

Brigitte Bardot, *beyond the image*



BARDOT
VILLEFRANCHE-SUR-MER

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Chapelle Saint-Elme - La Citadelle

Since the release of her debut film in 1953, Brigitte Bardot has never ceased to shine. She has inspired women, artists, and, undoubtedly, many film-makers, and has, whether in the limelight or in her private life, charmed the lenses of the most talented photographers, weaving her life into emblematic moments.

The exhibition at La Citadelle opens with one of her early roles, in a film evoking the glimmer of 1950s Villefranche-sur-Mer: 'Act of Love', directed by Anatole Litvak in 1953 and released in France in 1954, in which she co-stars with Kirk Douglas and Dany Robin.

To mark her 90th birthday, Villefranche-sur-Mer is celebrating Brigitte Bardot with a unique exhibition paying tribute to a woman of undeniable talent, who transcended cinema to become an authentic, liberated icon, inventing the fashionable 'Bardot style' of blossoming femininity.

Brigitte Bardot's undeniable charisma was captured by the discerning eye of the Swiss photographer Léonard de Raemy (1924-2000).

His little-known photographs captured the essence of the actress, revealing both her fragility and her strength, as well as her elusive personality. Each photograph on display here tells a story, showing the evolution of a woman who has navigated confidently between the roles she has played and the public image she has cultivated, while allowing herself moments of relaxation with friends and pets.

These images show her sometimes radiant with joy, sometimes in an introspective state, but always imbued with that aura that has fascinated, and still fascinates entire generations. Although Bardot was praised for her beauty and talent, she was also a pioneer who challenged established norms and revolutionised, preconceived ideas of femininity and independence. The photographs captured by Léonard de Raemy offer a fresh take on her the rebellious side, revealing the vulnerability behind the façade of a legendary star.

This exhibition celebrates a great icon of French cinema, as well as a glimpse in the life of a woman who captivated the world while remaining true to herself.

Room 1: 'Act of Love' in Villefranche-sur-Mer

Before her cinema debut, Brigitte Bardot stood on a little sunny beach in Saint-Tropez and set her eyes on the Côte d'Azur for the first time; from the shores of one Mediterranean beach to the magnificent bay of Villefranche-sur-Mer.

In 1953, three years before, 'And God Created Woman', the Ukrainian-born film-maker Anatole Litvak arrived from Hollywood to shoot the Franco-American film, 'Act of Love', adapted from an English novel. Based on a screenplay and dialogue by Joseph Kessel, the film sees a soldier return to a pretty seaside town after the Second World War, where he relives and remembers a Parisian woman he loved dearly and even wanted to marry.



Room 2: The making of a film legend

In the midst of shells and crustaceans, as if born from the waves, lying on the sand, alone but not abandoned, not dressed up, not artificial, not manufactured, not dolled up. In a word, in a single image, rare if not unpublished, Brigitte radiates naturalness in the photos on display here. In her *itsi bitsi* little pink gingham bikini on the pretty little Ponche beach in the heart of Saint-Tropez, while the mistral wind will get used to running without sailboats, she embraced the legend. Her legend, and ours too, in a scene from 'And God Created Woman'. A few seconds before entering the Mediterranean Sea, the deep sea, the mythology of the 20th century, the New Wave, the currents of fashion, the splendour of eternity and the waves of glory. In 1956, the beautiful girl became 'BB', a beloved creature and world star.

Room 3 : Brigitte, now BB, an icon with a purpose

From the very start of her career, from Paris to Saint-Tropez and via Villefranche-sur-Mer, all along her path to fame, from one film to the next, Brigitte has had all the makings of a celebrity: whether copied, scrutinised, followed, persecuted or adored, she made one successful film after another based on her sex appeal, in which she often plays a young French woman who is portrayed as wild, suave and beautiful. Often the object - and victim - of a malicious curiosity, on screen she reveals a true, inhabited and moving actress. Brigitte irritates and amuses her contemporaries all the more by her blatant disregard of public opinion and lack of approval of known critiques. In the 1970s she decided to fight for animal rights.



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