

A CINEMA GUILD RELEASE



HORSE MONEY

A film by Pedro Costa

104 minutes / 2014 / 1.1:33 / HD / Not Rated
In Portuguese with English Subtitles

Synopsis

Pedro Costa's latest film, a follow-up to his renowned COLOSSAL YOUTH, follows Costa regular Ventura on an odyssey that is part horror film, part fever dream, and utterly unique. The time is now, a numbing and timeless present of hospital stays, bureaucratic questioning, and wandering through remembered spaces... and suddenly it is also then, the mid '70s and the time of Portugal's Carnation Revolution, when Ventura got into a knife fight with his friend Joaquim. HORSE MONEY is a self-reckoning, a moving memorialization of lives in danger of being forgotten, as well as a piercingly beautiful work of modern cinema.

Pedro Costa Bio

Born in Lisbon, Costa left his course of studies in History to attend classes taught by the poet and filmmaker Antonio Reis at the Lisbon Film School. His first film, O SANGUE (BLOOD), had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival in 1989. CASA DE LAVA, his second feature, shot in Cabo Verde, was shown in Cannes, Un Certain Regard, in 1994. His other features include BONES, IN VANDA'S ROOM, and COLLOSAL YOUTH (currently available in the US as a box set from the Criterion Collection), NE CHANGE RIEN, and WHERE DOES YOUR HIDDEN SMILE LIE?, a documentary on the work of Daniele Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub. Recently he directed the SWEET EXORCIST, a segment of the omnibus feature CENTRO HISTORICO with Manoel de Oliveira, Aki Kaurismaki and Victor Erice.

Filmography

- 2014 HORSE MONEY**
- 2012 SWEET EXORCIST (short, from CENTRO HISTORICO)**
- 2010 O NOSSO HOMEM / OUR MAN (short)**
- 2009 NE CHANGE RIEN**
- 2007 THE RABBIT HUNTERS (short, from MEMORIES, JEONJU DIGITAL PROJECT)**
- 2007 TARRAFAL (short, from THE STATE OF THE WORLD)**
- 2006 COLLOSAL YOUTH**
- 2003 6 BAGATELAS (short)**
- 2002 WHERE DOES YOUR HIDDEN SMILE LIE?**
- 2001 DANIELE HUILLET, JEAN-MARIE STRAUB (from CINEASTES DE NOTRE TEMPS)**
- 2000 IN VANDA'S ROOM**
- 1997 BONES**
- 1994 CASA DE LAVA**
- 1990 BLOOD**
- 1987 CARTAS A JULIA (short)**

Interview: Pedro Costa
by Neil Bahadur for *Film Comment*

How long did it take to shoot *Horse Money*?

Well, it was a bit erratic. Because of a lot of things. The film was supposed to include another screenwriter, a composer and actor who I met, shot with a little bit, just a few minutes. He was supposed to write two or three musical scenes. And then he died.

Oh!

It was Gil Scott-Heron. He was a black American poet, rapper, musician, very, very active in the Seventies, Eighties, Nineties, and then he did a comeback with an album. He was the father of a lot of rappers—well, politically conscious rappers. They owe everything to him. And physically, he looked very similar to Ventura. One day I was in New York and I asked a friend who knew him, and I said: “It would be great to have them talk!” Because Ventura doesn’t speak any English, and Gil couldn’t speak Portuguese. So I showed him my films, and he called me and said: “I like this. Let’s meet.” He was playing in Lisbon so I went to meet him, and I proposed [my idea], and he said yes.

He was supposed to write what you see today in the film—probably the montage with the people in the neighborhood, this voyage through the night. That first version was supposed to be written by him, with music by him, and shot perhaps in the same place... Or perhaps not. But it would have had him acting. That is what the first version was supposed to be like. But then he died. That was about two years ago. That was the first blow. So then I attacked the elevator sequence, which is quite big and difficult in itself. We shot that for three to four months.

Your last feature-length film was *Ne Change Rien*. Was making that any kind of influence on the greater musical element in this film, compared to your previous narrative works?

I think when I thought about Scott-Heron, I was in New York with *Ne Change Rien*, around the festival or something. That was the moment when I started talking to people about the music from the New York scene. And then I remembered that, especially with the African-American poets, the lost poets, there were a lot of very, very strong political rappers working in the Sixties and Seventies in New York and Chicago. I like that very much. Between poetry and rap and music. Rock, funk, books. Scott-Heron was a writer too: he wrote a great novel called *Vulture*. I thought of something like that—that the film could be a long rap, and Scott-Heron could do that. I thought we could get him, and Ventura would sing and Scott-Heron would say poems. Because Ventura likes to sing, and in *Colossal Youth* there’s not really that chance.

I remember you mentioned yesterday [at the press conference] how you're only just starting to like the movie now. Is it usually that way with your films? Or is it specific to this one?

I think I like this more now. I only like some of the others, or small moments in the other films. This one came out so tense—I see a kind of tension that was very difficult to get. That's because of Ventura too. Some people can do it like that [snaps fingers] like Straub. Well, not like that [snaps fingers again] because they work a lot. But even with the amount of work that we put in the films, and we work really very hard, it's always difficult to get the... tight tissue—like a nervous body. It's Ventura's body, nerves, hands, eyes. It came out exactly how I thought he could be in the film. But that's him. I do say, "Stand here, look there," but the words, almost every movement, the timing, everything is him.

And you had Ventura and Vitalina write their own dialogue on the day, each day?

Yeah. That's the thing that's the same as before.

How much writing do you do prior to shooting?

Oh, I do it everyday, but... I understood it recently: for me, the secret is not to waste too much time with the same dialogue. When I have a thing I want them to say, or that they want to say, they need to say, we should find the form first, or work on that form. Horse Money has a different rhythm than Colossal Youth, where I did a lot of takes. [I did on] this one too, but in a different way. This was more for the music, for a certain tempo, a certain way of saying things, and looking at things. Colossal Youth was more theatrical, let's say.

I understand.

It's a stupid word, but Colossal Youth was a little bit more rehearsed, refined, than this one. Horse Money was a bit more chaotic and physical too. And a bit more mysterious than Colossal Youth, I think. There's more, "What... the fuck is this? Where is this?" You know, people ask me: "What is that? A hospital? A Roman theater?" But Ventura says it in the film: "I know a bunch of hospitals." Hospitals, prisons, rooms, it's all the same, it's always underground. It's not one—it's millions of hospitals and corridors and doors, so there's no match. It's a film where nothing matches. The doors are always different, but they are always hospitals, prisons, with the same sound, the same heaviness.

This film is much faster paced than any of your previous movies.

It was something I wanted to try, and say "Can I do this?" Sometimes I can, sometimes I fail, but it has the same coherence. I think I said it yesterday [at the press conference]: "You do not have the time to think." And that's what so great about those older films.

Karlson, Fleischer, all of the B-guys. Or like Buñuel, for instance. Not to compare myself, but there's something that forces you to catch your breath.

How different is the "Sweet Exorcist" sequence in Centro Historico to the edit in Horse Money?

A little bit. Well, quite a bit. People won't see the differences. There are a lot of cuts. There are things missing. In Horse Money it's a bit shorter, there are two or three new bits of dialogue, there is a moment in the woods that is placed somewhere else in the finished film. It's quite different. It's more musical too. The same piece of music arranged differently.

I got the invitation for [Centro Historico], and because I liked my partners I said: "Yes, but I'm shooting." They said "Well, can we include this?" and I said "Are you sure? Because this is an elevator and you want something about the history of Portugal." [Laughs] They said "We don't care."

I remember you mentioning that you were going to make your next film with Vitalina.

Yeah. It's very good, her name. If you go to the dictionary, it means "full of life." It's Latin. Anyway, it's a recent friendship—we met not even two years ago. I think she can be one of our partners for a lot of things. I would like to do something now with a woman, but I don't know what yet. It's not even an idea yet, really more of a desire. But we'll see, because she has to write it. Well, "write it," "tell me," whatever. She has to tell me things, and want to tell me things, and I don't know if she can do that yet. But we'll see.

Yesterday at the press conference you said: "You can either ask about the horse, or the money," and then proceeded to talk about how the movie cost 100,000 euros. What did you mean when you said, "You can ask about the horse"?

[Laughs] Well, because we could talk about the horse, or we could talk about the money. Back home I would prefer to talk about the money. Really, about the money. How much, how do you do films, what can you do today, who is making the good stuff? What's waste, what's not, how should you run your crew, how does a film crew work today? Things like that. That's the money part of the title. "Horse" is everything else. I'm making them like this with these kinds of people, which means they have all the time. They're free, available, professional. And we are three or four, never more. So I'm not depending on co-productions or anything like that, from Switzerland or France.

It's all from Portugal.

Yeah. It's a very small project, really. All we have are sandwiches. We get money every month for all of us. We really didn't buy anything. Just some things for the elevator.

What about the tank scene?

We called the army. We had to pay for gas. [laughs] And two guys came with the tank to drive it, so we paid for one night. It wasn't much. Five hundred euros, something like that, which is huge for us. Everything else is fake. The guns are fake—they're just toy guns.

The money thing is important. It runs through the film. It's not a metaphor. Ventura talks about it all the time, his pension, his salary, his wages. He's very dependent on money. Because you think a lot about money when you don't have it. So the film is also very afraid of running out of money, all of the time. And Ventura, he's always afraid of losing the contract. Like myself, losing the contract for me is to lose the films, my contract with the film and the people involved with it. And that contract has to be, of course, morally decent. If not, the film will be indecent, like 90 percent of the films today.

In my country, everywhere I see more and more credits—credits that are longer than the films. All the logos, it's crazy—yesterday I saw a film that had 700 logos. This foundation, the other foundation. Here and Switzerland and Italy—for a seven-minute film. [laughs] The credits were longer than the film. And it's a bit stupid, because I think you get lost that way. You know, when you get lost in the logos! [laughs] It's not nice. But if you get lost in the elevator or in the story, that's good.

Credits

Cast	Ventura Vitalina Varela Tito Furtado António Santos Benvido Tavares
Director	Pedro Costa
Director of Photography	Leonardo Simões, Pedro Costa
Sound	Olivier Blanc, Vasco Pedroso
Editing	João Dias
Grading	Gonçalo Ferreira
Sound Editing	Hugo Leitão, Éve Correa-Guedes
Sound Mix	Branko Neskov
Music	Os Tubarões
Producer	Abel Ribeiro Chaves
Production	OPTEC, Sociedade Optica Técnica

A Cinema Guild Release