



OFFICIAL
SELECTION

INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
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MADALENA

DIRECTED BY **MADIANO MARCHETI**



INTERNATIONAL SALES

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PóloFilme, Raccord Produções, Viralata e Terceira Margem
present



NATÁLIA MAZARIM

RAFAEL DE BONA

PAMELLA YULE

MADALENA

DIRECTED BY **MADIANO MARCHETI**

BRAZIL | 85' | COLOUR | SCOPE | 5.1 | PORTUGUESE W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES

SYNOPSIS

Luziane, Cristiano, and Bianca have almost nothing in common, beside the fact that they all live in the same rural city surrounded by soy fields in western Brazil. While they don't know one another, each of them is affected by Madalena's disappearance. In different parts of the town, each in their own way, they react to her absence.



INTERVIEW WITH MADIANO MARCHETI



Madiano Marcheti on Madalena's set.

Where did you get the idea to make *Madalena*, your first feature film?

Well, to explain that, first I have to say a bit about where I come from. The film sprang from a desire to reflect on issues that are specific to the region where I grew up, which is still under-filmed and barely discussed even within Brazil. I'm from the northern part of Mato Grosso, a part of the Brazilian agricultural frontier that has been transformed beyond recognition over the past sixty years.

During the military dictatorship, during the 1960s and 1970s, the government sponsored massive campaigns encouraging families to migrate to southern Amazonia so as to populate the region and create a hub for agriculture and livestock. Thousands of families heeded the call and founded new cities in search of a better life, hewing to the development plan proposed by the State. The part that's normally left out of this story, though, is that the region had already been settled by countless Indigenous groups who had already seen their homelands eaten away by real estate speculation. The model of development applied to the region would have devastating consequences for the local Indigenous population and the environment, as well as being painfully unequal.

I was born to poor parents who put down roots in one of the young cities on the Amazonian frontier, a region which in under a half-century became a powerhouse for the cultivation and export of soybeans and corn. I am fully aware that my family and I are the result of this very recent migration; and while I am proud of my origins, it would be blindness not to recognize the grave damage this process has wrought, both on nature and in terms of the erasure of indigenous peoples.

With that in mind, *Madalena* was always essentially a film about a place, about the place I come from, and about how its recent metamorphosis has affected the natural landscape and the people who make their lives there.

... and how did you arrive at trans issues as a guiding thread?

While the idea of the film came from the desire to speak about the literal place I come from, I also wanted to address a "place" of another sort: namely, the experience of being a LGBTQIA+ person

in that part of Brazil. About the experience of not fitting in to the dominant mores. As a gay man, I felt that keenly throughout my childhood and adolescence, and it was important for me to bring the issue to the screen. The idea was to reflect on the specific social dynamics of my region while focusing on the ways in which they affect people's lives, especially those who are relegated to the margins, whose very existence is seen as an affront to dominant social norms.

That being said, as I developed the research and script, I ultimately gave up the initial idea of having a gay or lesbian lead and decided that the story should be guided by a trans protagonist, Madalena. Trans people are murdered in Brazil at shocking levels; and at every point on the spectrum of anti-LGBTQIA+ violence, they are also the likeliest to suffer and lose their lives. Given my goal of addressing the impact of oppressive social forces on the expression of gender and sexuality, it seemed both clear and urgent to focus on the trans experience.

Although Madalena's name lends the film its title, she's dead from the first scene. That seems like a risky choice...

It is the riskiest choice in the film, but it makes a lot of sense for me. As much as I see *Madalena* as a film about life and resilience (especially when I think about the way that many travestis and trans women deal with the experience of mourning), or about forms of resistance, the deaths caused by transphobia remain a glaring reality. One shameful and telling data point: the life expectancy for trans people in Brazil is just 35.

So while I never sought to exploit death from an aesthetic point of view or craft anything along the lines of a violent police procedural, by the same token I felt unable to avoid the issue. Hence the idea of having the film revolve around the absence, the disappearance of Madalena. The film is not concerned with investigating how she was killed or even by whom, but rather the forces that fuel this sort of crime; and her absence becomes a presence that moves the film forward. In this sense, we are brought to witness how each of the three main characters reacts to Madalena's absence. The disillusioned young woman living on the poor outskirts of town, the farmer's son seeking to earn his parents' respect, and Madalena's friends who push on in spite of their tragic loss. I was drawn to the characters' different reactions to her disappearance as they relate to the crisis of

empathy – or the lack thereof – which has plagued our country in recent years. It has become all-important to reflect on how we as a society react to and position ourselves in light of the physical, discursive, and institutional violence perpetrated against trans people.

What do you mean by a crisis of empathy?

When I say “crisis of empathy,” I'm referring to the inability to identify with the emotions of another, an issue which is typically exacerbated when that “Other” is seen as a deviation from the norm, as is the case with trans people. This is nothing intrinsically new, but the far-right wave sweeping Brazil has aggravated what was already an appalling situation. Policy is dictated by fear, and the result has been an escalation of violence against the bodies of people seen as “deviants.” Ours is still the nation that murders the most transexuals in the world, and that is by no means a coincidence. Beyond the economic, political, and health crisis that Brazil is facing right now, we are grappling with that crisis of empathy. The way to get through it will be to remake our social and emotional fabric. What I mean to say is that bodies seen as enemies by a part of society must be humanized (rather, properly understood to be human), and that practicing empathy is a fundamental part of that process.

In the film, certain characters seem unable to act or feel in light of Madalena's death. This is what I'm talking about, people rendered incapable of seeing themselves in another's pain. On the other hand, we also get to see the perspective of one of Madalena's best friends, Bianca, another trans woman. Even as she mourns, Bianca keeps on striving to fulfill her dreams. The film seeks to affirm life through Bianca's story; her presence manifests as resistance, a declaration of joy as vital power. I read somewhere that oppression requires melancholy in order to strengthen itself and prevail, and so I like to think that happiness is the ultimate form of resistance. In that sense, *Madalena* suggests empathy rather than pity.

Beyond Madalena herself, the absent presence at the heart of the film, and the three main characters, the landscape is a major presence in the narrative. How did you arrive at the aesthetic decisions that make the setting itself yet another main character?

When I think about the multiple perspectives in the film, I like to say that the points of view are so

diverse that not all of them are human. The animals, the soybean fields, the forest, the machines are all important characters in the story. Not only do they bear meaning, they create tension. In the choices that went into the image and the mise-en-scène, the screen format and so on, I always sought to consider all those aspects.

For example, we shot the machines that work the soybean fields like monsters, creatures that shamble across the inhospitable landscape that has become their home. The rheas, the only animals that seem able to survive in the green soybean “desert,” are going through their own narrative: they’re seeing and feeling things beyond the human experience. Meanwhile, the soybean fields and the forest are two worlds in collision. On one side, a nature tamed by the human hand, by technologies, tools and chemical substances, from fertilizers to pesticides. On the other, an island of jungle, increasingly cornered by those vast fields, but which manages to hang onto something of its wildness and spontaneity.

With that in mind, I worked with the team, especially the cinematographers, to shape the mise-en-scène around the dynamic between human and nonhuman bodies, tame and wild landscapes.

The sound is also a big part of that, often working to create tension in quite unexpected ways...

That’s true. There are two major layers within the film’s soundscape. The first contains music and diegetic sound that helps to give a sense for life in that part of Brazil; and the second layer is made up of sounds from concrete, natural elements that become a quasi-soundtrack. I was initially interested in hearing just how the wind blowing over the soybean plants sounded, the crickets, the drones hovering over the plantation, the machines spraying pesticides. Then I worked to see how those sounds could come together to give the impression that this space, the soybean fields in particular, is somehow hostile and strange: a world gone awry.



INTERVIEW WITH PAMELLA YULLE



Pamella Yulle on Madalena's set.

How was the preparation for your role as Bianca in *Madalena*? How was the character-building process?

I feel that Bianca was written for me. We have so many things in common, like having a day job and a fiancé, for instance, or her respect and care for her friends, who are like her family; these are things that I value and strive for on a daily basis. During the preparation process, the hardest part for me was to hear the countless stories that the other actresses taking part in the cast selection workshops would share about violent losses of friends, or the neglect from the police when the girls would find themselves in need of protection. But, overall, the preparation was a lot of fun despite the whole anxiety that we always go through, you know? That second guessing that makes you wonder if your performance was good enough, if you delivered what they were looking for... My main goal was to always bring truth to my performance, especially because I am not a professional actress, even though I love performing.

What does the cinema from the Central-West region of Brazil bring differently? What is the importance of having a film like *Madalena* being made available internationally and of telling this story in particular?

Madalena brings to light the realities of Brazilians living in regions driven by agribusiness. However, I myself, despite having lived in Mato Grosso do Sul since always, had never seen how large the plantations can really be, and how they completely transform and reshape the natural landscape. Showcasing this specific issue interwoven with the life stories of those who live in that context can give international, but also national, audiences an opportunity to see Brazil through a different perspective, and get to know lesser-known manifestations of our culture. I believe that the film invites people to look at us, transgender people, with more humane eyes, so they finally understand that the problem is not our existence or our choice of living our lives and of being happy the way we are. We are common people, but who still lack the opportunities and the respect that we deserve.

Which would be the most fascinating trait of Bianca's character that could resonate with the audience?

Her empathy and the way she handles problems, always caring and attentive to those around her.

There are differences between the experiences of being a trans person living in big cities or in the countryside of Brazil. As you hail from the same region where the film was shot, do you believe that the specificities of being a trans person and living in that region are somehow portrayed in the film?

I think so. Look, Brazil is a country the size of a continent. Just as people from different regions have their own cultural peculiarities, it's also interesting to see how trans people also live their lives in places other than big cities. I think that the movie is a great portrayal of the experience of being trans in that specific geographical context. It shows, for instance, how easy it is to get rid of a trans body and get away scot-free, how easy it is for one of us to make a fool of ourselves romantically, how our dreams can be built up and knocked down, and how we sometimes wind up living off emotional crumbs.

There is a moment in the film when Madalena's friends get together and somehow say goodbye to her. How do you see this moment?

I see my character's arc as a breath in the film, a moment when the characters are human and warm. Despite the grief and loss, the feeling of injustice and the fact that they are missing their beloved friend, they move on. That moment conveys the message that nothing can break us down when we have our family beside us. And by family I do not necessarily mean the people who share the same blood.





THE DIRECTOR

Madiano Marcheti was born and raised in the state of Mato Grosso, in Brazil's Amazon region. *Madalena* is his first feature film. He is currently working on his next feature film *Mother of Gold* while he develops the script for the projects *Images of the Dungeon* (Dir. Carolina Aleixo) and *Muff on Muff* (Dir. Lia Kulakauskas). Previously, he directed the short film *The Coldest Place in Rio*, which was selected by the Cinélatino Festival 27èmes Rencontres de Toulouse and several other festivals, and was awarded at the VII Festival Janela Internacional de Cinema de Recife. He also directed the short films *The Weight of Loving You*, *In Transit* and *Void*, screened in several Brazilian festivals.



LETTER FROM THE PRODUCERS



When *Madalena's* treatment crossed our desks five years ago, we were immediately fascinated by the idea of a film that dared to explore places and characters rarely seen in Brazilian cinema. While it sought to portray a number of life experiences in the world of agribusiness, it also proposed a unique take on being LGBTQIA+ in that setting.

The drive to make *Madalena* a reality brought together four Brazilian production companies from across the country, invested in telling this story, the debut feature from director Madiano Marcheti. The film is enriched by the eye of a filmmaker born and raised in the region where plantations meet – and encroach upon – the Amazon rainforest.

From the very start, we were convinced that the film's fresh approach would require a diverse, largely young team. In the same spirit, the cast was almost wholly drawn from local talents in the places where it was shot.

Madalena was made possible thanks to investments from the Brazilian government's fund for audiovisual production, which served to create jobs and help train up-and-coming professionals. The strength and originality of the work is an expression of the resistance and resilience of Brazil's cinema, which has forged on in spite of the blows struck at the cultural sector in recent years.

Clélia Bessa, Joel Pizzini, Sérgio Pedrosa, Marcos Pieri and Beatriz Martins



CAST & CREW

Cast

Natália Mazarim
Rafael de Bona
Pamella Yule
Chloe Milan
Mariane Cáceres
Nádja Mitidiero
Joana Castro
Edilton Ramos
Maria Leite
Antonio Salvador
Lucas Miralles

Directed by

Madiano Marcheti

Produced by

Clélia Bessa
Joel Pizzini
Sérgio Pedrosa
Marcos Pieri
Beatriz Martins

Written by

Madiano Marcheti
Thiago Gallego
Thiago Ortman
Tiago Coelho

Consultant Writer

Helena Vieira

Production Manager

Beatriz Martins
Marcos Pieri

Associate Producer

Rosane Svartman

1st Assistant Director

Renata Rodarte

Photographers

Guilherme Tostes
Tiago Rios

Editor

Lia Kulakauskas

Art Director

Rocio Moure

Costume Design

Preta Marques

Hair & Make Up

Dani Shuña

Sound

Ana Luiza Penna

Casting

Giovani Barros

Original Soundtrack

Junior Marcheti

Sound Design and Sound Mixer

Bernardo Uzeda

International Sales

Wide

National Distributor

Vitrine Filmes







SALES AGENT

wide

DISTRIBUTION



PRODUCTION



CO-PRODUCTION



CULTURAL SUPPORT

CANAL BRASIL



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