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LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2019
Official Selection

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Film Festival 2019

SANDRA
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ALBANO
JERÓNIMO

MIGUEL
BORGES

A HERDADE

A FILM BY TIAGO GUEDES

PRODUCED BY PAULO BRANCO



PAULO BRANCO
PRESENTS

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A HERDADE

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SYNOPSIS

The chronicle of a family, and João Fernandes (Albano Jerónimo), the charismatic landowner (a sort of “anarchist and progressive ‘prince’, *bigger than life*”) of one of the largest estates in Europe, on the south bank of the River Tagus, *A Herdade/ The Domain* is a huge fresco of Portugal in the second half of the 20th century, an epic with strong, intense and enigmatic characters.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Burden of Heritage

What makes us who we are?

The choices and options we take throughout our life define us, but we also carry on with us matters we don't understand neither control. Something that makes us be and act, something that was born with us and was passed on to us, something we inherited. This film is about those invisible ties that define us and limit our behaviour.

The scenery of the film works almost as a metaphor for everything that happens to the protagonist, a charismatic and imposing man. Both man and land are grand and imperial at the beginning, but as the events take place they start to reveal their imperfections, their grey zones, and both start to collapse.

A Herdade (the word derives from the Latin "Hereditas", and so does the word "Herança/Inheritance"), is kind of a huge isle inside a country dominated by a fascist dictatorship. It's like a kingdom dominated by an anarchist and progressive "prince". But he will inevitably collide with the people's will to change. A collision with the changes of history, with the passage of time. I actually did want to bring into the film these human and territorial transformations. And their consequences.

The landscape of *A Herdade/The Domain* will be the discovery of the immense marshlands and cattle latifundia of Tagus' south bank. A singular view: the earthy hill, the barns, the

cornfields, the horses, the lakes in the sun will be the historical, political, financial stage of Portugal in the last 60 years, going through the Carnation Revolution (25th of April 1974). They will be the spots of the obscure actions of the film characters consumed by their torments, social biases, greed, love and mismatches.

The atmosphere of *A Herdade/The Domain* sends us back to several films I deeply love. Films of open spaces, westerns lost in the middle of nowhere with enigmatic characters who carry secrets, as in Leone's and Anthony Mann's films. At the same time, human relationships are explored in a way that is similar to the melodramas of Minelli and Kazan's more classic films.

A film of strong characters, great actors, strong performances, and the greatness of the landscapes that envelop them, and the consequences of the secrets they carry with them. The heritage left to us and the heritage we leave to others.

Tiago Guedes



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR TIAGO GUEDES AND ACTOR ALBANO JERÓNIMO

By Inês N. Lourenço

The Domain is a fiction film inspired by a real character. Did the inspiration come from the person himself or from the reality of a landowner?

Tiago Guedes: For me, it wasn't the character, definitely. It was the idea of a certain type of person. But I believe that the first version of the screenplay, written by Rui Cardoso Martins, was really influenced by the real character, with whom he talked a lot, so many stories might have some truthful aspects. However, the aim was never to do a biopic. It was just a starting point – someone whom, in a certain Portuguese territory [the Barroca d'Alva Estate], experienced a huge change in our society [the 25th of April Revolution].

It was the writer Rui Cardoso Martins who initially worked on the screenplay. What followed this narrative structure?

TG: The idea came from Paulo [Branco] who wanted to do a film about this land and a man "bigger than life". He started working with Rui and when I joined the project there was already a screenplay, so I tried to adapt the story in order to get it closer to what I wanted to talk about – and twisted it a little... Then arrived Gilles Taurand to help and, at the end, I took all of those ingredients and wrote the final script, that is to say, I took the others and wrote my own. And during the editing with [Roberto] Perpignani we re-wrote it yet again!

This is a large-scale production, distinct from the rest of your filmography. What led you into a project of such, say, epic scope, somewhat unusual in Portuguese cinema?

TG: When Paulo approached me it was exactly for us to find our shared taste for a certain classic cinema – American, Italian...– a passion we both share. So that is where we drew our inspiration from. I am talking about films that are on that same scale. Then, the way of filming, respecting the eras, the protagonist, all of this gives it that epic sense. But, from my part, there was never the intention of doing something bigger. The logic was: this object calls for it.

And you Albano, what attracted you about this character?

Albano Jerónimo: Something very simple: I had never been the protagonist of a film. So this was a challenge from the beginning, in the daily management of the work. I have done it in the theatre, but never had the pleasure to do it in cinema. Then, constructing the character of

João [Fernandes], this idea of being someone “bigger than life”, this eucalyptus effect that dries everything around, a kind of man that, before reading the script, I always thought would die young – and it’s the complete opposite. This kind of man dies old and sees everyone around him die first...

We are talking about a man of contradictions, capable of defending his workers from political perversity at all costs but with a very cold relationship with his wife and children...

AJ: That’s the best part, because it’s exactly where I find his human side. He is an imperfect man, and on the top of that it’s difficult for him to express himself, to communicate. And that is present in a body, in an era, in a family, in a context...

TG: I remember talking with Albano about this, about the need to saving him in one scene or another. Saving him in the sense of pushing him to a grey area. And those moments are



there. For example, when he arrives home and shows some affection towards his wife – this was a suggestion from Albano and we didn't warn Sandra [Faleiro] about it – she was unaware, so she wasn't expecting it, and it stayed in the final cut.

The short scenes in the stable are some of the most beautiful and also give us the human side of this man. A kind of romantic loneliness shared with the horse.

TG: That's where he can be. It's his place.

The horse is named “Suão”, as it is mentioned in the film, in reference to the wind. Wind, which, by the way, is heard throughout the film as a “soundtrack”. Does this connection make any sense?

TG: It makes total sense. In fact, in the original script the horse wasn't even named Suão, I brought it to the text. I lived in Alentejo for 8 years and I came across that wind several times. It's a circular wind that puts you in a

place where you almost lose your mind... I am of course exaggerating, but there are a lot of suicides during the period of the “Suão”, a warm wind that in some way drives you mad... I really wanted to bring that to the film, without emphasizing it. But it's curious that you noticed it because for me, as an element of the sound design, the wind has a really important part.

The horse also matches the language of the western, present in the way you film the dynamics between characters through silent glances.

TG: It's one of the film genres that inspired me, and that I like quite a lot. I have watched many westerns, at first to write and to favour a certain dryness, to look for a way to be sparse in words... In fact, managing silences was what I wanted to work on the most.

And to this you add the expression of the melodrama, specifically of Minnelli's *Home From the Hill*, in the way that you observe



the often toxic aspects of leadership and masculinity.

TG: *Home From the Hill* was a film at origin of all of this, not as a story but as a universe. It was that toxic masculinity I was looking for, but at the same time I didn't want this man to be evil. And this is very relevant in Minnelli's film – Mitchum is not a bad guy, he's a stereotype of men at that time...

And of that social condition...

TG: Absolutely. To be a leader he has to be like that. I like that a lot: to not be able to detect who is really evil. Because I think that we all have it inside of us, we all are potentially good and evil, and it's the circumstances of life that are going to determinate it, according to the way we face them.

Albano, did you also have Robert Mitchum's character as a reference?

AJ: Of course. I like especially the idea of serving a purpose, a legacy. And I think Mitchum is exactly that, just like João Fernandes. Tiago touched on a crucial point: the construction of the character is a process that follows the course of events. In other words, I don't believe in characters. I believe that events help to define some kind of character.

There is an idea of circularity which, from my point of view, is present throughout the film, internally and visually, and that takes shape in the editing itself. For example the first time we see João Fernandes, he's vaulting with the horse. The following plan catches Miguel Borges' face with the camera still driven by the movement of the

vaulting. Was this "shape" already planned or did it come from the contribution of the editor Roberto Perpignani during the said re-writing?

TG: The idea of circularity already existed in the narrative. But without any doubt the editing emphasized it in a way that wasn't planned. The circularity lays in the emotions they go through, and in the inheritance itself. Then, some of the camera movements have this conscience, others not as much, but they are highlighted by Perpignani's editing. For him editing is not the same thing it is for a younger editor; there is a notion of narrative poetry that is extremely hard to achieve. And when I presented the raw material to him, what he did with it was the work of a true master!

Coming back to the romantic figure of the horse: what relationship did you established with him, Albano?

A.J: Two months before the shooting I had riding lessons. Besides that I took care of the horse, washing him, grooming him... I wanted to go back into those details to be with him, to get closer to this great animal. But there is something I never forget, that [Raúl] Ruiz told me when I worked with him: "always trust the elements". He told me this regarding a scene in which the wind always messing with my hair and I kept raising my hand and fixing it... And in this case my relationship with the horse was like this – of trust, of listening, of surrendering to what could happen. Here it's the animal who's in charge.

TIAGO GUEDES

Tiago Guedes attended the New York Film Academy and an Actors directing course at Raindance London. He directed several projects for television, theatre and cinema, and was awarded prizes in all those areas.

These are some of the highlights from his work as film director: the short *Waking Up* (2001), premiered at the Internacional Film Festival Rotterdam and won the Best Short Film award at Newport Film Festival; his first feature film, *Blood Curse* (2005), codirected with Frederico Serra, was in the official selection of festivals such as Hamburg, Sitges, Busan and Torino, amongst many other international festivals. The film was released on DVD in Spain, France and USA. The feature film *Noise* (2008), also codirected with Frederico Serra, was selected for several international film festivals, such as San Sebastián – section “Zabaltegi-Tabakalera” –, Cartagena, where it was awarded the Best First Feature and Best Actor Prize, Torino, where it won the Ciputti Prize for Best Film, and São Paulo, amongst others.

From his collaboration with author Tiago Rodrigues, he directs the short *Chorus* (2014) and the feature *Sadness and Joy in the Life of Giraffes* (2019, Official Selection in Iberian-American Competition at Guadalajara Film Festival, and Indie Lisboa).



A Herdade/ The Domain (2019, Official Selection in Competition at Venice Film Festival and “Special Presentations” at TIFF), whose script was written in collaboration with Rui Cardoso Martins, is his latest work.

Tiago Guedes also directed theatre plays by authors such as Peter Handke, Dennis Kelly, David Harrower and Martin McDonagh.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- *A Herdade/ The Domain*, 2019
- *Tristeza e Alegria na Vida das Girafas*
Sadness and Joy in the Life of Giraffes, 2018
- *Coro dos Amantes/ Chorus* (short), 2014
- *Odisseia* (tv series) 2013
- *Entre os Dedos/ Noise*, 2008
- *Coisa Ruim/ Blood Curse*, 2005
- *Acordar/ Waking Up* (short), 2001

CAST AND CREW

Albano Jerónimo, *João Fernandes*

Sandra Faleiro, *Leonor*

Miguel Borges, *Joaquim Correia*

João Vicente, *Leonel Sousa*

João Pedro Mamede, *Miguel*

Ana Vilela da Costa, *Rosa*

Rodrigo Tomás, *António*

Beatriz Brás, *Teresa*

Teresa Madruga, *Guilhermina*

Directed by: Tiago Guedes

Screenplay: Rui Cardoso Martins, Tiago Guedes

With the collaboration of Gilles Taurand

Cinematography: João Lança Morais

Film editing: Roberto Perpignani

Art direction: Isabel Branco

Sound: Francisco Veloso, Elsa Ferreira, Pedro Góis

Costumes: Isabel Branco, Inês Mata

Assistant directors: Paulo Mil Homens

António Pinhão Botelho, Ana Mariz

Makeup: Íris Peleira

Producer: Paulo Branco

Co-producer: Carlos Bedran

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