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VENEZIA 2008
Competition

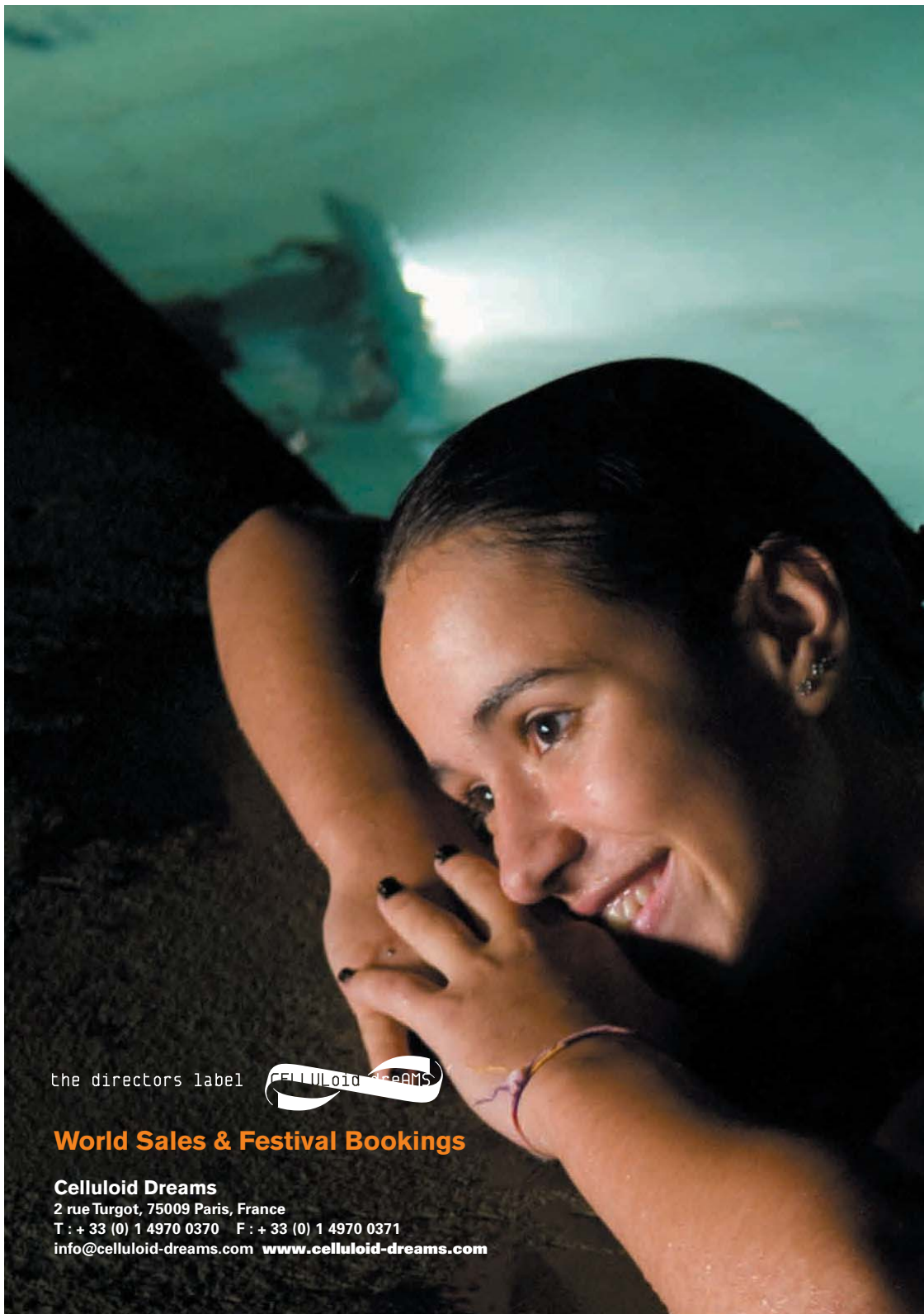
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The film has been recognized as of National Cultural Interest by The Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Direzione Generale per il Cinema

www.birdwatchersfilm.com

CLASSIC Rai Cinema KARTAFILM gullane





the directors label



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a Classic film production
in collaboration with RaiCinema
and with Karta Film - Gullane

ITALY/BRAZIL - 2008 - 108 min - Colour - Portuguese/Guarani



A Marco Bechis **Film**
BIRDWATCHERS

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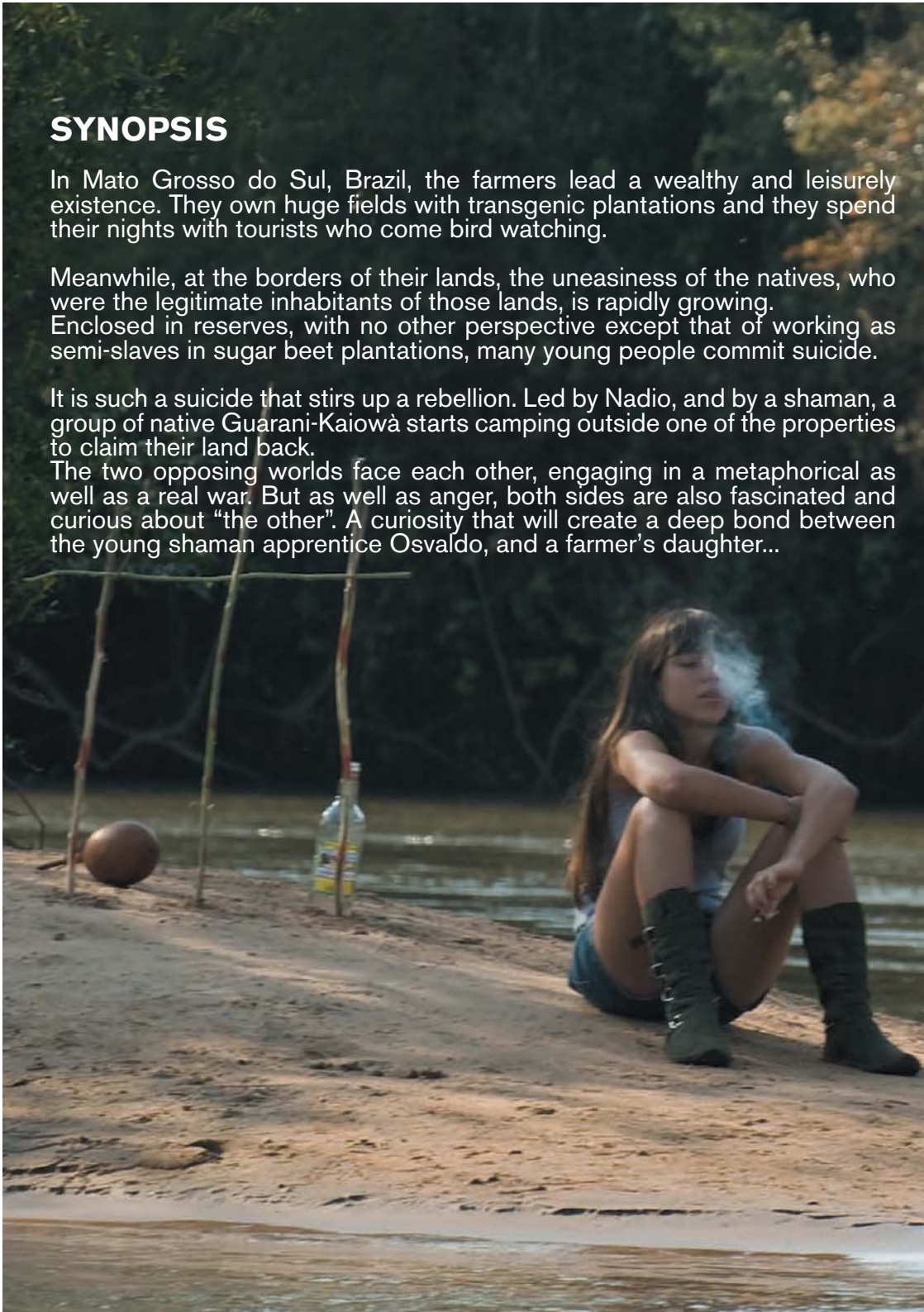
SYNOPSIS

In Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, the farmers lead a wealthy and leisurely existence. They own huge fields with transgenic plantations and they spend their nights with tourists who come bird watching.

Meanwhile, at the borders of their lands, the uneasiness of the natives, who were the legitimate inhabitants of those lands, is rapidly growing. Enclosed in reserves, with no other perspective except that of working as semi-slaves in sugar beet plantations, many young people commit suicide.

It is such a suicide that stirs up a rebellion. Led by Nadio, and by a shaman, a group of native Guarani-Kaiowà starts camping outside one of the properties to claim their land back.

The two opposing worlds face each other, engaging in a metaphorical as well as a real war. But as well as anger, both sides are also fascinated and curious about "the other". A curiosity that will create a deep bond between the young shaman apprentice Osvaldo, and a farmer's daughter...





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The arrival of the Guaraní-Kaiowá on the cinema screens: a cinematographic struggle.

This film is dedicated to the memory of Enrique Ahriman, my friend and mentor, who died in 2002 in Buenos Aires. We talked a lot about our projects. Enrique was a multi-faceted artist but we, his friends, were the works he really cared for. He was always thinking and he thought more about what we had in mind than about his numerous personal works. While he was slowly passing away, we talked a lot about the great genocide of human history, the American Conquest. I was interested in the "problem of the other" which Todorov had thoroughly analyzed in a book of the same title. He suggested me to read Yanoama, the story-interview to Helena Valero, a woman who was kidnapped and held secluded for thirty years, a sort of female Tarzan.

The following year, I made a long trip on the Andean cordillera, among the Indian communities living in Peru and Ecuador. Then I went as far as the Equatorial Amazonia in a small plane with a group of birdwatchers, visiting the Ashuar tribe who met the white man for the first time only forty years ago. When I came back to Milan, I wrote a screenplay on Helena Valero's story straight away and I prepared a trip of location scouting.

I had been following for years the Survival campaigns for the defence of Indian populations. I visited their offices in London and Milan. I gathered information on the tribes still surviving in Latin America and I discovered extremely rare videos on Indians who had just been discovered. Then I learnt about the suicides among the young Guaraní-Kaiowá in Mato Grosso do Sul and of the fights for the reoccupation of their lands, the retomadas. I understood immediately that Guaraní-Kaiowá were the people I had wanted to know for a long time, although I had never heard about them. But I also knew that I couldn't use the screenplay I had written on Helena Valero. And I changed my travel plans, not to Amazonia any longer. I put a 35 mm camera, a notebook, a tape-recorder in my bag and I left with Caterina Giargia (art director and costume designer) for Dourados, one of the main cities of the area, both modern and rich, the centre for the production of the transgenic soya labelled "Monsanto". The town seemed the perfect set for David Lynch's "Twin Peaks". At the bus station, Nereu Schneider, a lawyer, who has taken care of the defense of the Guaraní-Kaiowá for twenty years, was waiting for us. Nereu introduced us to the Indian communities of the region and the first one we visited was Ambrósio's, who later became the protagonist of the film (Nádio). His degraded life story in the Carapó reserve, the occupation of a farm built about sixty years before on the native lands, the daily fights with the farmers, were events which left a mark on the screenplay which I was beginning to write. Ambrósio's was an exemplary story. Five hundred years after the conquest, the conflict was the same as then. The modes had changed, not the substance. The film I wanted to make hovered above those places, but the question was "how" to do the film, using which film language, which devices. I knew that the main problem was choosing the actors who would play those roles, but which professional actors could do it?

I found the answer to this question one afternoon, after a meeting with the government authorities: those native men and women that I was watching while they loudly explained their reasons to Brasília's authorities, were gifted with a sophisticated art of rhetoric, they knew how to speak convincingly, with a great control over their words and body. They were actors. From then on, I always knew with absolute certainty that the film would be made only if I managed to make of those natives the protagonists of the film. Without them, the film would be meaningless.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT cont...

In order to confirm that first intuition, I asked a young native called Osvaldo, of Ambrósio's community, if he was interested in acting in a film. He asked me what being actor in a film meant and I answered that to be an actor meant playing a role, that he had to learn how to act. He thought about it for a while and then replied: "But I play a role every day", "When?" I asked with surprise. "Every day, when I pray". Their rituals are "theatrical" performances, events and conversations with Nhanderu, their God. Acting is part of their ancient tradition.

We started the actual preparation of the film only at the end of 2006 and we started the actors selection. We needed about 230, between main roles, supporting roles and extras. Urbano Palacio, who has a great knowledge of the Guaraní language, travelled round the Indian communities of Mato Grosso do Sul interviewing 800 natives. Then we concentrated on three large communities in the surroundings of Dourados. We had to keep to the communities near the city because we didn't want to uproot the actors from their families for long periods. During the shooting the natives were driven on the set every morning and went back to their communities every night.

Then we examined all the interviewees, one by one, taking decisions on various levels: apart from the expressive potentialities, we had problems which simply don't exist in a conventional casting: we wanted to know before starting shooting if the Indians we had chosen would get to the bottom of their engagement. Our great fear was that our work with the Indians could get interrupted. Everybody repeated that I wouldn't get to the end of the film, that they would leave me half way, that they would protest and strike as they did with Herzog's *Aguirre the Wrath of God* and *Fitzcarraldo* or with Joffé's *The Mission*. But they were unfounded worries: all the Indians we chose continued their work until the end of shooting.

In *The Mission*, the Waunana Colombian natives who played in the film the role of the Guaraní, were always and only background figures beside the principal characters played by Robert de Niro and Jeremy Irons. In my film, I wanted to reverse this cliché giving the Indians the role of protagonists and keeping the professional white actors in the background.

Once the first selection was over, we had about a hundred Indians ready to do the film. I wanted to set them to work before deciding who would play the main roles. I met Luiz Mário, a theatre director who supported me in the preparation work. He had never gone through such an experience as the one I proposed to him. We didn't have to impose classical acting exercises and techniques which we were conscious would break their spontaneity and their originality. We had to start form their cultural and material universe. And we had to keep in mind that they already had a huge "acting" ability: diction, gait, gestures, acting, were all techniques which would make them stiff. So we decided with Luiz Mário to prepare their body, their voice, working on their gestural culture and their tonal scale. We started a series of "theatrical seminars" with the Indians.

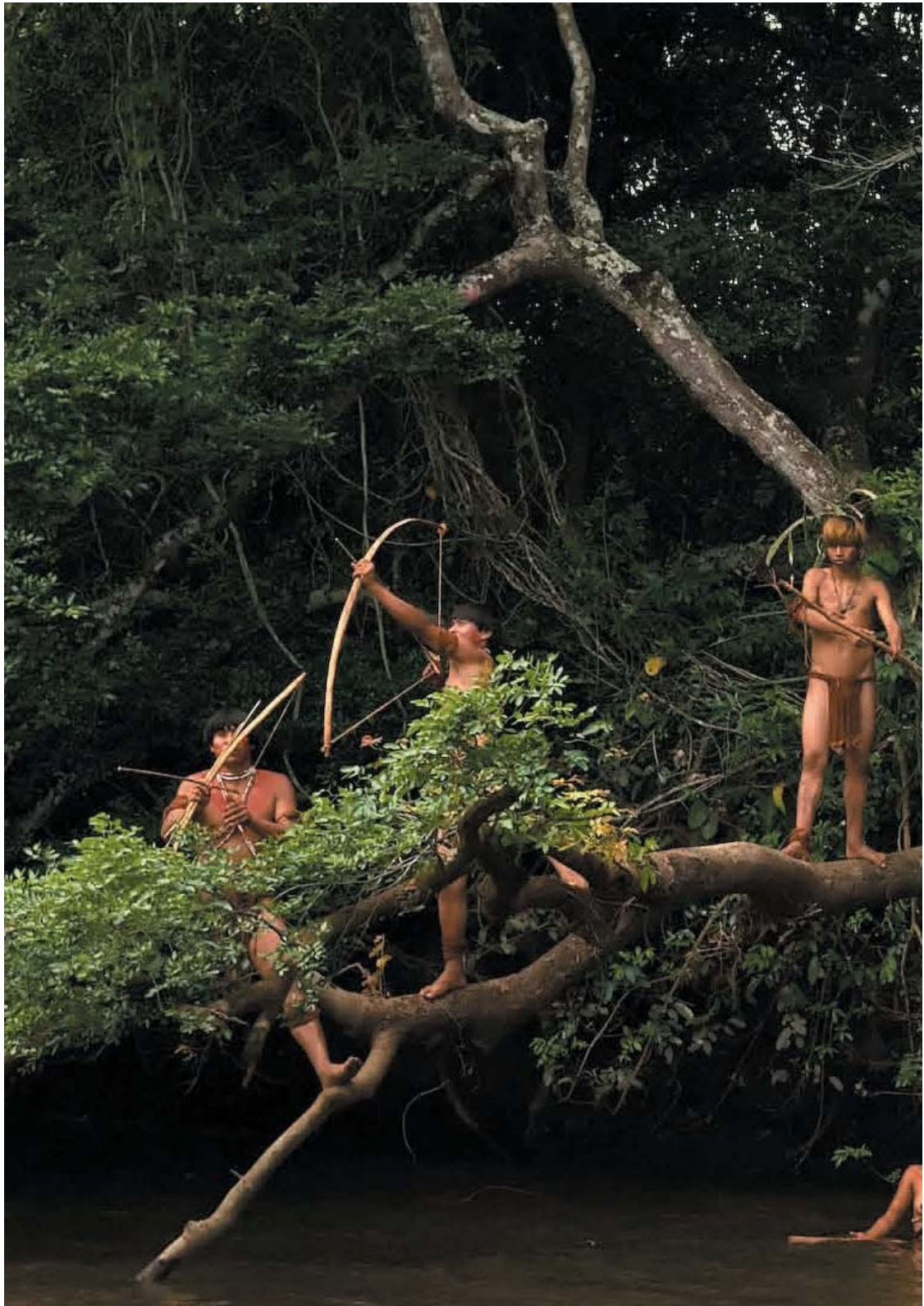
After the first months of work, I watched the first improvisations on video and I realized that something was still not working: the Indians always talked as much as possible, as if silence was prohibited, as if words were the only means of "performing" in the scene they improvised. I thought about their oral tradition, but also about television, which many of them watch. I realized then that they needed to know more about how cinema works, nobody had taught them that as yet. In a make-shift projection room I showed them two sequences with almost no dialogue (*The Birds* by Hitchcock; *Once Upon a Time in the West* by Sergio Leone).

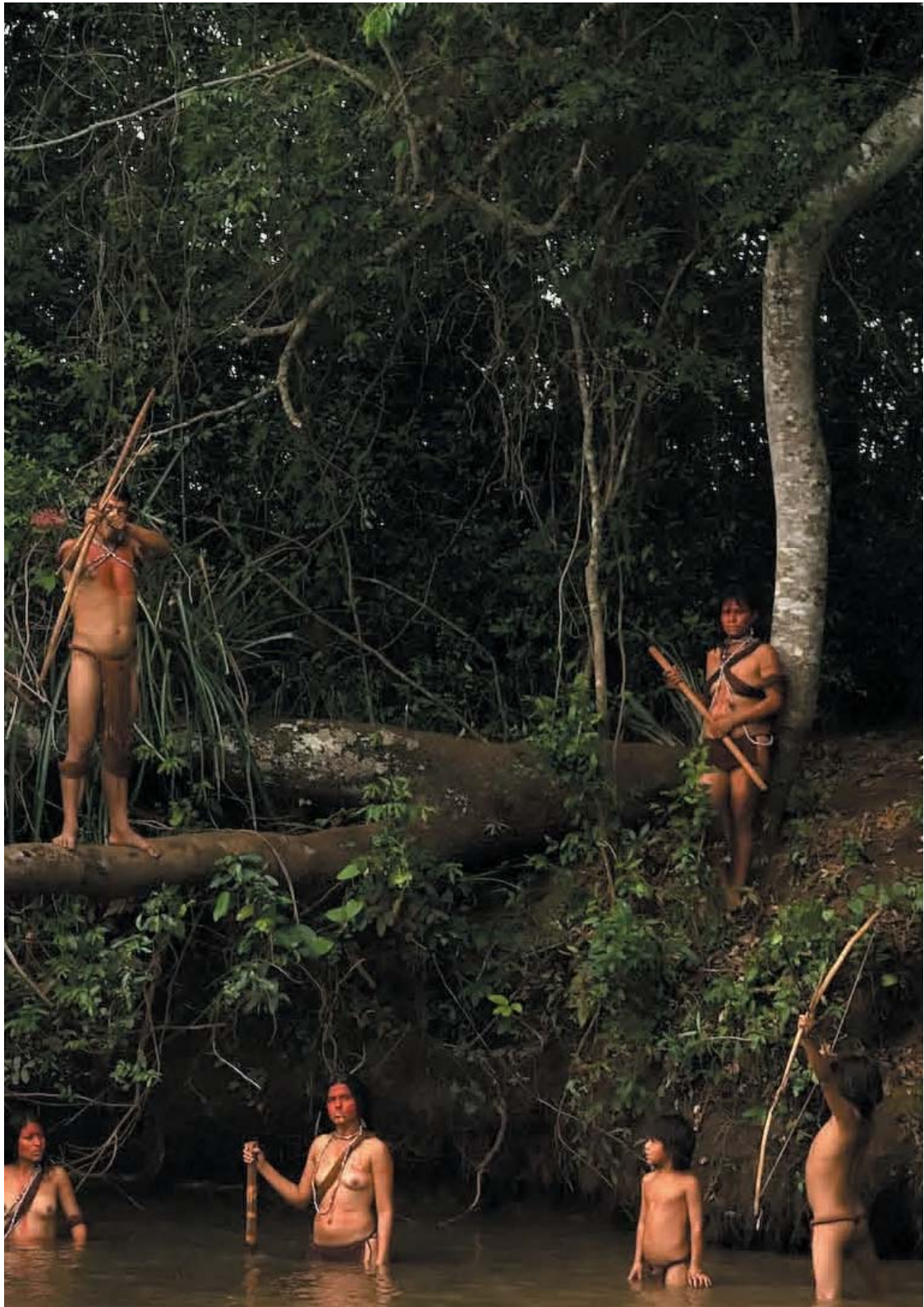
I screened the scenes in three different ways: the sequence as in the original, the same sequence interrupted by two seconds of soundless black screen at each cut, and a third version of the same scene without any sound. I then showed them what happened at each cut, as every scene was composed by many pieces, and all the pieces were the frames we were about to shoot. The interruptions of two seconds of black clarified the concept of scene and frame and, most of all, it clearly showed the cue, so they were beginning to understand how "editing" works. But what I was mainly after was silences. In a speechless sequence of *Once Upon a Time in the West*, I explained the importance of those silences, I made them understand that often those silences are worth more than a hundred words. I warned them, explaining that they were the protagonists of the film but that the supporting actors (Claudio Santamaria, Matheus Nachtergaele, Chiara Caselli, Leonardo Medeiros) were professionals who knew very well how to use those silences in a scene and knew very well how to take their time before replying. In front of Leone's and Hitchcock's images they immediately saw what I meant. During the shooting, it was enough for me to say: "remember *Once Upon a Time in the West*..." and Ambrósio would say: "I know what you mean, Marco", and he made long pauses looking at the white man, before speaking. Their rapid time of learning was incredible. They became actors in five months.

Matheus Nachtergaele, the Brazilian actor who plays Dimas in the film, asked the script writer Luiz Bolognesi if he thought it was a good idea to play another film with the same Indians, as Matheus is also a director. Luiz answered on the spot: "Actors normally don't play in one film only".

Marco Bechis







Guarani-Kaiowá

When Europeans first arrived in South America, the Guarani were among the first peoples they met. At that time, the Guarani numbered more than 1.5 million, spread across present-day Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina. Today only a fraction of that number survives. In Brazil there are three Guarani groups, of which the Kaiowá is the most numerous, numbering around 30,000. They live in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, in the southern part of Brazil, near the border with Paraguay.

The Guarani-Kaiowá are the descendants of those indigenous people who, at the end of the 1600s, refused to enter the Jesuit missions. Despite centuries of contact with foreigners, they have maintained their own distinct identity, and are a profoundly spiritual people. Many communities have a communal prayer house and a religious leader, the pajé, whose authority is based on prestige rather than power. All Guarani share a religion that attributes supreme importance to the earth, the origin and source of life, and gift of the 'great father', Nande Ru. The Guarani experience the invasion of their land not only as theft, but also as a serious assault on their very identity.

Their problems

The Guarani of Brazil suffer terribly from the loss of almost all their land, which has been steadily taken over and destroyed by ranchers and farmers since the end of the 1800s. 'Mato Grosso' means 'thick forest' but there is barely any forest left. In the last fifteen years, much of the (already small) area that the Kaiowá have been trying to protect has been lost, and today it measures less than 25,000 hectares. Some Kaiowá live in small government reserves completely surrounded by ranches and plantations, others in shantytowns on the edges of the cities. None have enough land to sustain them through hunting, fishing and agriculture, and many children suffer from severe malnutrition.

In order to survive, adults and young people are forced to find work as seasonal labourers in the sugar cane plantations and alcohol distilleries that surround their lands.

Brazil has been one of the world's leading biofuels producers for decades, and most of its cars can run on ethanol. The country also aims to become a leading exporter of ethanol, with ambitious plans to export 26 billion litres a year by 2010. Much of the sugar cane from which the ethanol is produced is grown on the land previously occupied by the Guarani's forests. In Mato Grosso do Sul state alone, there are eleven sugar mills and ethanol distilleries, with another thirty under construction, and plans for a total of sixty.

Three months of work in conditions of semi-slavery often provide only a few tens of dollars per person, but even this last means of support is drying up, as increasing mechanisation renders the previously large workforce unnecessary.

In the last 20 years, over 517 Guarani-Kaiowá have committed suicide: many were young people. The youngest, Luciane Ortiz, was only 9 years old. Tired of waiting for the authorities to intervene, for some years now the communities have begun to reoccupy their lands (in actions known as retomadas) provoking violent reactions from the farmers and their gunmen who intimidate, beat up and even kill the Indians.

The Brazilian context

460,000 indigenous people; 225 tribes; 40-60 uncontacted groups; 12% of Brazil designated as Indian land; 0% of land Indian-owned.

The Indian population of Brazil consists of a huge variety of peoples, spread throughout the country from the tropical rain forests to the prairies and savannahs. The size of these tribes varies greatly. Some, such as the Guarani and Yanomami, number in the tens of thousands. Others are virtually extinct – only six Akuntsu survive, for example.

Along with Suriname, Brazil is the only South American country that does not recognise the rights of Indians to the ownership of their land, in violation of international law. Although there is a department of Indian affairs [FUNAI – Fundação Nacional do Índio] and some government projects are aimed at the indigenous population, in many states the authorities do little to protect the Indians who, throughout the 20th century, have become extinct at an average rate of one tribe every two years. Today, the existence of Brazil's tribal peoples is seriously threatened by racism, a general impunity for crimes committed against them, deforestation, mining, hydroelectric projects, roads and a rapid increase in the cultivation of biofuels, especially soya, sugar cane and maize.

The key to their survival is a proper recognition of their land rights by the Brazilian government, and the full observance of both ILO Convention 169 (the key international law on tribal people, ratified by Brazil in 2002), and of the UN Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Source: Survival International



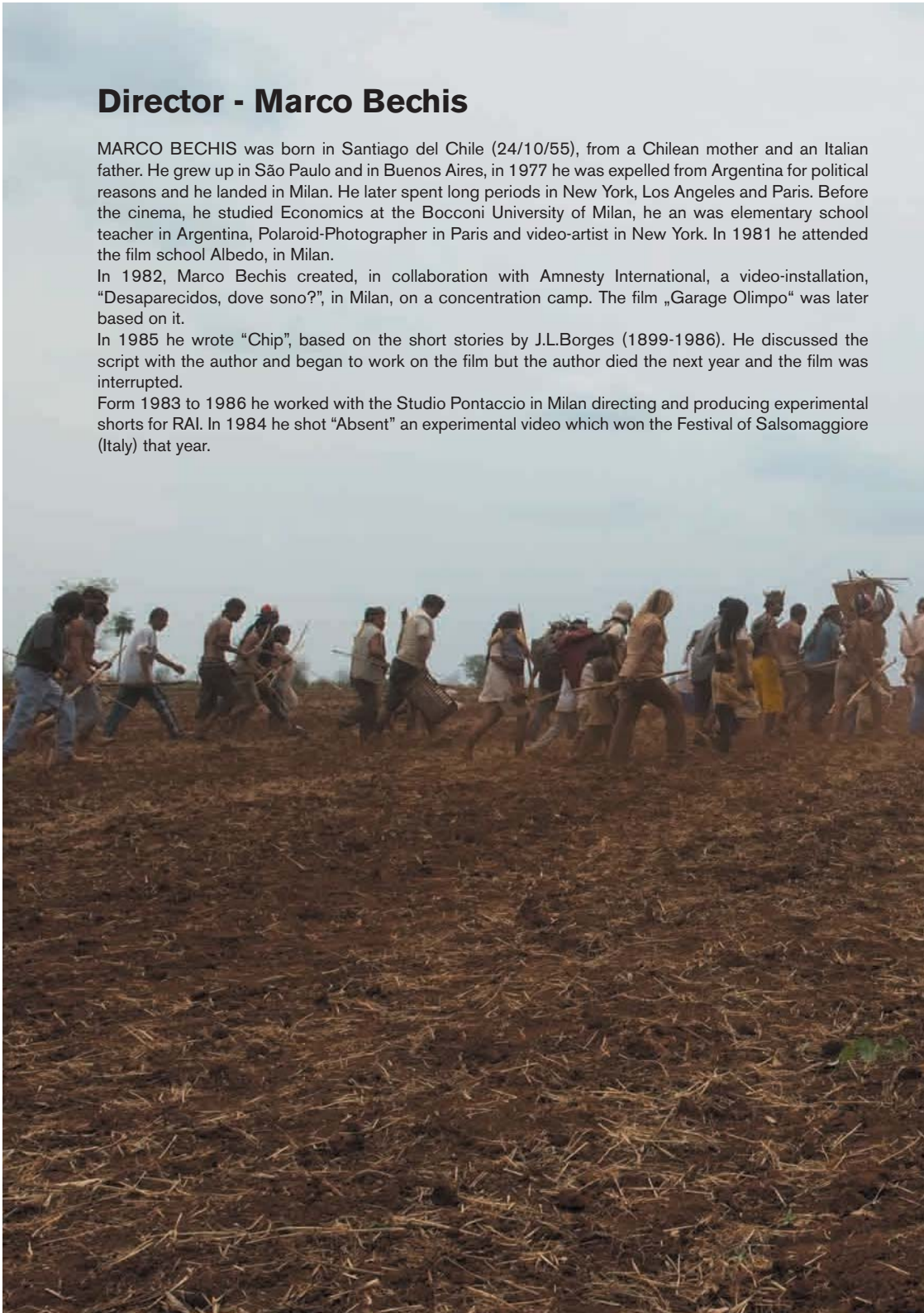
Director - Marco Bechis

MARCO BECHIS was born in Santiago del Chile (24/10/55), from a Chilean mother and an Italian father. He grew up in São Paulo and in Buenos Aires, in 1977 he was expelled from Argentina for political reasons and he landed in Milan. He later spent long periods in New York, Los Angeles and Paris. Before the cinema, he studied Economics at the Bocconi University of Milan, he was an elementary school teacher in Argentina, Polaroid-Photographer in Paris and video-artist in New York. In 1981 he attended the film school Albedo, in Milan.

In 1982, Marco Bechis created, in collaboration with Amnesty International, a video-installation, "Desaparecidos, dove sono?", in Milan, on a concentration camp. The film „Garage Olimpo“ was later based on it.

In 1985 he wrote "Chip", based on the short stories by J.L.Borges (1899-1986). He discussed the script with the author and began to work on the film but the author died the next year and the film was interrupted.

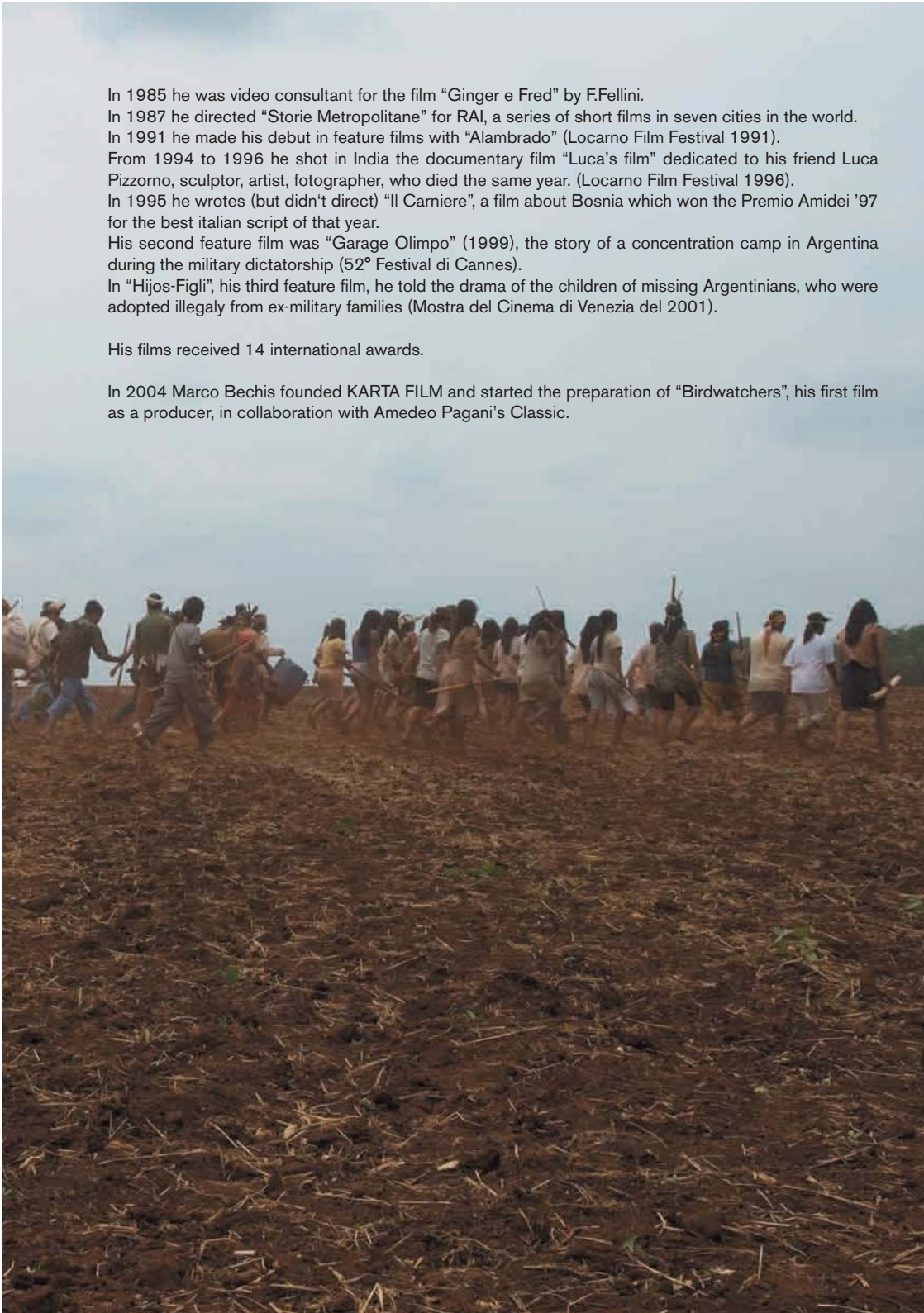
From 1983 to 1986 he worked with the Studio Pontaccio in Milan directing and producing experimental shorts for RAI. In 1984 he shot "Absent" an experimental video which won the Festival of Salsomaggiore (Italy) that year.

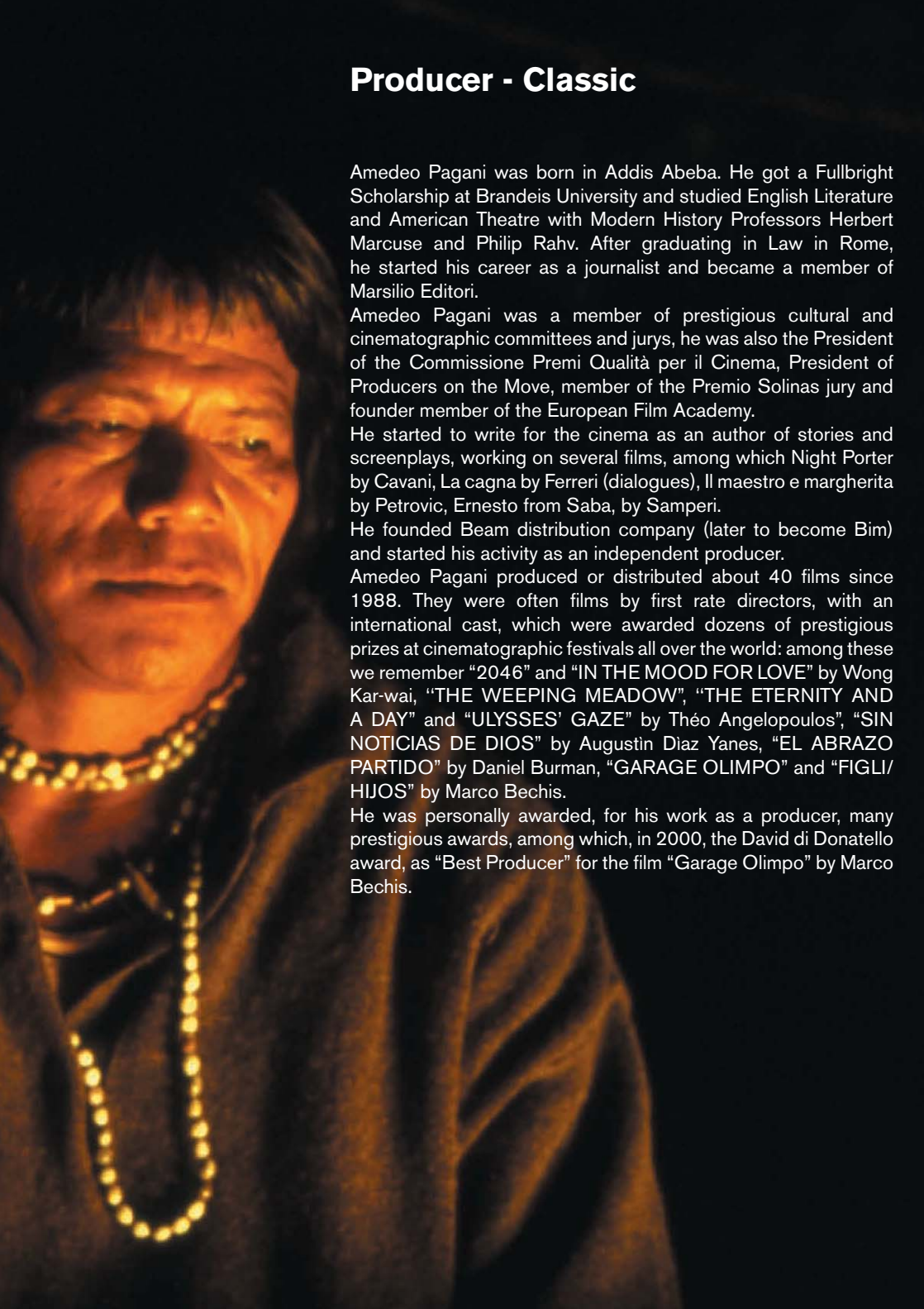


In 1985 he was video consultant for the film "Ginger e Fred" by F.Fellini.
In 1987 he directed "Storie Metropolitane" for RAI, a series of short films in seven cities in the world.
In 1991 he made his debut in feature films with "Alambrado" (Locarno Film Festival 1991).
From 1994 to 1996 he shot in India the documentary film "Luca's film" dedicated to his friend Luca Pizzorno, sculptor, artist, fotographer, who died the same year. (Locarno Film Festival 1996).
In 1995 he wrotes (but didn't direct) "Il Carniere", a film about Bosnia which won the Premio Amidei '97 for the best italian script of that year.
His second feature film was "Garage Olimpo" (1999), the story of a concentration camp in Argentina during the military dictatorship (52° Festival di Cannes).
In "Hijos-Figli", his third feature film, he told the drama of the children of missing Argentinians, who were adopted illegaly from ex-military families (Mostra del Cinema di Venezia del 2001).

His films received 14 international awards.

In 2004 Marco Bechis founded KARTA FILM and started the preparation of "Birdwatchers", his first film as a producer, in collaboration with Amedeo Pagani's Classic.



A close-up portrait of Amedeo Pagani, a man with dark hair and a serious expression, wearing a dark jacket and a long, dark beaded necklace. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on his face and the necklace against a dark background.

Producer - Classic

Amedeo Pagani was born in Addis Abeba. He got a Fullbright Scholarship at Brandeis University and studied English Literature and American Theatre with Modern History Professors Herbert Marcuse and Philip Rahv. After graduating in Law in Rome, he started his career as a journalist and became a member of Marsilio Editori.

Amedeo Pagani was a member of prestigious cultural and cinematographic committees and juries, he was also the President of the Commissione Premi Qualità per il Cinema, President of Producers on the Move, member of the Premio Solinas jury and founder member of the European Film Academy.

He started to write for the cinema as an author of stories and screenplays, working on several films, among which Night Porter by Cavani, La cagna by Ferreri (dialogues), Il maestro e margherita by Petrovic, Ernesto from Saba, by Samperi.

He founded Beam distribution company (later to become Bim) and started his activity as an independent producer.

Amedeo Pagani produced or distributed about 40 films since 1988. They were often films by first rate directors, with an international cast, which were awarded dozens of prestigious prizes at cinematographic festivals all over the world: among these we remember "2046" and "IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE" by Wong Kar-wai, "THE WEeping MEADOW", "THE ETERNITY AND A DAY" and "ULYSSES' GAZE" by Théo Angelopoulos, "SIN NOTICIAS DE DIOS" by Augustin Diaz Yanes, "EL ABRAZO PARTIDO" by Daniel Burman, "GARAGE OLIMPO" and "FIGLI/ HIJOS" by Marco Bechis.

He was personally awarded, for his work as a producer, many prestigious awards, among which, in 2000, the David di Donatello award, as "Best Producer" for the film "Garage Olimpo" by Marco Bechis.

Producer - Gullane

Founded in 1996, Gullane is one of today's better known and most respected Brazilian production companies. A focus on international co-productions is the company's trademark. Besides Birdwatchers, Gullane presents in Venice two other films: the Brazilian-Chinese co-production, also in Competition, Plastic City, by Yu Likwai and the horror film Embodiment of Evil, by José Mojica Marins, Out of Competition. Also in September Gullane is releasing in Latin America with HBO the television series Alice.

Main feature productions

Plastic City, by Yu Likwai, 2008

in co-production with Xstream Pictures and with Bitters End and Sundream, 110 min
COMPETITION – VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

Embodiment of Evil, by José Mojica Marins, 2008

In co-production with Olhos de Cão, Fiction, 90 min
OUT OF COMPETITION – VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

The Ballroom, by Lais Bodanzky, 2008

In co-production with Buriti Filmes and Miravista, Fiction, 94 min

Querô, by Carlos Cortez, 2007

Fiction, 90 min

The Year My Parents Went on Vacation, by Cao Hamburger, 2006

In co-production with Caos Produções and Miravista, Fiction, 104 min
COMPETITION – BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL AND TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL

Carandiru, by Hector Babenco, 2003

HB Filmes' Production, in co-production with Sony Pictures Classics, Globo Filmes, Fabiano Gullane and Flavio Tambellini, Fiction, 147 min
COMPETITION – CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

Brainstorm, by Lais Bodanzky, 2001

In co-production with Buriti Filmes, Dezenove and Fabrica Cinema, Fiction, 88 min
YOUTH JURY AWARD AT LOCARNO / BEST FILM AT BIARRITZ / BEST FIRST FILM AT TRIESTE,
CARTAGENA, CRÉTÉIL / OFFICIAL SELECTION AT TORONTO, MONTREAL



CREW

DIRECTOR
STORY
SCREENPLAY

Marco Bechis
Marco Bechis
Marco Bechis
Luiz Bolognesi
with the collaboration of Lara Fremder

CINEMATOGRAPHER
ART DIRECTOR

Hélcio Alemão Nagamine
Clóvis Bueno

COSTUME DESIGNER

Caterina Giargia
Caterina Giargia
Valeria Stefani

COACH
INDIAN CASTING

Luiz Mário Vicente
Urbano Palacio

SOUND
EDITOR
MUSIC

Nereu Schneider
Gaspar Scheuer
Jacopo Quadri
Domenico Zipoli (1688-1726)

PRODUCTION
in collaboration with
and with

Andrea Guerra
Classic (Italia)
Rai Cinema (Italia)
Karta Film (Italia)
Gullane (Brasile)

THE FILM HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED AS OF NATIONAL CULTURAL INTEREST BY THE MINISTERO
PER I BENI E LE ATTIVITÀ CULTURALI - DIREZIONE GENERALE PER IL CINEMA

PRODUCED BY

Amedeo Pagani
Marco Bechis
Fabiano Gullane
Caio Gullane



CAST

ABRÍSIO DA SILVA PEDRO
ALICÉLIA BATISTA CABREIRA
ADEMILSON CONCIANZA VERGA (KIKI)
AMBRÓSIO VILHALVA
CLAUDIO SANTAMARIA
MATHEUS NACHTERGAELE
FABIANE PEREIRA DA SILVA
CHIARA CASELLI
LEONARDO MEDEIROS
NELSON CONCIANZA
POLI FERNANDEZ SOUZA
ELIANE JUCA DA SILVA
INÉIA ARCE GONÇALVES

OSVALDO
LIA
IRENEU
NADIO
THE SCARECROW
DIMAS
MARIA
THE FARMER'S WIFE
THE FARMER
THE SHAMAN
TITO
MAMI
THE HOUSEMAID



the directors label

