. Balthazar, who wanted to die because he found it so hard to be a child: “Every day I am less of a dreamer, less light-hearted, less detached. More serious still, I am descending into seriousness. Before, I used to be both at once: both golden and sombre. We only have one age in life; we catch it when we are born and we keep it”.

People do not appreciate the complexity of humans; they prefer us to content ourselves with what is reassuring, so that they can be reassured themselves. Is Banier loved? Certainly, because he seems in all circumstances to overcome any obstacle; to find a way to cope with anything that arises. And would someone who is able to cope in any situation also feel the need for attentive affection, for an ear able to discern a murmur which brilliant words, out of politeness, prevent from making itself heard, and which is like the very beating of the heart? But why complicate matters? We find it indispensable to reduce him, by force if necessary, to his role as conqueror. Without being, as someone else said, “nobody and a hundred thousand”, everyone holds within himself someone who shelters closer to the soul, and who dreams. In Banier, the two figures he is in a sense composed become one as soon as he writes or takes photographs. Because everyone wants to achieve a single thing: to give the ephemeral a chance to live; to seize what Virginia Woolf termed ‘instants of life’.

Press the button and we'll do the rest: such was the slogan of the American who brought photography within everyone's reach by inventing a small-format camera to which he gave a name that would be easy to remember in any language: Kodak.

Since then, anyone can "photographize" as Flaubert called it, without suspecting that taking photographs is one thing, but being a photographer is quite another. In fact, we have always denied the need for the specific sensitivity a real photo requires. Banier, however, might say as Cartier-Bresson did that taking photographs is about placing the head, the eye and the heart on the same sight line. What thrills him is to trap reality, to record an unplanned gesture, movement or posture that is specific to its age or to a social condition: a detail that is enough to reveal the nature of a human being, whether anonymous or famous.

Banier does not pursue people, nor lie in wait for them; he would never ask someone to pose for him. His art is that of the instant. But this should not be taken to mean that what he does is easy; it is, on the contrary, a particular way of knowing. Many different things come into play when the eye commands the hand, including one's experience of life, a sense of composition, and the many facets of triggered memories. This is why in this album – which is a mere selection from over twenty years' work – some puffy-faced, deformed woman allows us to see the little girl she once was, as if the lens has somehow brought her to the surface.

In these pictures there is so much life and there are so many different lives, with their dreams, their derisory satisfactions, their nostalgia for lost places! But if I was asked to choose one in particular, it would be this luxurious-looking woman walking towards a point outside the frame, in a suburban landscape: an empty area of gravelly ground with buildings in the background. Behind her, a man crossing the esplanade suddenly has suddenly looked in the direction the woman is walking in, bathed in powdery grey light...What is going to happen? That's what Banier's photographs are like: situations that continue into the future; instants that will last for a long time; the impossible novel made from a single word.

Hector Bianciotti.

\*\*\*\*\*

**SILVANA MANGANO**  
**Hôtel Raphaël, October 1984**

“Silvana was very cheerful that day. She was posing for her friend Lila de Nobili. Suddenly her veil slipped; to regain her pose, she grabbed the empty chair next to her, revealing, for a split second, the tragedy that would be with her forever: the death of her son Federico in a plane accident a few years previously”.

**PASCAL GREGGORY**  
**Paris, November 1979**

“Pascal Gregory, who played Isabelle Adjani’s brother in “The Brontë Sisters”, saved my first play, “Hôtel du Lac”, from disaster. Along with Marlon Brando, he is my favourite actor”.

**MARCELLO MASTROIANNI**  
**Rome, October 1986**

“Marcello died when he was seventeen. He died of love, stabbed by the beauty and mystery of the sublime Silvana Mangano. Forty years later, he starred alongside her in “Dark Eyes”. Their dream was to do a remake of “Brief Encounter”, an allusion to the love that the vagaries of life had stolen from them”.

**TRUMAN CAPOTE**  
**Paris, October 1968**

“I was working at Cardin, I’d sold him this marmot skin coat. But I was the press attaché, it wasn’t up to me to sell clothes”.

**JOHNNY HALLYDAY**  
**Paris, November 1979**

“We’d arranged to meet for dinner after the concert. He saw me arrive on my motor scooter. I said “get on”. He thought he was in the presence of a madman”.

(Translation by Martyn Back)