



DIVINO AMOR

an unorthodox religious tale by GABRIEL MASCARO

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“True love never cheats, True love shares.”

De derde speelfilm van Gabriel Mascaro (NEON BULL) is een controversiële, erotische, futuristische gospel en tevens een intelligente aanklacht tegen het groeiende conservatisme in Brazilië.

SYNOPSIS

Brazilië in het jaar 2027. Joana, een ambtenaar bij de burgerlijke stand is verantwoordelijk voor het afhandelen van echtscheidingszaken. Echter vanuit haar geloofsovertuiging ziet zij het als haar persoonlijke missie om deze stukgelopen huwelijken juist te redden. Een van de middelen die ze inzet is de geheime, onconventionele groep Divino Amor; een hyperreligieuze club waar alles in het werk wordt gesteld om stellen middels seksuele uitpattingen nader tot elkaar te brengen. Intussen doen de vrome Joana en haar man Danilo er alles aan om zwanger te raken, waarbij geen middelen worden geschuwd. Hun toewijding en gebeden lijken niet te worden gehoord... totdat er een wonder gebeurt.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Brazil has traditionally been referred to as a liberal and united country, where the annual Carnaval celebrations espouse the country's diversity and cordiality. But the fact is that during the past few years, a cultural, social and political transformation led by powerful, ultra-conservative forces, with substantial support from media outlets, has taken hold in the country. The film takes place in 2027 when the majority of the population is Evangelical, but the state still claims to be secular. It is a film that speculates the near future through an extraordinary allegory, despite the present day displaying ever stronger signs of this reality.

Instead of telling the story of a character fighting against this conservative shift - a strategy that would have been easier for me, perhaps - I wanted to challenge myself to do the opposite, to tell the story of a woman consumed by a desire to radically advance the conservative religious agenda in a very personal way. I am interested in creating characters that have different values to my own as I believe that within the differences that separate us you can find openings, fissures, that provide opportunities to connect us. I wanted to make a humane movie, as a means of bringing me closer to a character who a priori I would reject. If a societal chasm has emerged as a result of hatred and misunderstanding, cinema is a space where we can fantasize improbable encounters.

DIVINE LOVE is a universal story about the pulsating desire of a woman whose faith is the cornerstone of her life, who waits and searches for a divine sign, and ends up receiving a greater sign than she was prepared for that will either lead her to question everything or bring her even closer to God.

This is not a film only about Brazil, DIVINE LOVE is a commentary on the conservative, fanatical and nationalist agenda that is spreading throughout the world and the way those that don't espouse it, engage with it.

CAST

Dira Paes Joana
Julio Machado Danilo
Emílio de Melo Drive Thru Pastor
Teca Pereira Divine Love Group Leader
Calum Rio Narrator
Mariana Nunes Divorcee
Thalita Carauta Client

CREW

Director Gabriel Mascaro
Producer Rachel Daisy Ellis
Co-producers Sandino Saravia Vinay, Katrin Pors, Augusto Matte, Dan Wechsler, Jamal Zeinal Zade, Maria Ekerhovd & Anthony Muir
Screenplay Gabriel Mascaro, Rachel Ellis, Lucas Paraizo & Esdras Bezerra
Editing Livia Serpa, Eduardo Serrano, Fernando Epstein & George Cragg
Director of Photography Diego Garcia
Art Director Thales Junqueira
Costume Rita Azevedo
Make-up Tayce Vale
Direct sound Fabián Oliver
Sound design Roberto Espinoza
Original soundtrack Juan Campodónico & Santiago Marrero, Otávio Santos



Q&A WITH THE DIRECTOR

What is the evangelical phenomenon like in Brazil?

According to official data, since 2010, a new religious organization has been registered almost every hour in Brazil. The gradual fusion between the state and religion is constant and in a few years the diverse practices of evangelical Christianity will surpass as the religious majority of Brazil. While generalizations are dangerous, and the Evangelical movement in Brazil is very heterogeneous, the more conservative line has gained much ground in the country, society and its political institutions.

Is the film a dystopian reading of the future?

Joana, the film's protagonist, would say that this is a utopian film because she is living a moment in history when God is more integrated into day to day life than ever before, which is her mission. Even when confronted with a crisis in her own marriage, provoked in part by religious activities that she engages in, her belief is galvanized, bringing her even closer to God.

Joana embodies a rare Brazilian anti-heroine who uses ethically questionable methods in pursuit of her unwavering belief in God. Empowered by the Kafkaesque bureaucracy of the notary's office where she works, she pursues her religious mission with subversive and radical power.

The film aims to go beyond a utopia/dystopia binary; I tried to reinterpret Brazil's increasingly powerful and dominant Christian nationalist identity through unexpected cultural appropriations (from pop gospel to porn) woven throughout the film in a biblical and erotic narrative about faith and power.

Why did you decide to tell the story of a woman who is part of a conservative religion but that participates in an unusually liberal sexual therapy?

Between her bureaucratic profession and her missionary piety, the protagonist Joana challenges some notions of the role of the body as a libertarian agent. She uses her own body to radicalize the conservative religious agenda in order to to strengthen the Christian family. Her body is an instrument of faith and proof of her love of God.

The group Divine Love is a religious couples' therapy with clear rules and objectives. The group uses extreme methods to preserve the traditional family under the slogan "True love never cheats, True Love Shares." Joana is a woman who does everything for love. In Joana's body lies the ambivalence of an entity that gives to receive and of a body that multiplies.

Is this an erotic film inspired by the Bible?

This film is not just inspired by the Bible, but also by some real women of the Middle Ages. Hagiographies of Christian women martyrs are extensive. The tradition was registered in the research of the writer Elisabeth Roudinesco in the book "Our Dark Side - History of Perversion". She focuses on the abundance of religious women who, in their most intimate and secret lives, have given themselves, body and life, in search of greater ecstasy. The French writer Georges Bataille reinforces that, "all eroticism has a sacramental character." Joana is an ambivalent character, drawing together the characteristics religious ecstasy and erotic enjoyment. As such, the film naturally tries to articulate the idea of devotion, suffering, and pleasure in as they relate to the themes of faith and desire.

A photograph of a group of men lying on their backs on a stage floor. They are positioned in a row, facing away from the camera towards a large, draped curtain. The scene is dimly lit, with a strong purple and pink hue. The men are wearing various casual clothing, including shirts, trousers, and jeans. The curtain behind them is light-colored and has a scalloped top edge. The floor is dark and reflective.

“An unorthodox religious tale”

How did you create the aesthetic of the film Divine Love?

Aestheticism is a very special topic when thinking about evangelical culture in Brazil, since its brand is breaking away from the tradition of holy art. Curiously, by negating Christian iconography, other specific elements have become integrated into evangelical imagery in Brazil: intertwined curtains, powerful speakers on display, plastic chairs, believers wearing formal clothes, pastors speaking loudly. But it was very important to me not make a caricature of the religion. We came across several reports where evangelicals expressed profound discomfort with the visual caricature of their roles on Brazilian television. Therefore, our goal was to reread these codes and project a near future without naivety or stereotypes, whilst also taking some risks. This happened thanks to contributions from my art team, costume, composers, DoP, cast, and the strength of the actress that is Dira Paes, who gave body and light to Joana.

What does the film mean in the current Brazilian political context?

There is a broad front in Congress composed by what in Brazil is called the “BBB Caucus” (Bulls, Bible, and Bullets), representing agrobusiness, evangelicals, and armament. The recently sworn-in President Bolsonaro, has just created the “Ministry of Women, the Family and Human Rights” putting the family at the heart of the state, led by a profoundly religious minister. The signs are very clear that there is a new plan for Brazil, one that is being led by powerful conservative and religious forces. Here

I propose a film that uses the allegory of an improbable future to talk about the present. Rather than comment on traditional stereotypes of the church such as pressure to donate or money laundering, DIVINE LOVE focuses on the philosophical project of power. There are minority views in the evangelical tradition itself that are questioning improper commercial and political use of faith, for example. The manifestation of evangelism in Brazil is diverse and complex but the fact is that faith is now the principal Brazilian commodity.

Was it a challenge to make a movie without a clear antagonist?

The challenge was understanding what could be the greatest antagonist for a woman who loves God above all things. Instead of an external antagonist who creates difficulties during the protagonist’s journey, when making the film I realized that the most powerful antagonist is her own belief in God and the doubt she has in her Faith.

I was fascinated by the narrative strategy of “Deus Ex Machina,” which was first used in Greek tragedies through the incorporation of God-like /divine characters to narrate unbelievable occurrences. I tried to channel this tool through the use of a never-seen, omniscient narrator. In a film about faith and procreation, I decided to construct the film from the point of view of Joana whilst narrating the film using the voiceover of a Child in the future a “Filous Deus Ex Machina,” who narrates passages and parables with a child’s voice.

ABOUT GABRIEL MASCARO

Gabriel Mascaro is a Brazilian film director, scriptwriter and artist who lives and works in Recife, in the Northeast of Brazil. Initially known for his documentary work, his first fiction film, AUGUST WINDS, premiered in the international competition of Locarno Film Festival in 2014, where it won a special mention. In 2015 he released his second fiction feature, NEON BULL, which won the Orizzonti Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival and went on to receive critical acclaim and numerous awards including two Fenix awards (best Script and best Photography) and was Brazil's entry to the Goya's in 2016. DIVINE LOVE is his third narrative feature.



FILMOGRAPHY

Boi Neon (Neon Bull) 2015, Brazil / Uruguay / Netherlands, 101', Fiction, HD
71st Venice Film Festival - Special Orizzonti Jury Prize
Toronto International Film Festival - Platform Prize - Honorable Mention
Best Film Award - Adelaide Film Festival
Best Film Award - Cartagena Film Festival
Best Film Award - Rio Film Festival
Award for Artistic Bravery - Durban International Film Festival
Best Director - Marrakech International Film Festival
Best Cinematography, Best Screenplay - Fenix Film Awards

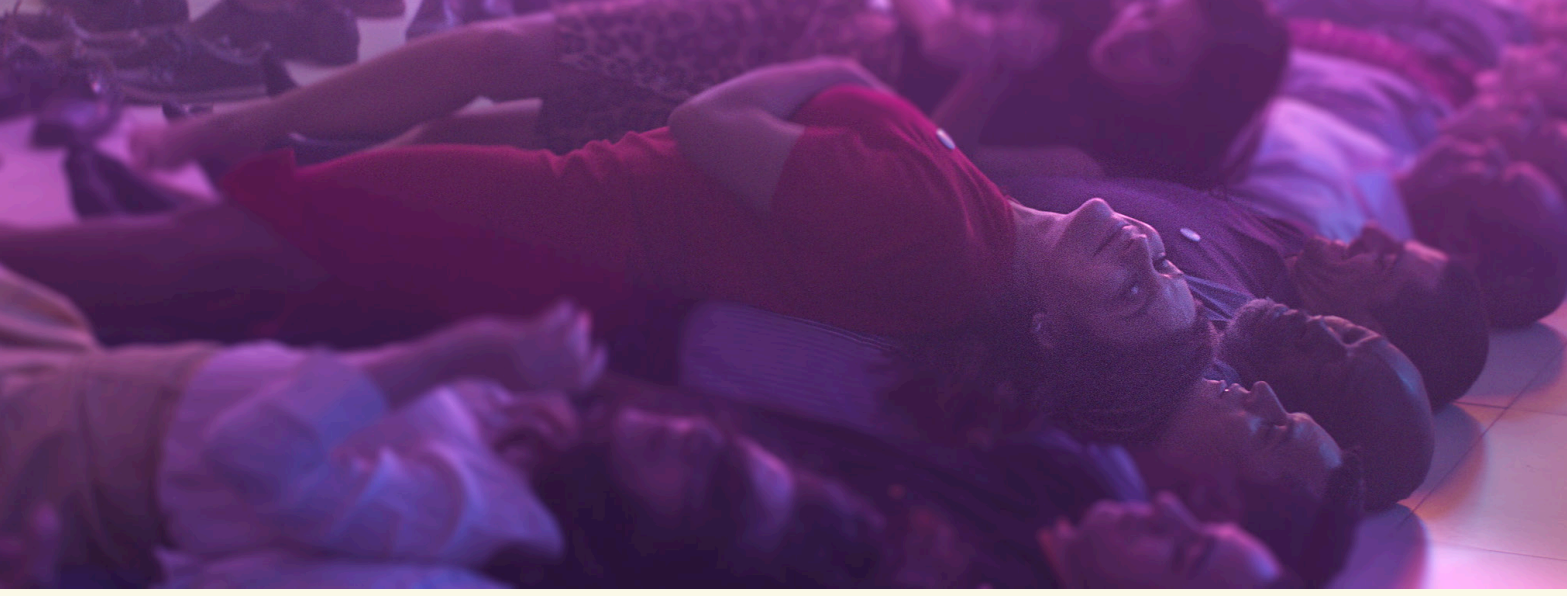
Ventos de Agosto (August Winds) 2014, Brazil, 85', fiction, HD
67th Festival del Filme Locarno, *Special Mention*

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

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





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