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Rifle

Davi Pretto

Producer Paola Wink, Paulo de Carvalho, Gudula Meinzolt.
Production companies Tokyo Filmes (Porto Alegre, Brazil), Autentika Films (Berlin, Germany), Casa de Cinema de Porto Alegre (Porto Alegre, Brazil), Gogó Conteúdo Sonoro (Porto Alegre, Brazil). **Director** Davi Pretto. **Screenplay** Davi Pretto, Richard Tavares. **Director of photography** Glauco Firpo. **Editor** Bruno Carboni. **Music** Davi Pretto, Marcos Lopes, Tiago Bello. **Sound design** Marcos Lopes, Tiago Bello. **Sound** Marcos Lopes. **Production design** Richard Tavares.

With Dione Avila de Oliveira (Dione), Evaristo Goularte (Evaristo), Andressa Goularte (Andressa), Elizabete Nogueira (Bete), Livia Goularte (Livia), Francisco Fabrício Dutra dos Santos (Mariano), Sofia Ferreira (Vitória).

Colour. 88 min. Portuguese.

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World sales Patra Spanou Film Marketing & Consulting

The southern Brazilian plains seem to go on forever, how can such a landscape ever be tamed? You can build roads, put up fences, herd sheep into the enclosures, and keep a watchful eye. But no one can be everywhere at once and they come in at night. The photos recall happier days when this was the new frontier, but people are leaving and the corporations are moving in. They send out their emissaries to buy up the land, their vehicles mark out the boundaries afresh. Dione left the city behind to come here, but now he's the only one that wants to stay. As his new situation crumbles, he decides to take matters into his own hands and impose a different order on the great expanse. He finds a rifle, chooses his position, takes his aim, and shoots, shattering windows, bursting tires, turning cars into balls of flame. Yet even gunshots hardly break the silence and each act of violence is decoupled from consequence, for the pampa swallows everything. The more Dione tries to keep the landscape in line, the bigger it seems, or maybe it's just him getting smaller. The southern Brazilian plains seem to go on forever. How can such a landscape be tamed?

James Lattimer

Silent violence

Rifle is a film about the identity of the people who inhabit an empty, post-exodus, rural countryside in the southernmost part of my country, and who are increasingly forced to resort to an urban life of decay. Because of that, it ends up also being a film about violence; not only about physical violence, but also about a type of silent violence that derives from the daily co-existence with a limitless expansionist capitalism; from the relationship between man and machine; and from the idea of succeeding in life and being someone. In this film, I wanted to explore a mixture of genres, as I have done in my first feature, but with a different approach. Whereas in *Castanha*, the actors play themselves in a sort of plot that revolves around crime and drama, in *Rifle* the inhabitants of the region play the characters of a story that is not their own – even if it could be – in a narrative between a road movie, a Western and suspense. It is an impulsive, harrowing and destructive journey.

Davi Pretto

The land distribution

Rifle was shot in Vacaíqua, southern Brazil, near the border with Uruguay, using non-professional actors from the region. The social and political aspects of land distribution in Brazil are both urgent and frightening. Numbers from the federal government show that more than 318 million hectares – roughly 55 per cent of the rural land in the country – are owned by around 130 thousand large-scale property owners, which is only about 0.002 per cent of the total number of properties in Brazil. Meanwhile, around 5 million small and micro properties – 90 per cent of the total – share 25 per cent of the rural lands in the country. The remaining land belongs to medium-sized properties. These numbers shine a light on the tense background against which the film is set – one of territorial dispute, social inequality, and unjust land distribution throughout the country.

“We have our own myths and genres”

How did you come across the story of Rifle? And how did you work together with your co-writer, Richard Tavares?

Davi Pretto: In 2010 Richard Tavares brought me a short story called ‘El Niño’, which was the first idea for *Rifle*. We thought it could be a feature film and he invited me to direct it. I remember it had a very powerful tension. It transmitted the energy of this young man in conflict with his own identity while trying to hold on to the place that is home to him. We were often travelling in the countryside, always noticing some little houses in the middle of nowhere in the fields, and we knew that this film should also show the feelings and stories of those people. So we started a long process of research to merge the short story with stories from people of this region. Richard is my partner at Tokyo Filmes and we have been friends since high school, so working together for us is natural. We speak the same language.

If you had to come up with a single phrase on what the film’s main concept is, what you are trying to get across, what would that be?

I searched images and sounds to depict a cathartic revenge.

How much did your own experience of growing up in Brazil’s far south shape your choice of place and your narrative style?

The state where I live, Rio Grande do Sul, has a popular historical narrative that people repeat: the rich landowners were kind, abolitionists and heroes. We grew up listening to this, and movies that were filmed here – which I don’t like at all – repeat it as a naive fairy tale. But in truth this state, as well as the whole country, was built on slave work, on the poor being killed or expelled from their territory, beginning the expansionism of the few people who own almost all the land. In some way, *Rifle* is a sensorial statement, showing a last attempt to resist, when there’s no one around to help. When you have an idea of resistance, your narrative style should be an instrument of opposition.

Rifle shares many characteristics with classic topics of the Western genre, such as wide-open plains or the conflict between big landowners and small farmers. Was this decision shaped by the location and/or influenced by other films or directors? What is your relationship with genres when you work on the concept for a film?

These topics came out by themselves during our research on the region and the script writing. They are also common themes in Latin American history and literature. But then I realised that we were indeed dealing with a kind of Western myth. As a lover of cinema, and particularly a lover of Westerns, it’s impossible for me to not think of John Ford, Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher and so on; it’s impossible not to watch and re-watch those amazing movies – and for that very reason I knew that *Rifle* certainly was not a Western. I’m from Latin America; we have our own aesthetics, our own myths and genres, so in the end I was playing a little bit with this whole situation, sometimes being very meticulous about it and some other times just having fun.

One of the main threads of the film is social injustice and the reactions of those who have been left behind. Do you see the situation you describe in Rifle as connected to the global re-appearance of economic inequality, and if so, what are the links?

Today, people in different countries and on different continents share the same experiences resulting from our capitalist system, which proves that we are just killing ourselves and our planet. The big cities have outgrown their limits, the very few richest people are getting even richer and the abyss between them and the middle class and the poor is deepening. At the same time, we have ultra right-wing movements worldwide gaining prominence and attention, railing against government policies intended to reduce social injustice. Absurdly and sadly, those with the most to lose often adopt the rants of these few billionaires. In my first feature, *Castanha*, I portrayed a marginalised man trying to survive in a big city. On the other hand, we have a few people who chose to remain in an empty countryside, and what did they receive? They have even fewer opportunities and less basic assistance. That’s *Rifle*.

How did you find your protagonists?

During the script research in the region I was also looking for possibilities for casting and locations, together with my producer, Paola Wink. We travelled the south of our state for many weeks. It was at the very end that we discovered Vacaíqua, a little village with less than thirty houses near

the border with Uruguay. When we arrived there, we knew it would be the perfect place to shoot the film. We stayed there for days trying to meet all the locals, and on the last day we met Dione and the family. We returned many times over a six-month period until they agreed to participate. After that, we became part of the family. I was there several times during pre-production, which was also important to prepare them for the shooting. I brought a camera with me and shot a few simple images during that time to show them and reassure them they could be actors. It was an incredible process to work with them.

How difficult was it to get the film made? How long did it take you from the first idea to the final cut? What would you say were your biggest challenges in the different phases of its realisation from script to shoot to post-production? What are your thoughts regarding the situation of filmmakers in Brazil today?

It's always a long and difficult road to make films. Richard brought me the first idea in 2010, which was even before *Castanha*, so *Rifle* was supposed to be my first feature. That did not happen. It took five years to write and finance the film until shooting, plus almost one more year for post-production. I think the biggest challenge always is to stay optimistic and energetic enough to put together all the things you need to finish the film. There are always several 'No's', some months when nothing ever happens, some days when you want to give up or aren't sure about anything, or you think you are making a bad movie... Regarding Brazil, we had an incredible change over the last five years because of an important recent fund called Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual (FSA) from Ancine (the Brazilian Film Agency), which was a result of a federal government program to grow and support the audiovisual industry. The support for films and TV series has grown exponentially and the results are clear: just focusing on 2017, one film in competition at Sundance, fifteen films (one of them in competition) at the Rotterdam International Film Festival, ten features (one in competition) at the Berlinale... It's an impressive mark. But we have to remember that we had a coup d'état last year in Brazil; the federal government politics are changing quickly, cutting several important basic social programmes, and we know the FSA might be affected. We are watching that situation very closely.

Interview: Carsten Siebert, January 2017



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Davi Pretto was born in 1988 in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. He graduated with a degree in Film from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre in 2008. Since then, he has been a director and producer of films as well as working as a curator and programmer for cinemas. *Rifle* is his second feature-length film.

Films

2009: *Quarto de espera/Waiting Room* (12 min.). 2012: *De Passagem/Passing Through* (16 min.). 2014: *Castanha* (95 min., Berlinale Forum 2014). 2015: *Metade Homem, Metade Fantasma/Half Man, Half Ghost* (29 min.). 2016: *Rifle*.