

THE PLAGUE

A film by NEUS BALLÚS



MARIA ROS · RAÛL MOLIST · ROSEMARIE ABELLA · IURIE TIMBUR · MARIBEL MARTÍ

Director **NEUS BALLÚS** Script **NEUS BALLÚS** with the collaboration of **PAU SUBIRÓS**
 Director of photography **DIEGO DUSSUEL** Composer **DAVID CRESPO** Editing **NEUS BALLÚS, DOMI PARRA** Sound **PAU SUBIRÓS** Sound mix **MARISOL NIEVAS, JUAN SÁNCHEZ "CUTI"**
 Assistant director **MARIA ALCÁZAR** Head of production **JUDIT QUINTANA** Delegate producer UPF **JORDI BALLÓ** Commissioning editor TVC **JORDI AMBRÓS** Commissioning editor ARTE France **LUCIANO RIGOLINI**
 Executive producer **PAU SUBIRÓS** Country **SPAIN 2013** Production Company **EL KINÓGRAF SL**



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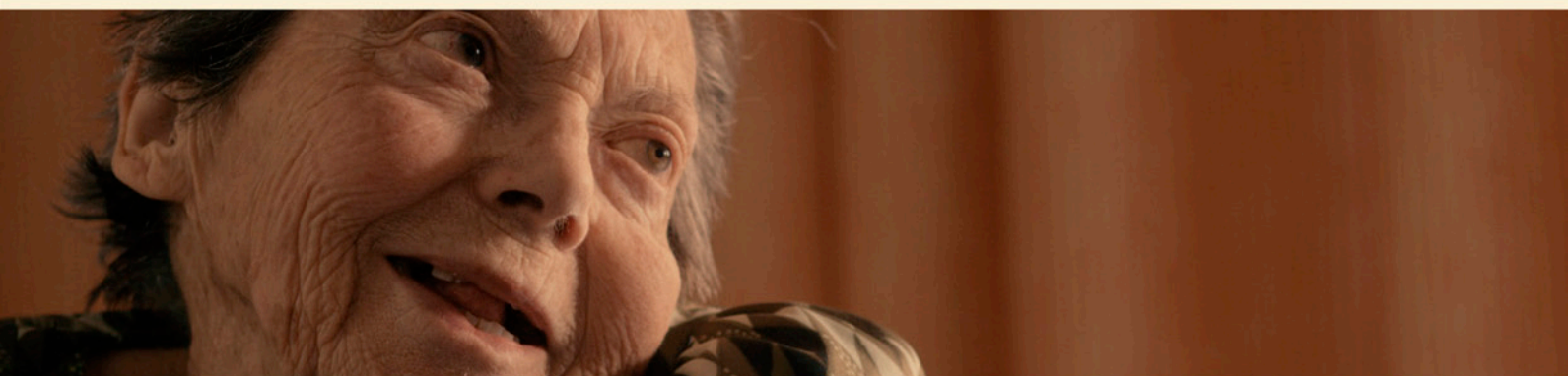


SYNOPSIS

Raul, a farmer who wants to grow organic food, hires Iurie to help him in the fields. Iurie is a Moldavian wrestling fighter, who earns a living in whatever comes his way. Slowly, their personal stories intertwine with those of three solitary women: Maria, an elderly lady forced to leave her countryside house for a retirement home; Rose, a Philippine nurse who has just arrived in the country; and Maribel, a prostitute who has less and less clients. The destinies of all

these characters become entwined as the summer goes on.

The Plague is a film of interwoven stories, that offers a moving portrait of life on the outskirts of Barcelona. The main characters are not actors. They play themselves after four years of working with the director. This long process has permitted Ballús to reveal the uncertainty and rebel spirit that underlies contemporary crisis-hit Spain.



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PLAGUE



INTERVIEW

Interview to the director **NEUS BALLÚS**

Gabriela Seidel-Hollaender, January 2013

How did you select your protagonists? Is this group also a representative mixture of the residents in this area?

I don't think they represent the residents and workers of this area. In fact, that wasn't my intention. On the contrary: I chose them because they are quite exceptional. They seduced me with their mixture of loneliness, strength, humanity and beauty. But they are representative in the sense that they symbolize the difficulties and problems we have in our society nowadays: individualism, loneliness, uncertainty about the future, the feeling of a threat that is beyond our control...

What did you tell your protagonists to convince them with your project? Did you have an exposé?

At the beginning of the process, I just asked them if we could meet from time to time, as I was thinking about making a film in the area. So I spent two years just talking to them, taking pictures, writing about their lives, imagining sequences and thinking how to build a film from their reality. After two years, when I had a very clear idea of the film I wanted to make, I finally asked them if they would like to be a part of it. It wasn't necessary to convince them, because they agreed from the very beginning.

Throughout the process, I often tried to explain to them what the film was about, but I always had the feeling that they weren't really interested in that, as it was something they couldn't even imagine. I realised they just trusted me, they had a blind confidence in what I was doing. That not only surprised me, but scared me a little bit. That's why I felt a huge responsibility about the way they were represented on film. And I've always tried to be strictly respectful with this, trying not to betray their reality.

Once you had the setting and the protagonists, how was the process of this unique work which took you over four years? How was the script developed and how was the shooting, since the protagonists are non-actors?

The secret of the great emotional involvement of the characters in the film lies in its long process. Everything they've done for the film stems from the personal relation I have with each of them. And this is something you can't do in a year or two. In the film they play themselves, in sequences that are slightly structured in a "script" that I constantly wrote and rewrote. I always tried to fix in paper what I imagined the film could be, but the reality changed, and we continually had to adapt. For instance, during the process, Maria had to move to the old people's home. So we moved with her to the residence, changing her entire story, and also including a new character in the film: the Philippine nurse, who ends up being very important to the chorality of the film. On the other hand, there are narrative threads that were clear from the beginning.

We planned the shooting as if it was a fiction, except for the fact that the protagonists were not actors, and we were talking about their real lives.

Where you thinking at any point of a documentary at all? And why did you decide in favour of a mixture of documentary and feature film?

The starting point of the film was this area in the outskirts of Barcelona, this strange place between industrial zones, motorways and housing estates. I have known this place since I was a child, and I had the feeling that I could find special characters there. So I did a lot of research, as a documentarist would, trying to understand the place and the protagonists' reality.

But as time passed, I started having a very strong idea of what the atmosphere of the film should be, the interweaving of the stories, the narrative threads,... And I realised that this is something you have to build up, as a filmmaker. That's why I thought that being between two stools would be the best choice for the film.

It's not the easiest way of working: it takes time and the balance is difficult. But I thought it was worth it, if the audience could see this film as if it was a fiction, but with real emotions constantly emerging from the images.

The film is dedicated to Maria Ros, who is an extraordinary part in the film. How was it working with her?

When I met her, she seduced me immediately. And before thinking about the film, we became friends. Four years after meeting her, she was still wondering why I decided that she had to be one of the protagonists. She would ask: "And how did you come to fall in love with me?". Our relationship was very intense: sometimes we fought shouting, and moments later we would be crying, hugging and apologising. I have shared in the last four years of her life. I was the last friend she made. These are relationships that go way beyond the film.

Could you say something about your aesthetic choices?

Because of this feeling of loneliness and uncertainty, I've always thought of *The Plague* as a contemporary western. Also because we're talking about the life on the margins of the system, in a strange landscape, in the heat of the summer,... And that's something that I had always in mind in creating the aesthetic atmosphere of the film.

"The characters symbolize the problems we have in our society: loneliness, uncertainty about the future and the feeling of a threat that is beyond our control."

"The secret of the great emotional involvement of the characters in the film lies in its long process."

"My goal was that the audience could see this film as if it was a fiction, but with real emotions constantly emerging from the images."



NEUS BALLÚS

(Mollet del Vallès, Barcelona, 1980)

Graduated in editing and film-making at Barcelona's Pompeu Fabra University in 1999.

Her first short films, **La Gabi** (2004) and **The grandad with the movie camera** (2005), were documentary portraits of two captivating characters: a transsexual living in a traditional based community in Nicaragua; and an old man with a recently discovered passion for making films. Both works received wide acclaim in the international short film festival circuit. Then she moved on to a radically original way of filming with **Immersion** (2009), a documentary shot entirely underwater in a public swimming-pool. The film received the ALCINE's Best Movie award (one of the most prestigious Spanish short film prizes, rarely awarded to documentaries). Ballús combines her job as director with editing for other filmmakers. **The Plague**, presented at Berlinale Forum 2013, is her first feature length film.

FILMOGRAPHY

2004: La Gabi

2005: The grandad with a movie camera

2006: Pepitu Ricu

2009: Immersion

2013: The Plague



CAST & CREW

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Country **SPAIN 2013**

Production Company **EL KINÒGRAF SL**

Running time: 85 min · Exhibition format: DCP 2K · Originally shot on: Digital 4K · Screen ratio: 1:1,85 · Colour: Colour · Sound format: Dolby 5.1.

BERLINALE SCREENINGS

07.02.13 13:30 **CinemaxX6** (press screening) · EN

08.02.13 19:30 **CineStar Event** · EN

09.02.13 22:15 **Cubix 9** · EN

11.02.13 13:30 **CineStar 8** · EN

15.02.13 16:30 **Delphi-Filmpalast** · EN

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