

FILM

## Gardens in Autumn

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Otar Iosseliani's "Jardin en Automne—Gardens in Autumn" (France/Italy/Russia/Georgia, 2006, colour, 115 mins) is a satiric spoof on a politician who falls from power. Old men visit a coffin maker's shop, and choose between oak and pine products. The size is selected in proportion to the living purchaser's height. An African head of state greets a French team, with fruits and elephants. The official French delegation offers guns and armaments. Officials exchange pistols. There is a shoot on a running deer. Medals are presented to French Nationals in the African town. An exhibition on cattle is followed by a lunch, for the dignitaries. The functionaries drive away in big cars.

Prime Minister Vincent (Severin Blanchet) has a home decorated with artefacts, a grand piano, and a sculpture of Venus. His wife, Barbara (Jacynthe Jacquet) is a great spendthrift. The prime minister's office in Paris is full of photos and paintings of wild animals. Also concealed are a large table, heavy weight lifting items, physical work out machines, and a TV set with live football. There are demonstrations outside the office, and processions engulfing Paris. Wife Barbara visits the prime minister's office. Another minister has a leopard in his garden. Prime minister Vincent Tharel resigns, and his artefacts and personal belongings are packed in cardboard cases. He stands upside down in his office. Books and agricultural fair models lie scattered. The minister's assistants burn papers and files. The new prime minister, Arnaud (Otar Iosseliani) retains only a caged bird; all other things are removed.

Journalists and photographers are kept at bay, outside the main gate of the prime minister's office. The outgoing prime minister, Vincent Tharel leaves in a big car. His car is pelted by tomatoes. At his official residence, his belongings are being packed up. Vincent packs his suits, and takes a ride on the caretaker's scooter. At Rue de Picard, two men are selling fake fur coats, to purchase gasoline, for going to Italy. Vincent's ex-girl friend, Mathilde (Lily Lavina) finds a fur coat present torn. She returns snow skates and a ring to Vincent. Smashing his hands on a glass window, Vincent throws the ring through the window. At a hospital, bandages are placed on his injured hand. He tires his old assistant and rejects all care and assistance.

At a park, Vincent meets two old friends. Vincent's wife deserts him, for another politician. He meets his mother in a park, and borrows money. His mother is a transvestite, with a male voice. An old friend, takes Vincent to his old apartment building. The building has been taken over by Africans. An old African woman, refuses to vacate the apartment. Vincent picks up some paintings and photos from his apartment. While the building caretaker leaves from the service exit, Vincent cleans up his room of discarded bottles. From a window, a sick man throws dirty water on to the street. A hooker takes Vincent home. Vincent throws a flower into window of his old office cleaner's apartment. As a simple mortal, he meets two Orthodox priests, and Gege the bar owner. Vincent has a lunch of mackerel, at a cafe with his friends. Old parents visit Vincent. He eats an apple, and plays the piano, till late at night. A

neighbour telephones to remind of the late hour. At Vincent's mother's estate, Vincent's sister arrives with two children. He spends time with the neighbourhood hooker, and skates on the road. One day a black woman gives Vincent a lift, in her car.

African and Chinese leaders meet the new French prime minister at a garden party. One diplomat drags a girl to the woods, while others fire on wild pigs. African leaders meet Vincent, for protocol, while photo-graphers click. Vincent's mother leads a memorial service for fallen soldiers. A brass band plays. Political arguments lead to fights, and Vincent is struck. Driving off in the hooker's car, the iron gates are damaged. The police evacuate Vincent's old residential building of squatters. His ex-wife and girl friends fight. He returns to his neighbour-hood, where his apartment is reset and white washed. He fixes framed wall paintings. An Orthodox priest asks for shelter. Television news flash demonstrations and protests in Paris, where shop windows are being broken. Vincent's ex-wife returns shopping to her new friend's residence, where the politician thrashes her for enormous spending. Vincent plays the guitar, to an accompanying pianist. A friend conducts chemical experiments to produce alcohol. Police arrive at a party when the music grows too loud. When the bar closes, Vincent and his friends move out with a full bottle. The evicted intruders, from Vincent's building, camp on the roadside. Vincent also sleeps outside with the squatters, on the banks of the Seine. A barge passes by.

Vincent plays the guitar, while a girl plays the piano. There is a change in government again. The prime minister's panther and bird cage are moved out. Vincent's successor is out on the road. Vincent helps a girl in gardening, and mows the lawns, with a lawnmower. His successor meets him in the garden. There is no resentment, and Vincent offers him wine and cigarettes. Friends and politicians gather in the garden house of Vincent's mother. There is plenty of wine and food, while musicians play. "Gardens in Autumn" produces an euphoric sensation, and pleads for fraternity and tolerance. William Lubtchansky's camera documents the roads, restaurants, artists, poets and the common people of Paris, exquisitely, with a sense of value. Iosseliani's gags and satire reject materialism. The film was screened at KFI (November-07).

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