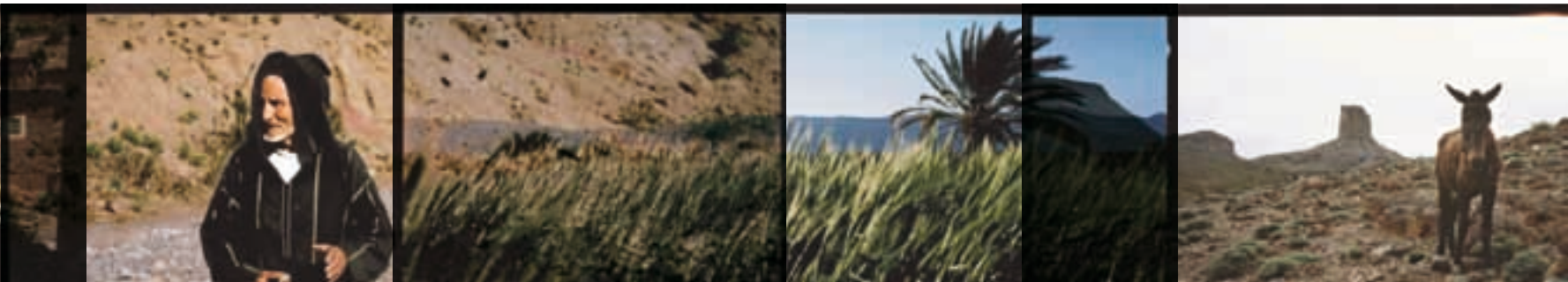




From the director of **Todos vós sodes capitáns/You all are captains** FIPRESCI Award Cannes 2010

**OLIVER LAXE**

# LAS MIMOSAS



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*I have been insulted and calumniated from the beginning of the world. Even the poets  
(my friends by nature) that defend me have failed to defend me well.*

*One of them (an Englishman named Milton) made me lose, along with some colleagues,  
an indefinite battle that never happened.*

*Another one (a German named Goethe) gave me the role of a procurer  
in a middling tragedy. But I'm not who they think I am.*

*Churches abominate me. Believers tremble on hearing my name.  
But, whether you like it or not, I have a role in the world.*

*I am not an insurgent against God, neither the spirit that denies.  
I am the God of the imagination, lost because I don't believe.*

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Fernando Pessoa



The High Middle Ages in the lands of the Maghreb. The kingdom is going through an age of crisis and deterioration. The different religious brotherhoods fight against each other for the control of power, trying to impose a return to a more pure and austere Islam.

The Sufi brotherhood of Akram is persecuted, being accused of heresy due to their practices contrary to faith. The old master seems to live totally alien to the situation, unperturbed, in a sort of unprecedented passivity. Devoted to God, he has reached the highest state of discernment that a mystic Sufi can get: he accepts with submissive calm everything that comes to him. However, close to death, he still has to transfer the reins of the brotherhood to Nabil, his insecure disciple, who does not seem to be ready for such a responsibility. Therefore, Akram in a surprising decision asks the prince of evil, the Devil himself, to finish the training process of the young man. As it is well known, the pacts with the fallen angel always imply giving something in return; the Devil is interested in a mysterious girl that travels in the caravan, Salma, who hides a disturbing sensitivity behind her fragile appearance.

The brotherhood keeps on going guided by Nabil and the Devil. The dangers and tensions increase and as a result many caravaneers leave, afraid of the disastrous path the brotherhood is going through. Ahmed, Salma's father, is expelled from the caravan due to his tyrannical attitude towards his daughter. Full of rage, he takes revenge denouncing the satanic caravaneers to the religious authorities that will inflict two of them an exemplary punishment: the death. The execution of the innocent Said and Shakib will be the last test for Nabil, Salma and the defendants themselves. They would only get over the pain of the martyrdom thanks to what is known as God's Love. This might be the last lesson of master Akram to his disciples: true Love may lie in the acceptance and total resignation.

*Las Mimosas* is a film placed somewhere between faith and the absence of faith.

The reason for this film

When I knew that my first feature film *Todos vós sodes capitáns* had been selected for the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs at Cannes 2010, I realized that my career would change completely. The prestige and relevance of this festival, where directors I admire have taken part in, such as Werner Herzog, Jim Jarmusch, Michael Haneke, Francis Ford Coppola, Chantal Akerman or Robert Bresson, together with the obtaining of the prize FIPRESCI, would make my career grow and flourish.

It has been two years since then, two long years full of changes. The paradigms of cinema production and financing seem to have expired once and for all. Furthermore, the break between cinema and audience has been increased, as well as the line between the wrongly called “art-house cinema” and the other misnamed “industrial cinema”. With this film I present, *Las Mimosas*, I want to find an intermediate stage between these two tensions by bringing together different sensitivities: **a film of a strongly independent nature, committed to the cinema and the audience**, made in a semi-industrial context. After the success in Cannes, many people advised me to make a film as soon as possible, on a similar scale to *Todos vós sodes capitáns*, in order not to get away from the scene, “from the spotlights”. I have chosen to take a step forward and go into a more ambitious and complex project not only in personal terms and style but also when it comes to production and search of new audiences.



Aesthetic intentions

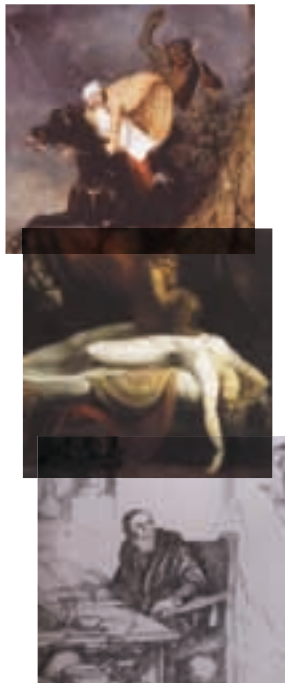
I have come back to Morocco and have deepened on my relationship with the Islam and the Muslim mysticism, the Sufism. Turkey, Cyprus or Mauritania have been other destinations that have helped me to understand the essence of this non-religion related to Christian mysticism, Buddhism, Taoism and many other mysticisms. It could be asserted that I share the same pursuit the characters of the film have. I am what is known as a “believer”, who tries to go deep into his own spiritual development for the sake of more freedom. It is not anything you look for, it is rather the opposite, and one has naturally inside himself that tendency to silence, to the other hermeneutics, the spirit’s one. In this way, *Las Mimosas* is not a secular film about the existence or non-existence of faith. What their characters look for is even more ambitious, that is, the harmony, immanence or connection with the totality, what has come to be referred to as “God”. Before Him, they share the same values of submission and abnegation, a way of love that breaks the distance among Lover, Beloved and love itself and between believer and God. Besides, my intention is to provide some serenity and historic perspective nowadays, especially against the monster known as “crisis”, by means of the maturity of these characters and their acceptance of such a barbarity. As different stages go by, the caravaneers will end up transcending the lament culture and will get a sort of stoical acceptance: they will not suffer any torment due to the uncertainty or the imperfection of life, since everything is divine will, divine perfection.

That is what mysticism lies in, in the achievement of harmony with the totality of life, integration with creation and comprehension of a situation by means of inspiration and lucubration. In the final scene of the execution, the main characters of *Las Mimosas* see the most abject side of the human being, but they will finally accept it and they will even see something eternal in it. The characters of the film provide that stoical and liberating look at what happens to them. The Sufis even accept the prosecution of the Ait Benesi: as the Devil says “a mosquito doesn’t bite because of evil”. Nabil will try to emulate his master Akram and see in the human being at the same time his beauty and ridiculousness, his heroism and guilt, his effort and weakness.

But *Las Mimosas* is much more than a religious film. As a Spaniard and communicator, I have always felt the responsibility of questioning the relationships between our society and a culture that is beyond what is shown in maps. As it is widely known, we are going through an age of big transformations; we are back to the class struggle and neo-colonial strategies with a







growing increase on populism and ethnic, cultural and religious fundamentalism. In view of this tumultuous period I would not talk about the need of a social revolution, but rather about revivifying and regeneration, what my characters try to do by means of their grace and harmony, not only at good times but also at apparently bad moments. The etymological origin of the word apocalypse is “reveal”, to uncover the veil to be able to see life through different eyes. Therefore, the change must be done in the level of perception, which is closely related to the image. Such a change is portrayed by the character of Salma.

*Las Mimosas* is a deterritorialised film where neither the national essence nor the exclusive traditions have any place in: there is only room for the necessary hodgepodge and promiscuity, in this case between East and West. Abraham´s sacrifice, the Virgin Mary and Jesus as well as the orders of chivalry or the stoning of Saint Sebastian, are some examples of tales shared by both religions, which I wanted to highlight in the film. The introduction of the Faust myth in a Muslim context is one of the main attractions and impacts of this film. In the revealed book of the Koran the Devil or Satan, known as Iblis, performs the same role than in the Holy Scriptures: he rebels against God by refusing to prostrate himself at Adam and it is expelled from heaven. In this way, the Devil, here and there, is the personification of the distance from God and the non-acceptance of the divine purposes. However, in *Las Mimosas* the Devil is not the guardian of Hell, nor is he a creature that does evil randomly: the Devil belongs to creation, therefore, he also fulfills a divine mission, which Nabil will try to accept and understand as an essential learning stage to reach the discernment he longs for beyond good and evil, beyond pain. Akram and Nabil know that Lucifer illuminates even if it is through contradiction. Somehow, the pact with the Devil also takes part in Sufism. The Persian character Al-Hallaj, the Sufi martyr, stands out. It has been considered as the Muslim Jesus Christ for being crucified because of his unorthodox approach to the divine in which he asserted “I am God”.

*Las Mimosas* will represent, in itself, a Sufi experience, **having full confidence in the impact consisted of the image, its secret connections and future resonance**. The last scene of the film reveals that it is intended to cause a phenomenological experience not only in characters but also in the audience. Akram, Nabil, Said or Shakib will finally realize, some of them more than others, that God is not in a transcendent afterlife, but it is among them, within everything that surrounds them.

## Visual aspect

*Las Mimosas* is a **chivalry epic tale** and as in Caroligian tradition, Arthurian legends and stories about the quest for the Grail, it hides in its background, in a more or less hidden way, a mystic or messianic epic. The visual appearance will be as that of an adventure film, a perfect way to covey the film different levels of meaning. The dramatic tension typical of this genre, close to western, will provide me with more freedom in the plastic use of the image and in the topics under consideration.

As in *Todos vos sodes capitáns* the 35 mm format will be also used in *Las Mimosas*. We will shoot in colour, using cinemascope format, in a combination of natural areas and sets from Ouarzazate film studios.

I have been living in the Skoura palm grove for two years, located among the fertile High Atlas, the dry Anti Atlas and the Sahara desert. In a few kilometres the four seasons coexist. We will be filming in February, a month when the climate is especially interesting. Particularly noteworthy is the collision produced on the High Atlas wall between the hot air coming from the desert and the cold one from the Atlantic Ocean. This leads to sudden, unrelenting and beautiful storms: intense snow, rivers overflowing, palms groves devastated by the blizzard, almond trees in blossom in the middle of the desert... **Nature**, that divinity always present, **will not be just a setting in *Las Mimosas* but it will be a character itself**, a character that constantly throbs, that vibrates as the 35 mm does.

My intention is to finish the scenes with the particular sensuality of the image, as a sort of physical catharsis, beyond the intellect, beyond analysis, in a journey that goes from the human to the divine, from the physical to the spiritual, from the erotic to the mystic. That is the objective in scenes such as the one of the bath in the oasis with the four Graces, the one of Salma´s childbirth or the final merging of Nabil with the river. In this regard, we could say that *Las Mimosas* is a film of a strongly feminine sensibility. At the same time, it is a veiled tribute to women. There is no better context than the Muslim culture, to make an ode to women´s strength and sacrifice, to their self-less love. *Las Mimosas* places in the character of Salma some hope for a future world that will balance masculinity and femininity, where it will not matter whether it is a woman or a man who embodies good purposes.



## Profesional actors vs. Non-profesional actors

I intend to work with a combination of professional and amateur actors. Only Akram and Nabil will be professional performers, and they are meant to help to me to provoke the others by means of information and interpretation itself. As regards the non-professional actors, **I will “invent” them all, “the way they are”**, as I have already done in *Todos vos sodes capitáns*. The script has been written with all their words and own gestures in mind.

As the making of *Las Mimosas* has something of a ritual, of a shared prayer, I have chosen a selection of actors whom I have a special relationship with. This must be transferred to the image, taking into account that everything that is behind the camera will always be felt through the image.

With my new film I propose a double game between seriousness and lightness, keeping in check the risk of dealing with such ambitious matters and theological and pagan vocabulary that have been overused by empty spiritualism and current cynicism. I will achieve this by means of characters´ vivacity and humour; **laughing is the best answer to all the odd aspects of life**, in fact, Sufism cannot exist without the constant relativism provided by laughing. I also suggest a double game between believing and not believing, between belonging to this world without being part of it; and doing so, I will try to avoid making just a distant sample or a parody. I would like to go beyond the recurrent absorption of the contemporary cinema, by using open and bright heroes instead of the common post-modern, isolated and intimate characters.



## References

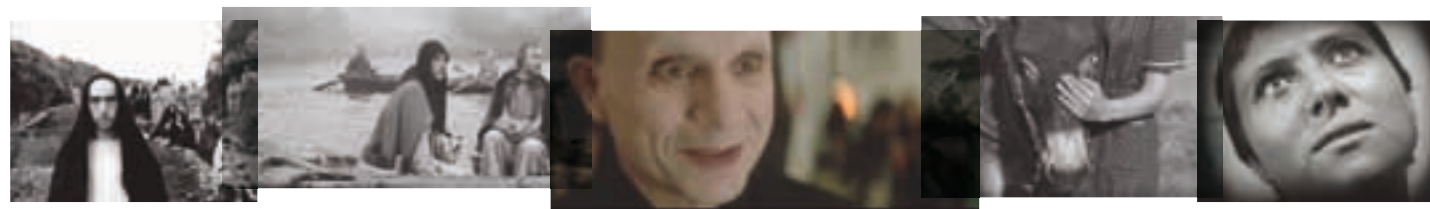
*Francesco, giullare di Dio* (Roberto Rossellini, 1950) is an essential reference, in the way to deal with subject matters that link men and nature, men and divinity or love and hate. Rossellini achieves this by outstanding simplicity and humour, by a decisive philosophical and conceptual austerity, an “unintentional” metaphysics. Thanks to the performers, ***Las Mimosas* will also be a “flesh and blood” film, where metaphysical elements will be mainly achieved due to the impact of life on life itself.**

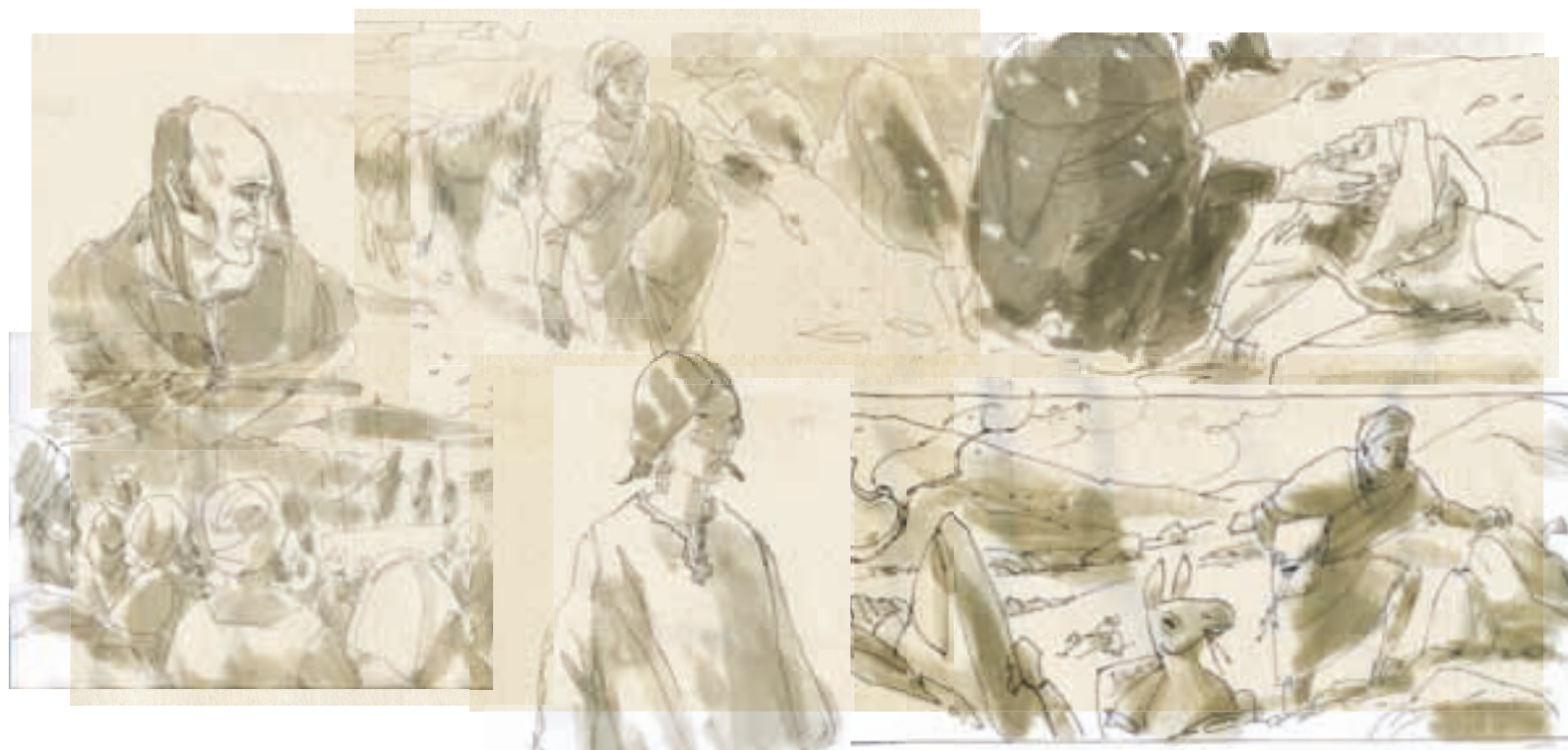
*Andrei Rublyov* (Andrei Tarkovski, 1966) and its final scene of the creation of the bell is the referent in terms of how to condensate in a single scene or image human endeavour, human ridicule nature, and at the same time beauty. The context of decadence is similar in *Las Mimosas* and the way characters must face it, as Andrei Rublyov does at the end of the film, when by means of Passion he finds out what makes humans be divine.

With the introduction of the figure of the Devil and the choice of Younisos as the performer my intention is to reach that strange uneasiness of scenes such as the one of the “Mystery man” from *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997). The interventions of the Devil in *Las Mimosas* will constantly shake the film and its characters. The “uncanny” is also a common feature of the Thai contemporary filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul, whose films are a key reference for me.

The scene of the execution of Said and Shakib recalls the figure of Joan of Arc and the wonderful films about her made by Carl Th. Dreyer and Robert Bresson. As the French martyr, these characters are aware of the redeeming message of Love and Passion contained in their deaths. I have been also influenced by Bresson´s *Lancelot du Lac* (1974). The ellipsis has been constantly used while writing the script; this is the case of the massacre of the soldiers in the Bou Thrarar gorges and the imprisonment of Said and Shakib when they get to the Taourirt Kasbah. And of course, it could not be left out *Au hazard Balthazar* (1966), whose main character is a donkey, which has a more anthropomorphic role in *Las Mimosas*.

Finally, I want stress the films by Pier Paolo Pasolini, particularly *Medea* (1969), which has helped me to build a myth with a few elements and has shown me how to detect the lyricism conveyed by the introduction of Berbers from the region where we will be filming as actors and extras.





## Production notes

*Las Mimosas* is Oliver Laxe's second feature length film. We are now finishing development stage, with an estimated budget of 900.000 €.

Oliver's first feature, *Todos vós sodes capitáns (You all are captains)*, made its debut at the Quinzaine des Realisateurs in Cannes 2010 (where it received the FIPRESCI award) and was internationally distributed in Spain, France, Portugal and USA.

For this new project we are currently looking for co-producers. We already started negotiations with some production companies in Europe.

So far, 20% of the budget is secured. For the rest of the budget our strategy is to target funds in Europe (national fund in Spain and in the other European countries we will co-produce with), broadcasters (TVG Spain, TVE Spain, Arte France and ZDF Germany) and theatrical distributors.

The project has just been presented to Spanish national funds, with an expected funding of 300.000 €.

An advanced version of the script is ready, with casting and location work already completed. Shooting is set to take place in Morocco in February-March 2013.

## Distribution & Sales

The multiculturalism debate is of paramount importance, but the manner in which it takes place begins to seem longer expire. *Las Mimosas* will not be a Moroccan film, neither a Spanish one. It will not be about the vision of Morocco from a European filmmaker; the intention is to reflect how cultural identities are interconnected and deterritorialized. We deeply believe that this approach would interest a wider audience.

We want to seek distributors and sales representatives with a complete screenplay and final co-production and financing plan already in place. As we plan to target urban art-house audience all over the world, we will look for a sales agent with a strong experience in this field.

Our objective is to repeat the festival strategy we had for our first feature film, debuting in one of the most important film festivals, which would give the film a visibility that will help its international distribution.





## Oliver Laxe

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Born in Paris in 1982, he is the son of Spanish emigrants. After finishing his studies in Cinema and filmmaking in Barcelona at the Pompeu Fabra University he moved to London, where he filmed in 2006 *Y las chimeneas decidieron escapar*, a 16mm short film made in collaboration with Enrique Aguilar.

He then ventured to Africa, spending the last five years in Tangier where he shot in 2007 *Suena la trompeta – ahora veo otra cara*. Another short film, *París #1*, was done the same year in Galicia. These short films were screened in several international festivals.

In Tangier he developed and implemented Dao Byed, a 16mm filmmaking workshop for disadvantaged children (<http://daobyed.wordpress.com>). From this experience was born *Todos vos sodes capitáns*, his first feature film, which made its international premiere at the Quinzaine des Realisateurs in Cannes in 2010 and received the FIPRESCI award. The film then participated in more than fifty international film festivals.

*Las Mimosas* will be his next project.



"In "You Are All Captains," a debut feature shown at Cannes this year, the French-Spanish director Oliver Laxe uses his own experience teaching filmmaking to children in Tangiers, Morocco, to spark a playful rumination on the creative process and his outsider status".

— **Dennis Lim, THE NEW YORK TIMES**

"The lines between fiction and nonfiction blur pretty quickly, but while this formula is familiar, it's so perfectly executed that the film never feels predictable. There are regular flashes of incredible power throughout the film, as the feelings of the children suddenly burst through".

— **Richard Peña, FILM COMMENT**

"A shape-shifting work that doesn't quite know what it is -fiction, auto-reflection, essay, landscape film- and that invites the viewer into its generous mode of guessing and discovering".

— **Gabe Klinger, CINEMASCOPE (n43, Summer 2010)**

"Oliver Laxe, flat-out the discovery of this year's Cannes, with his free-spirited and sublime You Are All Captains in the Quinzaine...".

— **Robert Koehler, FILMJOURNEY.ORG**

"One of the strangest/bravest directorial debuts in a long time".

— **Christopher Bell, INDIIEWIRE**

"You All Are Captains is one of the rare movies in which action is imbued with thought, and in which the very process of thought seems to come to life. The movie's scale is small, its subjects are intimate, its artistic reach is immense".

— **Richard Brody, THE NEW YORKER**

"À l'inverse de ces films d'apocalypse, les plus beaux films cannois proposaient des récits feuilletons, des images hybrides, un devenir. ONCLE BOONMEE, ses six bobines, ses échappées dans le conte ou le quotidien, FILM SOCIALISME et ses trois parties à l'énonciation chaque fois renouvelée, VOUS ÊTES TOUS DES CAPITAINES d'Oliver Laxe (Quinzaine) et ses soudaines bifurcations narratives, ou encore de L'ÉTRANGE AFFAIRE ANGÉLICA d'Oliveira baladé du matériel au spirituel, passant d'une rive à l'autre. Ces films ne proposent pas une fin mais un devenir, pas un état figé mais un monde transformable"

— **Jean-Sébastien Chauvin, CAHIERS DU CINEMA**

"A work among the impure, the imperfect and an undisguised vocation to appropriate the fiction from reality, to take it to more rugged and silent, and also more suggestive, fields".

— **Gonzalo de Pedro, CAHIERS DU CINEMA — ESPAÑA**

"The tiny film grows as the story progress (which has no conventional narrative) to become irresistible, regardless of their affiliation with Italian neorealism, the cinema of Abbas Kiarostami or Albert Serra, among others".

— **Diego Batlle, OTROS CINES**

"...brilliantly constructed deconstruction of "truth" versus "fiction".

— **Karina Longworth, VILLAGE VOICE**

**Top 10 Best Films  
of 2011**  
Christopher Bell (Indiewire)

**Top 26 Best films  
of 2011**  
Richard Brody  
(The New Yorker).  
12th position

**Top 10 Best Undistributed  
Film 2010**  
Dennis Lim, Gabe Klinger  
and Jay Kuehner

Zeitun Films is a Spanish production company born from art and culture combined.

## Productions:

### **Todos vós sodes capitáns/You all are captains**

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Oliver Laxe, 2010 | Fiction, B&W, 35mm., 79'

Premiered at Quinzaine des Réalisateurs Cannes 2010 (FIPRESCI Award). Won other 10 awards in more than 50 festivals; it also participated in Vancouver, Valdivia, São Paulo, Mar del Plata, Gijón, FICUNAM, Jeonju and IndieLisboa. Theatrical distribution in Spain, France, Portugal and USA.



### **Vikingland**

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Xurxo Chirro, 2011 | Documentary, color, video, 99'

Premiered at FID Marseille 2011, also participated in Mar del Plata, Gijón and FICUNAM among others. Best film at Play-doc Tui.



### **Arraianos**

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Eloy Enciso, 2012 | Documentary, color, HD, 65'

Premiere at a "category one" film festival this summer confirmed





*zeitun films*

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