

QUINZINE

DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2010

MACHETE PRODUCCIONES

AND INSTITUTO MEXICANO DE CINEMATOGRAFÍA PRESENT

MÓNICA DEL CARMEN
GUSTAVO SÁNCHEZ PARRA

(LEAP YEAR)

AÑO BISIESTO

A FILM BY

MICHAEL ROWE



Laura is 25 years old. She's a journalist, she's single and lives in a small apartment in Mexico City.

After a series of short-lived affairs, Laura meets Arturo. After the first time they make love, she is left deeply unsettled. They embark on an intense and passionate sexual relationship, in which pleasure, pain and love merge.

As days go by which Laura conscientiously crosses out in a calendar, her secret past resurfaces, pushing Arturo to the limit.

interview WITH MICHAEL ROWE

What is the origin of the film? How was the project born?

I studied screenwriting. But at 37 years I wanted to get one of my screenplays produced for the big screen. I didn't have any money, so it needed to be cheap. I wanted to write a script that had few locations and few characters. One day somebody told me about a conservative woman who'd accepted a sadomasochistic relationship in order to keep her lover from leaving. I liked this story, the script came out well and attracted the attention of a young production company. And that was it.

How would you describe the Arturo and Laura's characters?

They're both very solitary, closed characters. They're products of a society that sees sex more as a recreational activity than as a means to create or explore intimacy. And yet what both characters need more than anything else is just that: a real emotional connection with another human being.

Is it important for you that Laura's character is Mexican and indigenous?

Yes. I'm always interested in marginal characters, who live and die well outside the circles of power, eeking out a living in whatever sphere is available to them. Five hundred years after the Spanish conquest, the socioeconomic divisions in Mexico still follow the

country's racial breakdown very closely. The top 5 percent of the wealthiest people are generally from European families, and the 70 percent of the poorest people in the country are, by and large, indigenous. This film is about a relationship of power between a woman and a man, but at the same time in many ways it's a metaphor for the complex victimizer-victim dichotomy that I think is at the very heart of Mexican national identity.

Laura and Arturo's relationship evolves from a one night stand into a very loving, intimate, addictive and violent relationship. What does each of them seek and find in this relationship?

Margaret Atwood wrote that "Those who say they want nothing want everything." Laura's like that. By effacing her own will in favor of that of her lover, she hopes to win him over to herself for life. But to give all of the power to somebody doesn't necessarily make them powerful.

And Arturo starts out looking for sex and adrenalin. But the further into the relationship he gets, the more he finds himself being dragged into a whirlpool of unfulfilled need.

Who dominates who in the relationship?

Laura dominates the relationship from the very beginning. Despite appearances to the contrary, she's pulling all the strings.

Let's talk of the decision to film in this single space, Laura's apartment, and about the very important scenery elements, for example the picture of her father and the calendar.

Houses are a metaphor for the psyche. This film explores the deepest recesses of Laura's mind. In this context changing location would have only diluted the accumulated tension. In addition to this, being so closed in for the whole film puts the audience in the same sort of emotional isolation as Laura.

The calendar and the photo of Laura's father both refer us back to the real psychological motor behind Laura's depression and her sexual self-flagellation: her guilt-ridden relationship with her deceased father.

Monica del Carmen (Laura) and Gustavo Sanchez Parra (Arturo) are magnificently ordinary, just like the rest of the world. How was this achieved with the actors?

We didn't rehearse scenes at all. Gustavo was working on another movie and his dates were so tight that we barely had a few hours together to have lunch the day before we began filming. But when you're working with somebody as talented and professional as he is, it's just a sheer delight. We'd discussed the tone of his



character, and that was enough. He just picked it up and ran with it.

And Monica... At the casting, Monica made me cry. If there was one thing I knew I could depend on in this shoot, it was her brilliant acting. Rather than getting her lines down, what I wanted was for her to understand everything about her character. We worked together practically every day for two months before we started the shoot. We went through the script word-by-word, dialogue-by-dialogue, movement-by-movement, and she would ask me everything, until she knew the character as well as I did. Sometimes even better, I think.

The sex scenes are raw and modest at the same time. How did you manage this with the actors? How do you manage to pass on this feeling to the public?

I had two great actors. One hundred percent committed, one hundred percent focussed. They both understood why I wanted to film the way I did and they believed in the proposal we committed to getting it perfect. They trusted me completely and gave me 110 percent. And that's something I'll always be grateful for.

I wanted the sex to look real, and at the same time to

be devoid of any eroticism. At the movies we're used to seeing sex scenes through close-ups and dissolves, with romantic music in the background. And maybe that could come close to our subjective experience of having sex, but if you sit back and look at two people fornicating on a bed in a room, that's not really what's going on. There's a lot of sweating and grunting and spittle flying about...

But it's not particularly attractive, in the way that, say, ballet is. And that's what I wanted to capture, the sexual act stripped of all romanticism or eroticism. It simply is what it is.

Is Año Bisiesto a love story?

Most definitely.

Año bisiesto is your debut feature film and it is selected to be in Cannes. What are you expecting from the festival? What are your current projects?

I'm hoping it will open doors for me to put together a co-production for my second film, *Naturalezas Muertas* (Still Lives). I'd like to do it with an Australian production company.

You are Australian, but, do you feel like a Mexican film maker? Has being Australian changed the way you look at Mexican society?

Yes, I do feel Mexican... I've been living in Mexico for 16 years, and the film was written in Spanish, about Mexican characters, and filmed entirely with Mexican resources, cast and crew. And yet at the same time I know that my narrative sensibility was formed in Australia. When I arrived in Mexico I was already a writer. And I think of course that being born outside Mexico gives me a distance on Mexican society a lot of Mexicans don't have.

Michael Rowe *Australian director living in Mexico. He studied English and post colonial literature at La Trobe University, he is the author of three stage scripts: "Impudence and Innocence", "Reprise For Godot" and "Sexual Harassment." He is the winner of the Melbourne Fringe Festival Poetry Prize. In 2005 he won the Mexican Film Institute's Stimulus program for writers, with his script «Naturalezas Muertas». «Año Bisiesto», a powerful sex drama about a captivating, crude and painful love story, is his debut as a feature film director.*



cast

Laura **Mónica del Carmen**
Arturo **Gustavo Sánchez Parra**
Raúl **Marco Zapata**

crew

Directed by Michael Rowe
Written by Michael Rowe & Lucía Carreras
Produced by Edher Campos & Luis Salinas
Associated producers Olga Gonzalez & Gustavo Campos
First assistant director Rodrigo Bello Noble
Director of photography Juan Manuel Sepúlveda
Editor Oscar Figueroa Jara
Art director Alisarine Ducolomb
Costume designer Adolfo Cruz Mateo
Sound Antonio Diego
Sound designer Miguel Ángel Molina Gutiérrez
Theme « Flores para ti » **by** Afrodita
Production Machete Producciones & Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía
World Sales Pyramide International



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