

# BRUNO DUMONT

by **Andy Bailey**

The philosopher-turned-filmmaker Bruno Dumont specializes in a despairing view of humanity in which simple country people — typically played by stone-faced, non-professional actors plucked from rural anonymity à la Bresson — disrupt the boredom of their lives with casual sexual couplings that verge on the animalistic. But rather than exploit these unsophisticated souls, as Dumont was accused of doing after the two leads of his miraculous second feature *Humanité* (*L'Humanité*, 1999) won the acting prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1999, he infuses his characters with unexpected grace and compassion, even when they are confronted with the grimmer aspects of the human condition. *Humanité* — his masterpiece — was a metaphysical detective yarn about the seemingly autistic provincial detective Pharaon de Winter (Emmanuel Schotté) who pines for his 23-year-old neighbor (Séverine Caneele) while investigating the brutal murder of a young girl. Shot in widescreen and featuring painterly long shots and close-ups, it was one of the finest French films of recent years. His third feature, the English-language road movie and self-described experimental horror film *Twentynine Palms* (2003) was widely loathed for its sadistic dénouement filmed in widescreen in the unforgiving desert surrounding Joshua Tree National Park. For *Flandres* (2006), Dumont won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes for the second time, drawing raves for his naturalistic portrait of a randy farm girl in love with two men from her village who get drafted and sent off to fight in an unnamed war in the Middle East. Like his debut feature *The Life of Jesus* (*La Vie de Jésus*, 1997), *Flandres* addressed boredom and anomie in rural France with minimal dialogue, broadening Dumont's palette to include the senselessness of the modern war machine.