



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
la Biennale di Venezia 2016

Venezia 73  
Competition



# THE UNTAMED

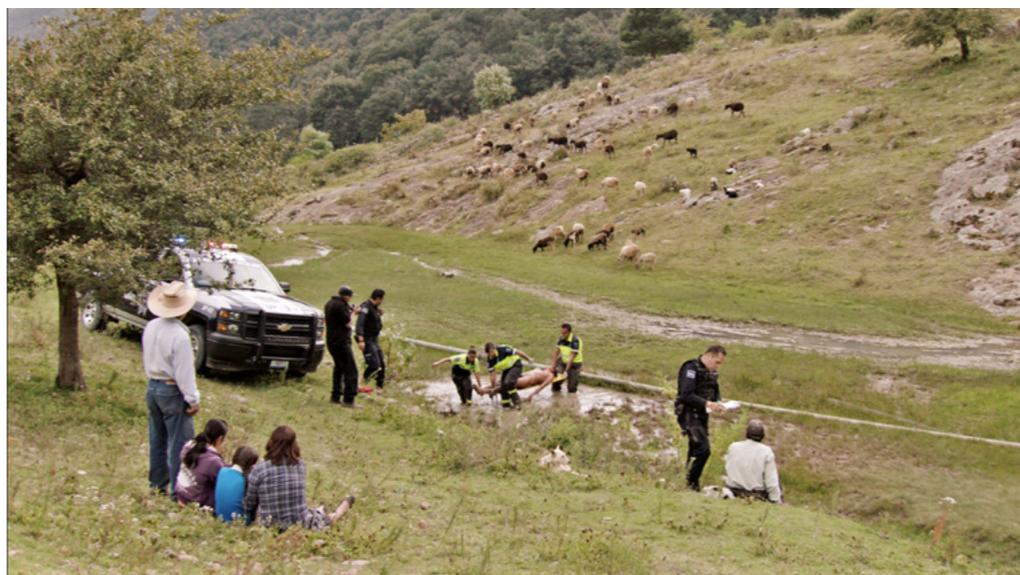
LA REGIÓN SALVAJE

A FILM BY AMAT ESCALANTE



## SYNOPSIS

Young mother Alejandra is a working housewife, raising two boys with husband Angel in a small city. Her brother Fabian works as a nurse in a local hospital. Their provincial lives are upset with the arrival of mysterious Veronica. Sex and love can be fragile in certain regions where strong family values, hypocrisy, homophobia, and male chauvinism exist. Veronica convinces them that in the nearby woods, inside an isolated cabin, dwells something not of this world that could be the answer to all of their problems. Something whose force they cannot resist and with whom they must make peace or suffer its wrath.



## COMMENTS FROM WRITER-DIRECTOR AMAT ESCALANTE

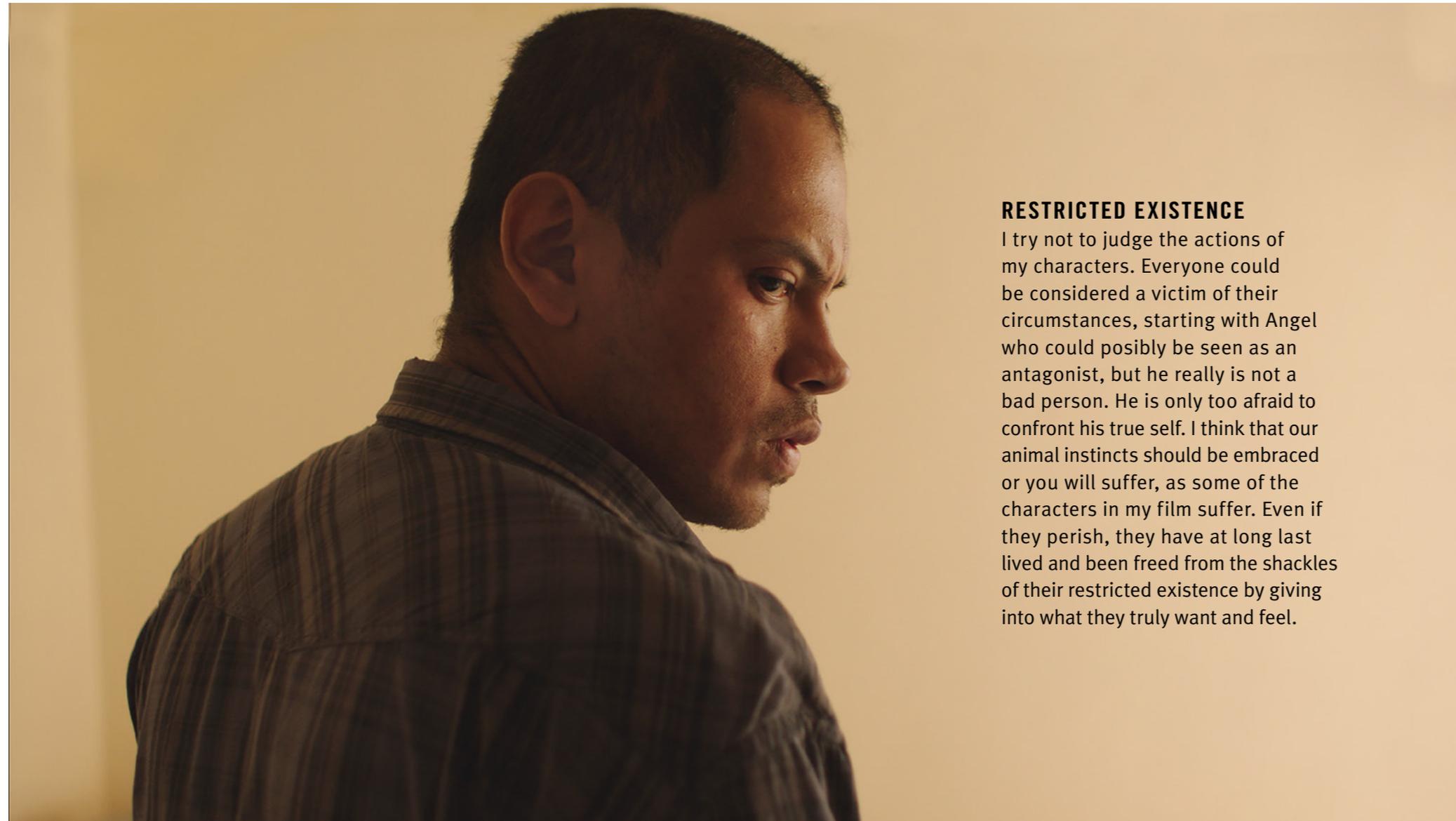
### CONSERVATIVE VALUES

I have shot most of my films in and around the capital city of Guanajuato, where I grew up and have lived most of my life. It is a place of conservative values and traditions. Guanajuato is the most Catholic state in Mexico. For example, at some point there was controversy with the government school text books that had a chapter on reproductive organs and safe sex and a citizens' group fought hard to pull that chapter out of the book. They even did book burnings in protest. But, we did not encounter any resistance to the shooting of THE UNTAMED.

### HEADLINES

The original inspiration came from two newspaper articles in the Guanajuato, Mexico, local newspaper. One was about a young woman that had suffered an attempted rape by an acquaintance in the woods that she was able to fight off. When the police arrived, they initially put them both in the same hospital room, and then later she was accused of being a "slut". Later, the accused guy fled town, which made it apparent he was guilty, so now he is in jail. But I was surprised at all the rumors, gossip and victim-blaming this young woman suffered. The second article was an image of a man's body floating in a stream with the huge headline above the image: "FAGGOT IS FOUND DROWNED". This impressed and outraged me very much. He was a male nurse working in a government funded hospital, and in spite of dedicating his life to serving the public, he is remembered as nothing but a "faggot" to everyone who read that newspaper. Those headlines became the triggers for THE UNTAMED. I tried to look for a reason to bring them together, but I couldn't, so I ended up using something that is just not from this world.





### **RESTRICTED EXISTENCE**

I try not to judge the actions of my characters. Everyone could be considered a victim of their circumstances, starting with Angel who could possibly be seen as an antagonist, but he really is not a bad person. He is only too afraid to confront his true self. I think that our animal instincts should be embraced or you will suffer, as some of the characters in my film suffer. Even if they perish, they have at long last lived and been freed from the shackles of their restricted existence by giving into what they truly want and feel.





### **PURE SEX**

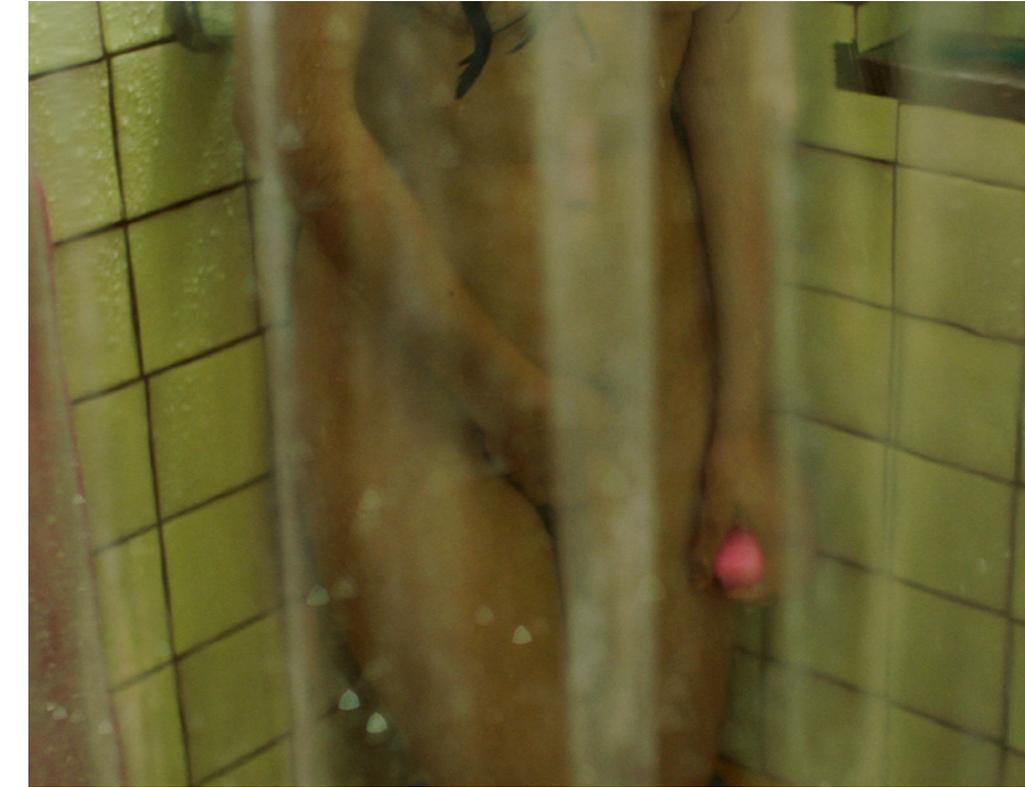
Certain basics of life like eating, defecating and reproducing are necessary for the human species to keep on living. The last one is our primordial duty, even if we don't realize it and think there is more to life. The reward for this is the pleasure that sex brings to us, otherwise we would probably not exist anymore because having sex would have been forgotten a long time ago. But humans are so contradictory: we look at sex as perverse and even somehow almost unnatural to some extent. We grow up and develop with this contradiction and battle in our heads. The creature in my film is just pure sex for humans, they have no choice

but to give themselves completely. They experience the pleasure purely and more intensely than ever before because with the creature it is not only physical but also mental surrender. By adding the horror/fantasy aspect and "creature" to the story, I wanted to create a symbolic representation of the ambiguous complexity of the id, the unorganized part of the personality structure that contains a human's basic, instinctual drives. The id is the only component of the personality that is present from birth. It is the source of our bodily needs, wants, desires, and impulses, particularly our sexual and aggressive drives. This has been an ideal way to approach and expand on these ideas and this aspect of our nature.



### **FANTASY ELEMENT**

The creature came after a few drafts of the screenplay that I wrote with Gibran Portela. There was something that I could not explain, something that did not make sense in any way, or at least I could not make sense of it. So this thing came into my head that somehow made sense in regards to the characters and the reasons for their actions. I also was a bit tired of crude reality in my films and a cabin in the woods is very much something from the fantasy element in films.



### **THE CREATURE**

The creature design was done with the help of Morten Jacobsen from the effects company Soda in Denmark, with sketches from Sune Elskær. Peter Hjorth was the VFX supervisor (MELANCHOLIA, NYMPHOMANIAC VOL. I & II) and Ghost, a VFX company, executed it for the screen. It was all part of the first-ever coproduction between Mexico and Denmark that also included director of photography Manuel Alberto Claro. The creature had to be functional for sex with humans, so that was the main characteristic. I also wanted it to be mysterious and attractive to the eye, somehow sensual. I find it appealing but at the same time grotesque and dirty.



### INJUSTICE

With all my films, I like to see straight on, without blinking, we could say. Not only regarding violence, but everything in general. In *SANGRE*, I wanted to look at the mundane uncompromisingly and directly, because I felt it was a fresh way of doing it. I want to be there in the situation and almost feel it viscerally in front of me. Of course, some viewers will react, because most people do not want to be in that situation or anything like it. For a film like *HELI*, for me, it had to be a slap in the face, not necessarily to the audience but to myself – like when you can't tell if you're dreaming or seeing reality in front of you. What motivated me the most is the injustice that I see all around me. In that way I feel proud to have said something about how I see things in my country in a film that has been seen by many people in Mexico.

### RADICAL CHANGE

In *THE UNTAMED*, for the first time I had the actors read the script and I rehearsed with them on a regular basis. This has been quite a radical change for me since before this I would never let them get near the script, and never rehearsed except just before the scene. I felt that I was able to tell the story I wanted more closely and without as much compromise as in my earlier films. I used to only use non-actors but now I have used people that actually were interested in acting. This was a big difference.

### IMAGES AND SOUNDS

I think I express myself much easier through visuals. To articulate things with words has been something I've always had to work on. Being able to do it with film is my salvation. Words can lie so much more than images and somehow images are the perfect words – for me at least. That's in part why I have been drawn to telling stories with images and sounds. My father is a painter and my mother used to play the cello. From the very start of my memories, I recall his paintings and her sounds. What I do mixes these elements in a new way, that then lets me articulate something to the rest of the world. Ironically, I think that I am actually quite bad at taking pictures or videos in life. I'd much rather capture the moment with my eyes and then have it in my head for my imagination to work over. In this same sense I consider myself a bad tourist, because I have to make a big effort to take photos of the places I visit.





## AMAT ESCALANTE

THE UNTAMED (LA REGIÓN SALVAJE) is Amat Escalante's fourth feature film. His previous film HELI received the Best Director Award at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.

Amat Escalante, born in 1979, is a self-taught filmmaker from the city of Guanajuato in Mexico. He began his work in cinema at the age of 15. After making two short films, he wrote and directed his first feature film, SANGRE, a FIPRESCI Prize winner at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival (Un Certain Regard). His second feature, LOS BASTARDOS, was also presented in Cannes' Un Certain Regard.

### FEATURE FILMOGRAPHY

2016 THE UNTAMED (LA REGIÓN SALVAJE)

2013 HELI

2008 LOS BASTARDOS

2005 SANGRE



# THE UNTAMED (LA REGIÓN SALVAJE)

## TECHNICAL DETAILS

Production: Mexico, Denmark, France,

Germany, Norway, Switzerland 2016

Length: 100 minutes

Sound: Print Master 7.1 & 5.1

Resolution: 1.66:1

Language: Spanish

## MAIN CAST

Alejandra: Ruth Ramos

Veronica: Simone Bucio

Angel: Jesús Meza

Fabian: Eden Villavicencio

Angel's Mother: Andrea Peláez

Sr. Vega: Oscar Escalante

Marta (Vega's wife): Bernarda Trueba

## MAIN CREW

Director: Amat Escalante

Screenplay: Amat Escalante & Gibrán Portela

Cinematographer: Manuel Alberto Claro, DFF.

Production Designer: Daniela Schneider

Visual Effects Supervisor: Peter Hjorth

Music: Guro Moe, Lasse Marhaug & Martín Escalante

Editors: Fernanda de la Peza & Jacob Secher Schulsinger

Sound Design: Sergio Diaz, Vincent Arnardi & Raúl Locatelli

Postproduction Supervisor: Carlos Morales

Creature designed by: Morten Jacobsen / Soda

Hair/Makeup: Jorge Fuentes „Jarrito“ / Emilio Cortés

Costumes: Daniela Schneider, Ursula Schneider, Paulina Kuznicka

Stills: Martín Escalante

Producers: Jaime Romandía, Fernanda de la Peza, Amat Escalante

Co-Producers: Katrin Pors, Jean and Anne-Laure Labadie, Michael Weber,

Maria Ekerhovd, Katja Adomeit

Executive Producers: Nicolás Celis, Thomas Gammeltoft

Associate Producers: Jamal Zeinal Zade, Dan Wechsler, Jim Stark,

Bosco Sodi, Meinolf Zurhorst, Carlos Morales, José Guillermo Zozaya

in association with:

Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía

Fondo para la Producción Cinematográfica de Calidad (FOPROCINE -MÉXICO)

Snowglobe

Le Pacte

The Match Factory

Mer Film

Adomeit Film

Copenhagen Film Fund

ZDF in collaboration with ARTE

Labo Digital

Bord Cadre Films

Pimienta Films

with support from:

The Danish Film Institute

Le Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée (CNC)

Aide au Cinéma du Monde

SØRFOND – Norwegian South Film Found

Secretaría de Turismo del Estado de Guanajuato (SECTUR)

Kansas City Southern de México

Production Companies:

Mantarraya Producciones / Tres Tunas

Sultepec 47, Hipodromo Condesa

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