



NEON BULL

A film by Gabriel Mascaro

Official Selection, 2016 New Directors/New Films

Horizons (Orizzonti) Special Jury Prize, 2015 Venice Film Festival

Official Selection, 2015 Toronto International Film Festival

2015 / Brazil/Uruguay/Netherlands / 101 min. / Color / In Portuguese w/
English subtitles

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Synopsis:

Iremar works at the Vaquejadas, a rodeo in the north east of Brazil where two men on horseback try to bring down a bull by grabbing its tail. It's dusty and back-breaking work, but Iremar is a natural 'Vaqueiro', feeding, prepping and taking care of the bulls.

Home is the truck used to transport the animals from show to show, which he shares with his co-workers; Galega, an exotic dancer, the truck driver and mother to the young & spirited Cacá, and Zé, his rotund compadre in the bullpen. Together they form a makeshift but close-knit family.

But Brazil and the Northeast are changing and the region's booming clothing industry has stirred new ambitions in Iremar. Swinging in his hammock in the back of the truck, his head is filled with dreams of pattern cutting, sequins and exquisite fabrics as he mentally assembles elaborate new fashion designs...

About Director Gabriel Mascaro:

Gabriel Mascaro (born 1983) is a filmmaker and visual artist from Recife, Brazil. His first feature film, **VENTOS DE AGOSTO (AUGUST WINDS)**, premiered in competition at Locarno in 2014 and was awarded with a special mention. The film has won numerous other awards and received much critical acclaim. His previous documentaries and video installations have been screened at important film festivals and artistic events including Rotterdam (IFFR), Amsterdam (IDFA), Oberhausen, Clermont Ferrand, Leipzig, BFI London, the Guggenheim, Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, MoMA Documentary Fortnight, and the São Paulo Biennale. **BOI NEON (NEON BULL)** is Gabriel's second feature film.

Filmography:

Boi Neon (Neon Bull) 2015, Brazil / Uruguay / Netherlands, 101', Fiction, HD 71st Venice Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival.

Ventos de Agosto (August Winds) 2014, Brazil, 85', fiction, HD 67th Festival del Filme Locarno, *Special Mention*

Doméstica (Housemaids) 2012, Brazil, 75' documentary, HD International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, 2012

A Onda Traz o Vento Leva (Ebb & Flow) 2012, Brazil/Spain, 25', documentary, HD International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, 2012, Oberhausen, *Jury Prize*

Avenida Brasilia Teimosa (Defiant Brasilia) 2010, Brazil, 85', documentary, HD 39th International Film Festival Rotterdam

As Aventuras de Paulo Bruscky (The Adventures of Paulo Bruscky) 2010, Brazil, 20', machinima documentary, HDÉ Tudo Verdade

Um Lugar ao Sol (High-Rise) 2009, Brazil, 70', documentary, HDBAFICI – Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente, *Special Mention*

KFZ-1348 2008, Brazil, 85', documentary, 35mmSão Paulo International Film Festival, *Special Jury Prize*

Director's Statement:

Amidst a recent wave of rapid economic growth, the film is an attempt to renovate the political and symbolic understanding of contemporary human relations in the Northeast of Brazil, where I grew up and have always lived.

The *Vaquejada* rodeo – one of the largest agro-business events in Brazil - seems to provide a fitting allegory of the recent transformations affecting the region. Through the lives of characters trying to keep pace with a new scale of desires and aspirations, I want to explore colors and textures that demonstrate the contradictions of consumption and expanding notions of identity and gender. I hope that by embracing the lives of this group of Vaqueiros, the cowhands who live on the road transporting bulls between *Vaquejadas* and working backstage at the event, NEON BULL throws new light on recent socio-economic and cultural changes.

The film is a study of the body, light and the transformation of the human landscape.

Q&A with Gabriel Mascaro:

How did the idea to make a film about a cowhand who wants to work in fashion come about?

The film takes place in a region where livestock and agricultural activities share space with a rapidly growing textile and clothing industry. During my research for the script I came into contact with the world of the *Vaqueiros* (cowhands) who work backstage at the *Vaquejada* and I met one particular cowhand who worked with both livestock and textiles. I was fascinated by the way he ritualized the cleaning of the bulls tails and then, a few hours later, would be sitting at a sewing machine for his second shift. This was the starting point for creating a fictional character who accumulates roles that combine force and delicacy, bravura and sensitivity, violence and endearment.

What was the biggest challenge in making this film?

The scenes were all quite long and therefore complex to shoot, and we had the added complication of bulls and horses in many of the sequences, yet much of the magic of the film occurs exactly when the animals take center stage. One of the central themes of the film was to question ideas of body hierarchy, be it animal or human, male or female. During the research for the script, spending time at the *Vaquejadas*, I noticed a fascinating ethic of the body that distinguished the way landowners and laborers related to each other and to the animals. Behind the stage the cowhands clean the tail of the bull, dust it with chalk and release them onto the track. Two horsemen then chase after the bull. The farmhand, mounted on one horse, grabs the bull's tail and passes it over to the second rider, who is also the owner of the horses, and whose job it is to finish the task of pulling the bull to the ground, taking the glory of the fall. I realized that this "sport" is almost an allegory of Brazilian hierarchy, materializing itself in the bodies of these men and animals. The repetition of this same movement for hours and hours, it became almost a ritual, a recurring choreography. So I wanted to explore the presence of these human and animal bodies politically, revealing new contours, new impressions, new eruptions, showing that violence and pleasure inhabit the same body.

It is the first time that you are working with experienced actors in Brazil. What was the process of preparing them for the film?

I come from a documentary and visual arts background, so, working with really experienced actors was a new and very rewarding challenge. I was supported by Fatima Toledo as drama coach (City of God, Elite Force, Suely in the Sky, A Jaula de Oro) and she conducted a wonderful rehearsal and preparation process. The length of the scenes was a real challenge and we had to work meticulously to choreograph them, but at the same time, give them room to breathe.

The film takes place in the same region where many classics of the Brazilian New Cinema movement were filmed in the 60s and 70s. Why did you choose to film in this region?

In the 60s politicians and economists viewed the northeast of Brazil as the problem region due to its history of desertification, starvation, drought, religious fanaticism and popular revolt. At the same time cinema and literature found an allegory of the class fight and rural uprisings in the region. Cinema Novo embraced the northeast as a terrain that crystalized certain symbols and ideas that they propagated, such as the preservation of traditional culture, the bravery and puritanism of the rural worker and the existence of values that could alleviate the identity crisis of urban centers. Today the context in Brazil is very different. The region has gone through a process of rapid economic development and its suburban towns are very wealthy, although inequality is still rampant and the landscape is testament to chaotic construction and lack of long-term development strategies. The film aims to uncover a new contemporary rural reality with symbols that are different from those of Cinema Novo in the way they relate to human emotion and aspiration. It is a film about the transformation of the human landscape.

How did you develop a visual concept for NEON BULL?

The idea was to break with a monochromatic image of desertification in the region that is present in many historic films of the Northeast [of Brazil]. We filmed during the rainy season, so everything is quite green and we included many multi-colored elements. The existence of color acts as a political agent that transmits a certain idea of modernity and economic progress. The cinematography of the film was an integral part of the choreography of each

and every scene of the film. The camera makes very subtle, constant movements, edging into new spaces, mapping the human fabric that emanates from this complex, often turbulent landscape that is both ordinary and surreal.

Your characters don't conform to stereotypical depictions of male and female roles, in Brazil or elsewhere...

What interests me is the expansion of gender representation, and by depicting the routine of the day-to-day, I try to ensure that any reshaping of gender roles is not sensationalized, but rather, normalized. I also wanted to go beyond the psychology of the characters, rooting the film in the physical presence of the characters in their natural surroundings and the daily choreography that has the potential to be a catalyzing poetic experience. The film doesn't necessarily follow one particular protagonist, rather it speculates on the impact of the experiences of each character within the group. It is about curious characters and intense experiences, and despite knowing little about who these people are, we find ourselves becoming deeply involved with their stories during the film. NEON BULL focuses on the microscopic conflicts that make up the everyday. As with all routines, life is cyclical, continues and then the film ends.

Cast:

Juliano Cazarré...*Iremar*

Aline Santana...*Cacá*

Carlos Pessoa...*Zé*

Maeve Jinkings...*Galega*

Vinicius de Oliveira...*Junior*

Josinaldo Alves...*Mário*

Samya de Lavor...*Geise*

Crew:

*Director....*Gabriel Mascaro

Producer.... Rachel Ellis

Co-Producers.... Sandino Saravia & Marleen Slot

Executive producers.... Rachel Ellis, Sandino Saravia & Marleen Slot

Actors' preparation.... Fatima Toledo

Associate Producer.... Tiago Melo

Script.... Gabriel Mascaro

Script Collaborators.... Marcelo Gomes, Cesar Turim & Daniel Bandeira

Director of Photography.... Diego Garcia

First Assistant Director.... Marcelo Caetano

*Editing....*Fernando Epstein & Eduardo Serrano

Production Manager.... Livia de Melo

*Art Director....*Maíra Mesquita

Costume.... Flora Rabello

Direct Sound.... Fabian Oliver

Original Soundtrack.... Otávio Santos, Cláudio N & Carlos Montenegro

Sound Design & Edit.... Mauricio d'Orey *Sound Mix* Vincent Sinceretti