

MAGIC LANTERN presents a film by
ALEJANDRO LANDES



“PORFIRIO”

U.S. Theatrical Premiere

February 8-14, 2013 at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

Followed by theaters nationwide

*Official Selection, Directors' Fortnight Cannes Film Festival 2011

*Official Selection, Toronto International Film Festival 2011

*Official Selection, New Directors/New Films 2012

Colombia / 101 min / Unrated / Color / In Spanish with English subtitles

Press site: <http://www.magic-lantern-films.com/porfirio/>

Magic Lantern

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Short Synopsis

Paralyzed from the waist down by a stray police bullet, the title character in Alejandro Landes's award-winning film spends his days selling minutes on his cell phone, flirting with his comely neighbor—and secretly plotting his revenge. Landes worked on the film for five years, creating a tale that joins the most intimate details of Porfirio's day-to-day life with an astonishing recreation of his attempt to hijack an airplane.

Long Synopsis

Welcome to the true story of the Air Pirate, told from the perspective of the man himself. Porfirio Ramirez Aldana made headlines in 2005 for trying to hijack a plane to Bogotá. What made those headlines more sensational was the fact that he did so while paralyzed from the waist down. But, once upon a time, Aldana had been king of his castle: a wealthy farmer and cattle rancher, he was a respected figure in his Colombian village until a bullet lodged itself in his spine and left him disabled.

Little of this information can be gleaned from Alejandro Landes' unusually spare narrative. Though Landes hints at Porfirio's backstory, he is more concerned with the course on which that tragedy has set him. The director offers a deliberate study of a once-prominent man struggling to maintain his dignity.

Saddled with a loser son, Porfirio is forced to rent out his cell phone to make a living, but he still finds happiness when locked in a carnal embrace with his next-door neighbor. Soon enough, though, his past comes rushing through the door, along with a travelling salesman who acts as a catalyst for the rest of the story. We learn that Porfirio wasn't wounded by some random stray bullet: the shots were fired by police, yet the state has consistently refused to compensate him. Desperate measures lead to the creation of a modern Colombian legend.

Director of photography Thimios Bakatakis looks Porfirio right in the eye, working from a low angle to create a series of fixed frames that provide a realistic glimpse into his confined life. And just as we've grown accustomed to this mesmerizing imagery that seems capable of going on forever, Porfirio changes everything by taking matters into his own two hands—the only functional limbs he has left.

—*Toronto International Film Festival*

Press Quotes

“Critic’s Pick! A slow-burn movie in which the mundane and often grotesque daily life of the protagonist makes palpable the need for escape and action.” —Bilge Ebiri, *New York Magazine*

“In this collaborative merger of documentary fact and the filmmaker’s imagination, Mr. Aldana embraces the fantastic drama of his own life.” —Steve Dollar, *The Wall Street Journal*

“Pick of the Week! Though his stylistic vision might superficially call to mind filmmakers like Carlos Reygadas, Lucrecia Martel, and Yorgos Lanthimos, with *Porfirio*, Alejandro Landes carves a unique path all his own. One of the most startlingly fresh films of this new year.”—Michael Tully, *Filmmaker Magazine*

“Superb! The film itself [is] tied closely to its protagonist’s movements [and] the observational method certainly pays off.” —Benjamin Mercer, *The L Magazine*

“An austere focus on physical action and behavior worthy of Robert Bresson.”
—Kirk Honeycutt, *The Hollywood Reporter*

“Landes has done an extraordinary job with his minimalist narrative, brilliantly exploring a new genre.” —Jale Laplante, *Miami New Times*

“Brilliant and original... Landes frames with sensibility and tact, yet with hyperrealist imagery that makes no concessions.” —Julio Feo, *RFI*

“An accomplished and engaging film in every way.” —Michael Sicinski, *CinemaScope*

“Alejandro Landes’s *Porfirio* is especially pleasing because it seems a pure triumph of directorial sensibility: an outline of the project would not hint at the film’s virtues. The widescreen aspect ratio is just right to depict the often-horizontal protagonist, and Landes’s lovely, symmetrical compositions are generally scaled to the dimensions of the people who inhabit them. Continuously imaginative in both the visual and the behavioral realms.”

—Dan Sallitt, *Mubi.com*

Selected Festivals

New Directors/New Films 2012

Directors' Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival 2011

Toronto International Film Festival 2011

San Sebastian International Film Festival 2011

Busan International Film Festival 2011

Grand Jury Prize, Amsterdam Film Festival 2011

Grand Jury Prize and Best Actor, Biarritz Film Festival 2011

About the Production

On the 12th of September 2005, I read a headline that lingered with me: Paralyzed Man in Diapers Hijacks Plane to Bogotá. Three months later, I found myself knocking on the door of the jailed man the press had nicknamed the air grew out of my time spent with him, his chair, bed, house and family.

Though I had my video sketch camera in hand on my first visit, it was of little use; I encountered a closed man. But I kept going back to visit and he thawed, revealing a mixture of bravado and dramatic flair, that, coupled with the fact he was forbidden to leave his house, captured my imagination. I began to video sketch and write but though Porfirio understood I was preparing a film, he did not suspect I would cast him as himself until days before the shoot. "Who will play me?" he kept asking me.

I moved to Florencia and lived in the places and with the people I wanted to work with for five months before shooting the first frame. During that time, I shot sketches of Porfirio, watching him move made me particularly conscious of time as well as the Catholic and Socratic notion of the body as prison to the soul. It was then that I developed the visual identity of the film: the low, frontal, still and symmetrical frame that, with a cinemascope aspect ratio pushing the horizon lines, would speak of the character and his relationship with the world around him.

The first draft of the screenplay read like a long stream of consciousness work, yet my time with Porfirio taught me to bring it down to the essence: portraying the drama of a man's character without dramatic devices. I decided never to show him the screenplay but rather I read him lines—mostly out of order—and asked him to say them back to me so I could rephrase, making the language his, not mine.

When I was set on casting the real Porfirio as himself, I decided to work only with non-professional actors. Porfirio's eldest son and real life accomplice had become too old for the part so I chose his youngest son, whose fit form and deft movements stood in stark but tender contrast to his father. Porfirio's wife had left him after the hijacking and he introduced me to a young neighbor he found to be the prettiest thing in the world; and she loved the attention he gave her. I was taken by Jasbleidy, both youthful and

hardened, and chose her on instinct, like I would the rest of the cast.

Three weeks before production, I invited the two lead characters to live with Porfirio in the house I had chosen to shoot in. I visited daily, never with the intention of turning them into actors but only to gain their confidence and accustom them to the camera, so that their natural reflexes, in both speech and movement, would prevail. I worked with the three of them, as I had with Porfirio, mainly watching them move around the house, a space that transforms from a metaphorical to a literal jail in the film's narrative circle.

Every aspect of the shoot had been storyboarded, but the production team improvised as we found things along the way. Since we had chosen to work with mostly natural lighting, we were forced to constantly adjust to the changing Amazonian climate. A small crew, comprised of 10 people, coming from Greece, Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay, Spain and Ecuador, allowed us to be flexible and preserve the real spaces we worked in.

In one of the deepest moments of the film, Porfirio gazes out the window of his bedroom and, I dare say, we can peak into his very soul. It was the second shot on the first day of the shoot. Although I think we captured many other fine moments, I must admit none matched a shining innocence I saw in his eyes that first day.

We wrapped the shoot of *Porfirio* in October 2010, just about five years after my first visit.

—Alejandro Landes

Director's Statement

The news, on paper or on screen, seems to skim the top off the boiling water that surrounds us, disguising acts of extraordinary violence as distant, dreamy—maybe almost freakish. Here, based loosely on a headline-grabbing true story and in the framework of Colombia's civil war, I'm looking to bring it closer; to position my camera in front of the humanity of what lies beneath: seemingly banal, quiet moments—both comic and tragic—that bubble to the surface in all their simplicity and shake our lives.

About the Filmmaker

Alejandro Landes was born in São Paulo, Brazil. He studied literature, economics and architecture at Brown University, and then went on to become a journalist and television writer. His first film, the documentary *Cocalero*, premiered at Sundance in 2007 and opened theatrically in more than ten countries. With *Porfirio*, Landes was a fellow at the Cinéfondation Residence and the Sundance Institute.

Film Credits

Title PORFIRIO
Written and directed by Alejandro Landes
Release year/production year 2013 / 2011
Production year 2011
Image Color, 35mm
Aspect ratio 2.35:1
Sound Dolby Digital 5.1
Running time 101 minutes
Language Spanish with English subtitles
Porfirio Porfirio Ramirez Aldana
Lissin Jarlisson Ramierez Reinoso
Jasbleidy Yor Jasbleidy Santos Torres
Produced by: Francisco Aljure, Alejandro Landes
Executive Producers: Francisco Aljure, Jorge Manrique Behrens, Maja Zimmerman
Co-producers: Jorge Manrique Behrens, Nicolás Avruj, Diego Lerman, Fernando Epstein, Antonio Segovia, Christophe Gougeon
Associate Producers: Rubén Cabrera, Thomas Nickel
Cinematography: Thimios Bakatakis
Assistant Director: Alejandro Ezpeleta
Sound Recordist: Raúl Locatelli
Sound Designer: Lena Esquenazi
Editor: Eliane D. Katz
Script: Tomás Landes
First Assistant Camera: Thomas Varvias
Second Assistant Camera: Alejandro Vallejo
Gaffer: Marlon Arango
Key Grip: Diego Usme
Screenplay Consultants: Mateo Ingouville, Ezequiel Schmoller
Editing Consultants: Yorgos Mavropsaridis, Jorge Manrique Behrens
Chief of Production: Nathalie Choquette
Production Manager: Gustavo Pazmín Perea
Post Production Manager: Fernando Zuber
Poster, titles & website design: Nicorisso
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