

KINO LORBER

Synopsis

Camila (Agustina Muñoz, *The Princess of France*), a young Argentine theater director, travels from Buenos Aires to New York for an artist residency to work on a new Spanish translation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Upon her arrival, she quickly realizes that her work isn't compensating for the loss of her friends and the lover she left behind. When she begins to receive a series of mysterious postcards from Danièle (Mati Diop, *Claire Denis's 35 Shots of Rum*), a former participant in the same residency, Camila second-guesses her artistic endeavors and begins to seek answers about her past. *Hermia & Helena* mingles actors from Matías Piñeiro's Buenos Aires repertory with stalwarts of New York's independent film scene (Keith Poulson, Dustin Guy Defa, Dan Sallitt). It is a film of dead ends and new beginnings, navigating amorous detours across hemispheres and languages, in which the words of Shakespeare clash with the entanglements of modern, digital life.

About the Film

Hermia & Helena is the first film by Piñeiro shot in the United States (and the sixth in his native Argentina), featuring understated and complex performances by Keith Poulson (*Listen Up Philip*), María Villar (*Viola*) and filmmakers Dan Sallitt (*The Unspeakable Act*) and Dustin Guy Defa (the upcoming *Human People*). A Trapecio Cine and Ravenser Odd Production, in association with Cinema Conservancy.

The film premiered in the main competition of the 2016 Locarno Film Festival. It is also an official selection of the 2016 New York Film Festival (main slate), BFI London Film Festival, Festival de Valdivia, Festival do Rio, Vancouver International Film Festival and others. The Toronto International Film Festival is *Hermia & Helena's* North American premiere.

About the Filmmaker - Matías Piñeiro

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina 1982. Piñeiro studied at Universidad del cine, where he taught Filmmaking and Film History. In 2011, he moved to the U.S. to undertake the Radcliffe Institute Fellowship at Harvard University. He now teaches filmmaking at the Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn, NY.

Piñeiro oscillates between New York and Buenos Aires, and is currently developing a new feature, *Ariel*, a CPH:LAB project with Gallicean co-director Lois Patiño based on William Shakespeare's "The Tempest." *Hermia & Helena* (2016) is the fourth instalment in his series on the female roles in William Shakespeare's comedies, and his first English language film.

Matías Piñeiro - Feature Filmography:

2017 – *Ariel* (co-directed with Lois Patiño) [*pre-production*]

2016 - *Hermia & Helena*

2014 - *La Princesa de Francia / The Princess of France*

2012 - *Viola*

2010 - *Rosalinda*

2009 - *Todos mienten / They All Lie*

2007 - *El hombre robado / The Stolen Man*

2006 - *A propósito de Buenos Aires / Regarding Buenos Aires*, [*collective film*]

KINO LORBER

Interview with Director Matías Piñeiro

Conducted by Gustavo Beck for MUBI Notebook

NOTEBOOK: *Hermia & Helena* shares a similar aesthetic with your previous films. At the same time, the overall tone feels much more melancholic now. You have been living in New York for the past few years and this was the first time you shot there. Did the first experience of shooting outside your hometown of Buenos Aires affect the way you developed your characters or even the story?

MATÍAS PIÑERIO: I moved to New York with no intention of making films there. It took four years to build the context in which it would be possible and exciting for me to shoot outside Buenos Aires. In the project of the “Shakespeareads,” the series of films I have been developing since 2010 around the female roles of Shakespeare’s comedies, changes and continuities are a vital part of its structure. The project is a game of variations. I realized that the change of territory that I experience in my life could be an axis for one of these films. In order to accentuate it, I thought it was important to insist on Buenos Aires, to shoot also there and produce this dance movement between one place and the other. Living outside your city is being at two places. A similar movement is experienced in translation. You move between two languages. Thinking about not been in my country help me to find the plot of the film: a theater director moves to New York to translate Shakespeare.

NOTEBOOK: You collaborated with actresses with those you have been working with for many years now, such as Agustina Muñoz and María Villar. But you also welcome new actors to your community and it is likely not a coincident that they themselves are filmmakers, like Mati Diop and Dan Sallit. What was the process of working with “regulars” as well as “newcomers” like for you? Would it be possible to measure the impact they had on your way of working?

PIÑERIO: Finding the people I would like to photograph was one of the challenges about making a film outside my usual context. I have worked for more than ten years with most of the cast and crew from Buenos Aires. It is always more about the chemistry between the actors than anything else. I realize I like working with actors that do something else apart from acting. María is a German teacher, Romina a novelist, Agustina a theater director, Julián a musician, etc. I feel that there is something in their gestures and faces that shows that multiplicity. I am attracted to this mix, to this lack of unity. In New York, I go a lot to the cinema, and so the community in which I live is the film community. They all come from different places but I started bumping into them, as I met the Argentine actors in the context of the theater community in Buenos Aires. I find Dan, Dustin, Keith, and Mati to be very interesting, intriguing and sensible people. There is something photogenic about that. So I tried to make their energy part of the film. For me, it was important to meet with them randomly, in the street, at the cinema or in a corner, and to see them walking, talking and simply standing to perceive how they would react to being next to Agustina Muñoz.

NOTEBOOK: You also continue your long-time collaboration with Fernando Lockett, your cinematographer since your feature debut. Yet, in this film, perhaps because of the film’s slower paced mood, the camera seems to behave differently. Could you elaborate on the process of defining the camera concept for your sixth film?

PIÑERIO: There is not a concept behind each film, but the idea that every film has to be different from the last one, especially because they have so many things in common. So I build a film in regards to the previous one.

I have worked with Fernando since 2002. We know each other very well, but there are still some mysteries. So we challenge ourselves. We believe in framing. That the fragmentation of the world through

KINO LORBER

the lens and camera produces a rhythm, a meaning, even if it's an ambiguous one. I enjoy a sense of kinship among the films, so it is the same technology and the same economics that makes the films possible. Shooting in New York and not being a tourist was one of the challenges. The city didn't have to photograph itself. But it is not that different to the work we do in Buenos Aires. The way we show both cities is similar. Avoid postcards and work in location with the geometries that the space provides to us at that moment. I think that it was important not to fool each other and just do the film trusting in the elements that the film had right there. That trust has to be followed rigorously.

NOTEBOOK: What the screenwriting process is like for you? Specifically, what is the role of Shakespeare and his plays in your work? What is your inspiration, your point of departure and how do you develop initial ideas into a story with characters? Also, do Shakespeare's text inspire you with images that already influence your writing?

PIÑERIO: Unfortunately, I write in a rush, always a bit behind pre-production schedule, but never compromising it. I don't fully enjoy the writing process taken as a moment of lonesome work. I rather talk about the plans for the plot, rehearse, do a play that take us to the written pages. I don't have a script fetish, but I do write them in the end. It is just that it seems I need to have the urgency of shooting in order to provoke the writing, trying to bringing them as close as possible. In *Hermia & Helena* there are scenes, such as the scenes with Dan Sallitt, where we were working the lines with a general scheme but building right there in the shoot. I feel that for that delicate scene that nervousness had to be performed. There was no sense for anticipating and rehearsing. It was much more about the magnetism between the bodies.

Shakespeare helps me to write. It helps me to avoid the white page. It puts the machine in motion. In the case of *Hermia & Helena*, Shakespeare provides lines, the actual text of *Midsummer's Night Dream*: objects (the torn pages, the book, the drawings, characters (a translator, the duets), excuses (the institute, the kisses), motives (the father figure, the flowers, the trip to the unknown land). It then all gets mixed. Shakespeare is a clay that we can put our hands in to and starting expanding a new form. There is no need for every element of the final film to point at Shakespeare, it is by putting myself and my crew in contact with a determine play that the film grows as it does.

NOTEBOOK: Many plot elements remain somewhat hidden. Instead, you focus on the atmosphere that springs from the characters' encounters with each other—without necessarily contextualizing them. What are your ambitions for creating a mood in film and how do you realize it?

PIÑERIO: There is a moment in the film where someone asks the main character: *what are your ambitions?* In Spanish, "ambitions" sounds so bad. Okay. I enjoy plot in films, but I prefer to think plot as a form that unravels before our eyes and ears. A mood happens in editing, by crossing a piece of music with a face, a camera pan with a line of dialogue, a color with a gesture. It needs the cooperation of the viewer. It can't be fully impose in the image by color correction or in the sound by a violin, but it is offered to the viewer with the hope that it produces in her or him something in the order of the nervous system. There is a search for equilibrium, providing information and stimuli in adequate proportions to produce a new and alternative way for telling stories. I trust in not exposing all that information. I know that the viewer is more intelligent than me, that there is a huge film and image history behind us and that we have to move forward it, even if that means making false steps, because maybe some times walking a crooked way can have its benefits.

NOTEBOOK: *Hermia & Helena* has a unique formal structure. The architecture of the story is not primarily chronological and instead it is made up of what might be described as different, isolated feelings as well as co-existing relationships. How did this structure come about and to what extent did the editing

KINO LORBER

process influence its final shape?

PIÑERIO: I tend to focus much on the structure of the film when I am writing. It is from the structure that the plot starts growing. I decided that this would be a film about the number two. It's *Hermia & Helena*, in Buenos Aires and New York, in English and Spanish. And that so it is a film about moving from one element to the other, and then coming back, because it has to be a film in constant movement from one to the other and back. It is a film about traveling that way. The structure had to create that. We will shoot in New York and also Buenos Aires, and the experience of one territory will affect the experience in the other land. And then we shall come back and have that again and again.

Also, I enjoyed that the three main sections of the film don't communicate much between each other, because that can be experienced that way. Not everything is connected to everything. It is the same trip of this character but we tell three different moments of it.

NOTEBOOK: In your previous films, the musicality of the dialogues was always something that grabbed the viewers' attention. What was it like for your actresses—and also for you—to switch back and forth between Spanish and English?

PIÑERIO: It had to flow. It is broken English and that gives another rhythm to the film. Another essential difference. I enjoy that there are many accents in the film. María's, Agustina's and Mati's. But also Keith, who is from Texas, or Dustin, who has been living abroad for some time. I am in favor of the mixed sounds. The actresses talk as they do, as they can. And I find a beauty to it.

It is also the core of the film. It is a film about coming and going, about changing states, changing languages and sounds. The actresses move different and react different when they talk in another language. I enjoy this idea of one person being two people. This doubleness. It is not innocent that the film is called *Hermia & Helena*. Hermia and Helena are all of them and none at the same time. It is much more about the tension of being two, of the energy in between the bodies, the duets that vary each time: Carmen & Camila, Camila & Danièle, Gregg & Camila, Camila & her father, Camila & Mariana, and so on... I think that it also reflects a movement that comes out from the work of translating, about the marks that are left on the thing that we do and say that talk about the process.

August 8th, 2016

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Full interview available at:

<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/inviting-chance-an-interview-with-matias-pineiro>

KINO LORBER

CREDITS

Cast

Agustina Muñoz (Camila)
Maria Villar (Carmen)
Mati Diop (Daniëlle)
Julian Larquier (Leo)
Keith Poulson (Lukas)
Dan Sallitt (Horace)
Laura Paredes (Valeria)
Dustin Guy Defa (Gregg)
Gabi Saidon (Bárbara)
Romina Paula (Mariana)
Pablo Sigal (Sergio)
Ana Cambre (Lucrecia)
Kyle Molzan (Dave)
Ryan Miyake (Michael)
Oscar Williams (Pianist)
Micah Gottlieb (Neighbor)
Bingham Bryant (Fellow)
Ethan Spigland (Librarian no. 1)
Ji Park (Librarian no. 2)

Crew

Assistant Directors	- Lionel Braverman - Agustina Galvez - Bingham Bryant
Art Direction	- Ana Cambre
Art Assistant	- Lindsey Vandevier
Sound	- Mercedes Tennina - Sean Dunn
Sound Assistant	- Daniele Ale - Pierre-Henri Bazin - Ted Fendt - Antoine Bravin - Andrés Polonsky
Image	- Fernando Lockett
Assistant Camera	- Kyle Molzan - Ben Cortes - Ines Duacastella - Sofía Victoria - Fidel González Armatta - Sean Hanley

KINO LORBER

Image (October, May) - Tommy Davis

Produced by - Graham Swon
- Melanie Schapiro

Producers - Jake Perlin
- Andrew Adair

Production Assistant - Micah Gottlieb

PA (Hudson) - Adam Weinert, Miles Joris-Peyrafitte

PA (Fort Greene Park) - Tyler Rubenfeld

Direction & Script - Matías Piñeiro

Post-Production

Editor - Sebastien Schjaer

Sound Mix - Mercedes Tennina
- Francisco Pedemonte

Colorist - Georgina Pretto