



**BORDERLINES  
FILM FESTIVAL**

**LA CHIMERA (15)**

Director: Alice Rohrwacher

Starring: Josh O'Connor, Carol Duarte, Alba Rohrwacher, Isabella Rossellini  
Italy/France/Switzerland, 2023, 2 hours 13 minutes, Italian/English + English subtitles

The words that tend to be used most often in descriptions of the work of director Alice Rohrwacher are 'quirky', 'odd' and 'idiosyncratic'. It has been clear from her previous films, notably *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018), that she works across a broad canvas, from political engagement and realism to mythical and magic realist dimensions.

In *La Chimera*, Josh O'Connor plays Arthur, a British archaeologist with a chequered past, a way with a dowsing rod, and a memorable linen suit. Freshly out of prison, he has fallen in with *tombaroli* – graverobbers – to scrape a living excavating Etruscan artefacts and selling them on, while he is also in search of a lost love, Beniamina. In short, he is on more than one kind of a quest. There is what Alessandro De Simone calls 'calculated anarchy in narrative and in staging'. Indeed, the very title of the film offers several ways into what is going on. We have the same word in English, and its layers of meaning capture ideas of an imaginary being that might be monstrous, of illusion and delusion, and of something that cannot be grasped.

Set and filmed in Tuscany and northern Lazio, the film has as one of its social themes the plundering of Italy's ancient past, a notion that Peter Bradshaw touched on in his review: 'there is no such thing as an antiquity that isn't stolen'. In an interview at the Lincoln Center, Rohrwacher has talked of how everywhere in that region of central Italy, where she grew up, there are tombs and relics, many of them 2,500 years old, and she dwelt on how there is 'the law of the soul – those objects belong to somebody'. In addition, the presence of Isabella Rossellini in the cast brings a broader history into play, that of Italian cinema. Along with Rossellini's own status as a star of Italian film, her father Roberto Rossellini was a central figure in postwar Italian neo-realism; critics have also referenced Pasolini and Fellini in attempting to summarise Rohrwacher's filmic scope.

*La Chimera* indubitably addresses layers of Italian social and cultural history. Its use of non-professional actors as a kind of collective, in the gang of *tombaroli* with whom Arthur consorts, seems to have drawn Isabella Rossellini to the project – she has emphasised in interviews how much she values this. Nevertheless, it is the swirling juxtapositions of the ancient and the modern, the material and the spiritual that dominate the screen, leaving in the end, perhaps, something that cannot be grasped.

Preview courtesy of Curzon Film

Notes compiled by Catherine Neale