



74th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Forum

REAS

A FILM BY

LOLA ARIAS



Synopsis

Yoseli has a tattoo of the Eiffel Tower on her back and has always wanted to travel, but she was arrested at the airport for drug trafficking. Nacho is a trans man who was arrested for swindling and started a rock band in jail. Gentle or rough, blonde or shaved, cis or trans, long-term inmates or newly admitted: in this hybrid musical, they all re-enact their lives in a Buenos Aires prison.

Reas is a collective work that reinvents the musical genre: the performers dance and sing about their past in prison, relive their life as fiction, and invent, through fantasy and imagination, a possible future for themselves.



The power of wishing

Any consideration of Lola Arias's second feature film, *Reas*, must necessarily mention her first, *Theatre of War*, which premiered at the Berlinale Forum in 2018. The device is much the same: work with non-actors who have been through a traumatic situation and propose a re-enactment, an artistic recreation of their experiences, from the subjectivity of their memories and experiences, which Arias then organizes into dramatic material.

But at the same time the two films could not be more different. While *Theatre of War* brought to the screen (after starting life as a play, *Minelfield*) conflicting masculinities in a group of ex-servicemen from both sides of the Falklands/Malvinas War, in contrast *Reas* is a feminine, diverse film, one that came to life in theatre workshops in a women's prison, but which as an artistic work was conceived as a film, without first passing through the theatre. Perhaps because of this, *Reas* embraces—from that documentary base that is always in everything that Arias does—the musical, that preeminent film genre.

The musical implies light, spark, joy, and this is what the characters in *Reas* convey, their prison memories expressed along with their dreams, aspirations and wishes. That distinctive characteristic is what makes *Reas* a radiant, vital film, because those bodies, once confined and subdued, are now free to dance and sing, play and imagine. It is this energy that drives the new film by Lola Arias.

Luciano Monteagudo



Interview with Lola Arias

By Luciano Monteagudo

How did *Reas* come about?

In 2019, I decided to give a workshop in film and theatre at the women's prison in Ezeiza as a first step toward doing an artistic project there. Initially, I thought of writing a film to be shot inside the prison, with the detainees doing their time. At the first workshop, we improvised some scenes based on their lives and did choreographies and karaoke sessions. And I saw how music and dance brought them happiness and new ways to express themselves, so this idea of making a musical started gaining momentum.

In prison, they are constantly watched, not only by the guards but also by the other prisoners. There is no space for solitude, no privacy, no way of having your "own room" or anything that sets you apart or lets you be someone else. And so the acting and dancing generated a different space within that space: a space of freedom, fantasy, and imagination. It was like they forgot they were there.

But then the pandemic came, and we couldn't enter the prison anymore. The workshops were cancelled, and I realized it would be impossible to make the film inside. And also, the people that I'd met started to be released. So then I turned my thoughts to working outside, with the people who had got out, reconstructing their time in prison in another space, in this case, the real space of a disused prison. At the end, *Reas* is really an EX film: ex-cons in an ex-prison, reconstructing their stories.

What was the casting process like? Who did you choose and why? And how do you manage to turn a non-actor into an actor?

I've worked with non-actors in the theatre for over fifteen years. My pieces are based on the true stories of real people –immigrant children, war veterans–, and they act

out these stories on stage. Research and casting happen simultaneously: I gradually understand the world I'm going to work in through the interviews that I do. Generally, I do about sixty interviews and then choose five or six people who will be in the play. In the case of *Reas*, it was very important to choose people from different backgrounds who went through that same experience. In that sense, I tried to make the cast diverse in personality, age, locals and migrants, with and without children. It was also essential to include trans people to make people aware of the specific situations they experience in jail.

I already knew various people from doing the workshops in the prison. But then, for two years, I did more research, looking for people who had been released. Some people brought others along. For example, I met Nacho because when I interviewed Estefy, she told me about a trans man she was in a rock band with, and I wanted to meet him. Regarding Yoseli, I met her in 2019, at the workshop in prison. Then she got out, and I looked all over for her. I didn't rightly know why. Really, as a protagonist, she's very shy and mysterious. Maybe it was that enigma that made me want to go back to her.

And now I realized that Yoseli Arias, that girl from an underprivileged part of Buenos Aires who wants to visit Paris, who has the Eiffel Tower tattooed on her back with the words "Never give up!" is my alter ego, and not just because we have the same last name! Yoseli has this fantasy of travelling, of seeing another world, of living other realities. Still, she was born into a very precarious economic background, and the only chance she had of getting out of there was to commit a crime. For me it's important that anyone can identify with that desire to live a different life, that anyone can think: I could have ended up in prison myself.

But how does a non-actor become an actor?

It's a very long process, basically training, acting exercises, improvising scenes, learning lines, and doing it over and over again. But acting is something that's inside all of us. It's all about discovering the performer who is inside the person, without turning them into a different character.

Plus, in the case of *Reas*, the acting work was accompanied by singing and dancing. A choreographer trained the protagonists to dance, and a musician taught them to sing and play instruments. We did a lot of prior work. There were months of tests, workshops, and rehearsals for a shooting that, for budget reasons, was just three weeks long. I had to be clear on everything; the script had to be very precise on what they would do, say, sing, dance...

Can you find truth from artifice? It's quite a contrast to what usually happens in series and films set in prison.

When I was writing the film and also during the rehearsals, our biggest danger (we discussed this with the crew a lot) was "prison realism". Our film couldn't be one of those series that stigmatizes people, that turn prison into a spectacle of violence. *Reas* had to be something different. We wanted to portray these people's memories, fantasies, desires. And most of all we wanted to emphasize something which is very important to me, namely what the prison system is like. What's it like to work in prison, what it's like to speak on the phone in prison, to love in prison? The musical genre was the perfect form to emphasize fantasy, imagination, to let the performers enjoy themselves and shine, be amazing, beautiful and glamorous. There's certainly violence in prison; there's horror and torture. But there's also love, community, family. And those prison-born relationships are what saves you.

Although Yoseli is kind of the lead, *Reas* also has a choral structure...

For me, Yoseli is the vehicle that gets everyone talking. Everyone tells their life

stories through her. She's the one who enters prison at the start and leaves at the end. But in that time, she gets all the characters she meets to talk. The film explores these different stories and comes across these different characters, but somehow, it always comes back to her, as if she were the guiding thread. Because *Reas* isn't exactly a film about one subject; it's a film about a group, about the kind of community that is built in prison.

What similarities and differences are there between *Theatre of War* and *Reas*?

Theatre of War is a film about masculinity, war, and heroism, while *Reas* is about women and trans people, community, love, and solidarity. *Reas* also works with this strange coupling between documentary and musical, and it gives off the appearance of fiction because it's constructed in the style of a more classical story, including its linear chronology: *girl enters prison, meets a boy, falls in love, and then leaves*.

There are also very important similarities that have to do with the device, the use of re-enactment and reconstruction that reflects on the ways of restoring memory. Both *Reas* and *Theatre of War* are films that use cinema to go back in time and reconstruct an experience with all its complexity.

And there's a difference in the tone, too...

Do you mean because of the humour? You could say that the film has some comedy in it, and we had a lot of fun making it. I think the strength of *Reas* lies in that empowerment that came from the simple act of reconstructing that past together.. We used to joke that it was a psychomagical act, that we were taking all the ghosts from prison for a day out, all these people who were in prison, who were tortured, who were killed... The space of the prison is so dark, heavy, and charged with death, that we could only do something that headed towards the light.

Nobody talks about being in prison. It's something people don't share because

they'll be stigmatized, they won't be able to get a job. So, the idea was to re-appropriate that prison story and acknowledge that it's an experience that marked them. Some of the performers said to me: "When the film comes out, everyone's going to know that I was in prison." They had to accept that they were making public something that not everyone knew about and wasn't easy to share. Because showing the complexity of the experience also has value. And they could also take some distance and sometimes even laugh about their own tragedy.

Do you have a theatre project with the same characters from *Reas*?

While making the film the cast started asking me what would happen next, and we joked that we had to make *Reas II*, the play. And I started to think that they were right, that it would be good to make a play after making the film. So now I'm researching and writing for the play. Unlike the film, I think the play will be more about what happens after prison, which is left open at the end of the film, in the final scene where they all talk about their dreams. What is the reality of that homecoming after prison? The play will premiere first in Argentina, and then it will have its European premiere at the Avignon Festival. So Yoseli's dream of visiting Paris is going to come true. I think that alone makes the play worthwhile!

There's something cruel about cinema, it's like a vampire: it takes everything it needs from you and leaves it there, set in stone, immortalized forever. Whereas theatre exists only when the people are present. The play is going to give them the experience of rehearsals, shows, and journeys; it will give them a job, and most importantly, it will give them hope. I feel like it's a way of giving something back to them for all that they gave me. Because these people trusted me, and now I have to live up to that.

Buenos Aires, December 2023

Information

REAS

Directed by Lola Arias

Argentina / Germany / Switzerland 2024

Language Spanish

WP Berlinale Forum 2024

82 min / Colour / DCP

Produced by Gema Films, Sutor Kolonko & Mira Film

Producers Gema Juárez Allen, Clarisa Oliveri, Ingmar Trost & Vadim Jendreyko

Production Managers Carla Rosmino, Pascal Moor & Bettina Müller

Script Lola Arias

Director of Photography Martín Benchimol

Editors Ana Remón & José Goyeneche

Production Design Ángeles Frinchaboy

Costume Design Andy Piffer

Sound Design Sofía Straface & Daniel Almada

Music Ulises Conti

Protagonists Yoseli Arias & Ignacio Amador Rodriguez

Main Cast Estefy Harcastle, Carla Canteros, Noelia LaDiosa, Paulita Asturayme, Laura Amato, Pato Aguirre, Cintia Aguirre, Julieta Fernandez, Silvana Gomez, Daniela Borda, Jade De la Cruz Romero and Betina Otaso.

Supported by INCAA, Fondo Nacional de las Artes, BKM, Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Bundesamt für Kultur - BAK, Fachausschuss Film und Medienkunst BS / BL, Sundance Documentary Fund, IDFA Bertha Fund, Sundance Documentary Fund, World Cinema Fund, Succès passage antenne SRG SSR, Swiss Films.

In coproduction with SWR/ARTE.

Director's Biography



Lola Arias (Argentina) is a writer, theatre and film director. She is a multifaceted artist who brings together people from different backgrounds (war veterans, young refugees, sex workers, etc.) in theatre, film, literature, and visual art projects.

Her most recent theater works play with the overlap between reality and fiction. ***Minefield*** (Royal Court Theatre, London, 2016) brings together British and Argentinian veterans of the Falklands/Malvinas War to share their experience of the conflict. ***Atlas des Kommunisten*** (Gorki Theatre, Berlin, 2016) gathers stories of women between the ages of 8 and 84 with backgrounds in the GDR. ***What they want to hear*** (Kammerspiele, Munich, 2018) is the reconstruction of the real case of a Syrian archaeologist trapped in German bureaucracy without any legal status. ***Futurreland*** (Gorki Theatre, Berlin, 2019) is a science-fiction documentary piece performed by unaccompanied minors, teenagers who fled to Germany on their own. ***Mother Tongue*** (2021-2022) is an encyclopedia of reproduction in the twenty-first century created in different cities with a diverse cast, and ***Happy Nights*** (Theater Bremen, 2023), an immersive performance where dancers and sex workers reflect on our relationships with sex, money, lust, and pain.

Her first feature film, ***Theatre of War*** (2018), was selected for the 68th Forum of the Berlinale Film Festival and received several prizes, including the CICAIE Art Cinema Award and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury. Arias also won the Best Director Award at the 20th BAFICI Festival in Buenos Aires. The film received the Movistar+ Prize for Best Documentary Film at Documenta Madrid and the Silver Condor Award for Best Adapted Script.

Lola Arias's work has been performed at the most prestigious theater festivals in the world, including Festival d'Avignon; Lift Festival, London; Under the Radar, New York; Theater Spektakel, Zurich; and cinema festivals (Berlinale, BFI London, San Sebastian, among others); as well as at venues including Théâtre de la Ville, Paris; REDCAT, Los Angeles; Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis; Parque de la Memoria, Buenos Aires; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Moma NY.

Filmography

Theatre of War (2018, 78')
WP Berlinale Forum



Gema Films

Is an Argentina-based production company created in 2009. We are interested in films with a strong authorial voice that explore narratives and experiment with the fabric between reality and fiction.

We work with established and emerging directors and artists. Among our recent works are **Reas** (2024, Lola Arias); **The Castle** (2023, Martín Benchimol) **Pornomelancolía** (2022, Manuel Abramovich); **Private Fiction** (2020, Andrés Di Tella); **Lina de Lima** (2019, María Paz González), **Theatre of War** (2018, Lola Arias) and **Oscuro Animal** (2016, Felipe Guerrero).

The company's director, Gema Juárez Allen, is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and of the Eurodoc and EAVE professional networks.

www.gemafilms.com
info@gemafilms.com

Sutor Kolonko

Founded in 2010, Sutor Kolonko produces documentaries and narrative feature films. The company has a strong focus on international co-production.

Sutor Kolonko's films include: the Cannes award-winning **Sofia's Last Ambulance** by Ilian Metev, **Rojo** by Benjamin Naishtat (Competition San Sebastian IFF 2018), the Emmy-winning **Solitary** by Kristi Jacobson, the documentary feature **Ringside** by André Hörmann (Berlinale 2019) and **A Voluntary Year** by Ulrich Köhler and Henner Winkler (Competition Locarno 2019).

Sutor Kolonko's most recent credits include: **The Mole Agent** by Maite Alberdi, which was nominated for the 2021 Academy Awards, the hybrid film **Mother** by Carolin Schmitz (2022), as well as **The Settlers** by Felipe Gálvez (Cannes Un Certain Regard 2023).

www.sutorkolonko.de
info@sutorkolonko.de

Mira Film Basel

Based in Switzerland, was founded in 2002 by Vadim Jendreyko and Hercli Bundi. In 2012, Susanne Guggenberger joined the core team of the company. Our focus is on addressing perspectives that offer surprising insights into social, political, and cultural questions. In collaboration with authors, directors, and international partners, we strive to create works that challenge and stimulate us through both their artistic approach and their content.

Our recent works include **Zehn Jahre** (2024, Matthias von Gunten), **Taming The Garden** (2021, Salomé Jashi), **Amor Fati** (2020, Cláudia Varejão), **The Naked King** (2019, Andreas Hoessli), **Eisenberger** (2018, Hercli Bundi), **Beyond the Obvious** (2018, Vadim Jendreyko) **Blue Note Records** (2018, Sophie Huber), **Calabria** (2016, Pierre-François Sauter), and **Ama San** (2016, Cláudia Varejão).

www.mirafilm.ch
info@mirafilm.ch

Sales Agent
LUXBOX

+ 33 171.37.99.34
info@luxboxfilms.com

International Publicity
THE PR FACTORY

Barbara Van Lombeek
barbara@theprfactory.com
+32 486 54 64 80

Marie-France Dupagne
mariefrance@theprfactory.com
+32 477 62 67 70



SUTOR KOLONKO

