



MEDUSA

An Anita Rocha da Silveira Film

BRAZIL

2021

FANTASY

129 MINUTES

PORTUGUESE

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LOGLINE

By day, young women show religious devotion through purity and perfection. By night, they form a vigilante girl gang, roving the streets of Brazil to punish sinners. When an attack goes wrong, Mari is forced to confront her inner demons.

SYNOPSIS

Mari and her friends broadcast their spiritual devotion through pastel pinks and catchy evangelical songs about purity and perfection, but underneath it all they harbor a deep rage. By day they hide behind their manicured facade, and by night they form a masked, vigilante girl gang, prowling the streets in search of sinners who have deviated from the rightful path. After an attack goes wrong, leaving Mari scarred and unemployed, her views of community, religion, and her peers begin to shift. Nightmares of repressed desires and haunting visions of alluring temptation become undeniable and the urge to scream and release her paralyzing inner demons is more powerful than ever before. A neon-tinged genre-bender that gives provocative form to the overwhelming feminine fury coursing through modern life, MEDUSA dares us not to look away.

MUSIC
BOX
FILMS

ANITA ROCHA DA SILVEIRA

WRITER & DIRECTOR

Born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Anita Rocha da Silveira has written, directed and edited three short-films: The Noon Vampire (2008), Handball (2010, FIPRESCI Award at the Int. Short Film Festival Oberhausen), and The Living Dead (2012, Cannes Directors' Fortnight). Her first feature Kill me Please (2015) was screened at the Orizzonti section at Venice International Film Festival, New Directors/New Films and SXSW, among others. Medusa is Anita's second feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

2021	MEDUSA
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2015	KILL ME PLEASE
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2012	THE LIVING DEAD (SHORT)
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2010	HANDBALL (SHORT)
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2008	THE NOON VAMPIRE (SHORT)
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A CONVERSATION WITH ANITA ROCHA DA SILVEIRA

How did you come-up with the film? In spite of its very pop aesthetics, its atmosphere feels like a dark utopia. Is it entirely fictional or inspired by true events?

In 2015, pictures and videos of a young paramilitary group surfaced the Internet. They were young men in uniforms saluting in front of an altar, screaming command words, saying they were prepared for the Lord's battle – they called themselves the Gladiators. Over the last few years, we have witnessed a significant growth of the Evangelical bench in the Brazilian Congress, as well as the birth of new influencers: young YouTubers who are charismatic and use the Internet to defend an ultraconservative lifestyle – such as a young journalist whose motto was "I Fight the End of Feminism".

We had also gone through the 2018 general elections, which were tarnished by hatred and misinformation, mostly spread out through WhatsApp groups. Part of the population was appalled to see fake news involving alleged "penis-shaped baby bottles" and "gay kits", supposedly distributed by leftists to "indoctrinate small kids into a gay lifestyle". Just like in the Q-Anon theory, it's all about "protecting the children". But from whom?

However, what really prompted me was seeing part of Brazilian society advocating the return of the demure female – one who is devoted to her man – as well as several reports in the news about violent attacks on teenage girls, carried out by other girls that attack in a group, in most cases because they regard the victim as promiscuous.

Sometimes the victims' hair was cut off, and the face slashed, which was essential to make the victims look "ugly". The reason claimed for such violent acts ranged from believing the victims were "too beautiful", to them "hitting on" a boyfriend of one of the attackers, to "showing off" with provocative clothes, "getting too many likes" on their Instagram pictures, or being perceived as "easy" or "slutty" – all in a world where social networks have become the primary surveillance tool. Violence among women – often used as a form of control – is constantly reiterated in our society, and it remains, to this day, a topic that we do not talk much about, as it challenges us to think about how the engines of machismo also operate inside us.

What were your motivations in rewriting the myth of Medusa in modern day Brazil?

When I read the news about the young women gathering to attack a fellow woman, I instantly thought of Medusa. In the most know version of the myth, Medusa is described as a beautiful maiden, a priestess of the temple of Athena. But one day she gave in to Poseidon's advances, angering Athena, the virgin goddess, who transformed Medusa's beautiful hair into snakes, and left her face so horrendous that those merely gazing into it would be turned to stone. Medusa was punished for her sexuality, for desiring, for not being "pure".

By combining myth and reality, it occurred to me that, even with the passing of the centuries, women wanting to control each other became part of the very foundation of this civilization.

And perhaps, it is a way of us to keep control of ourselves. After all, we are raised fearful of giving into our impulses or being labeled as "hysterical". Such control also involves appearance and beauty, for we are impregnated with the idea that it is the primary female attribute. We go on diets to achieve a certain weight and undergo painful aesthetic procedures in the hope to remain young forever.

When distancing herself from what is expected as standard behavior, Mariana will find her way to a special encounter. And this experience, instead of turning her body into stone, will awaken new sensations and desires.



One of the striking elements is that families and parents are totally absent in the film; and even more in the faith and the transmission of religious beliefs. Is Brazilian youth deep into religion today? What about the Church you outline, is it based on true stories?

Brazil is a very plural, diverse country, so I cannot make any generalizing comments on the youth. But I do notice that evangelical churches play a certain role and look after these kids in areas where other churches and the state have failed to do so. Besides providing a place of worship, evangelical churches offer classes, courses, support groups for the youth, for women, the elderly, and so on. So, when people find themselves estranged from their families, feeling lonely, sometimes in a new city, a church can become this place of support and bonding.

I would like to take the opportunity to point out that I do not intend to criticize religious manifestations, but rather to call attention to certain groups who make peculiar interpretations of the biblical texts and contribute to the construction of intolerant, sexist, homophobic environments that are tainted by hatred. Today, it can be easy to take on a doctrine and use it as you may see fit. No wonder we have witnessed, over the last few decades, a plethora of temples and churches from several Christian faiths, with discourses and dogmas that can vary immensely. To build the fictitious Church of Medusa, I conducted extensive research on this universe – from how youth groups organize themselves all the way to the preaching of reverends, all inspired in real sermons.

What are your influences in terms of cinema?

To create Medusa, my main influence was Dario Argento, especially in *Suspiria* (1977) and *La Sindrome di Stendhal* (1996) – for the incredible aesthetics and commitment to a horror genre that is done in a way that is light-hearted, filled with humor and small transgressions.

Mulholland Drive (2001) and the *Twin Peaks* TV show (1990–91/2017) are also references, for the way David Lynch works across genres and at times makes use of humor to expose the flaws in the sought-after American dream. As well as *Get Out* (2017), by Jordan Peele, and its excellent mix of horror, humor and social commentary.

I must not forget to mention Claire Denis, especially *Trouble Every Day* (2001) and *Beau Travail* (1999), for the way the director is able to frame bodies in an intense state of control and sublimation, yet also uncontrollably, ultimately surrendering to hidden desires. And finally, I would say *Carrie* (1976), by Brian De Palma, as one of the clearest and most beautiful depictions of what repression and humiliation can do to women.

Both the ‘The Treasures’ and the Sion ‘Watchmen’ cultivate high beauty/body standards, that seems like a very important part of their culture. Is this something inherent to the Brazilian society / youth?

In the universe created in Medusa, as the character Michele points out, "good looks are essential." For the paramilitary young male group, 'The Watchmen of Sion', working out and exercising is part of the routine and discipline to which they subject themselves. For the female youth group 'The Treasures of the Altar', it is important to conform to a certain beauty standard imposed by society.

Due to systemic machismo and colonialism, having a standard body and always looking "made-up" is what is expected of the girls; it is an essential part of being accepted into that universe. And it also involves straightening their hairs and always wearing makeup - but toned-down. At the beginning of the movie, Mariana is working in a beauty clinic, a place where Western normative beauty standards are even more exaggerated. And her transformation will begin precisely thought the way she looks.

However, the way I see it, the cult of the perfect body and certain beauty standards is first and foremost related to a form of control. Since these young people are expected to control their desire, the exercise of control starts through their own bodies and extends to the bodies of others.

Mari Oliveira already starred in MATE-ME POR FAVOR, did you have her in mind when writing this one? Can you let us know how you assembled this cast of young actors? Are they all professional performers?

Yes, I always had Mari Oliveira in mind. She is an incredible actress, an amazing person, and she managed to add several layers and nuances to the character. To put together the cast, I had the help of cast producer Giovani Barros, and together we made open calls through social media. We received over 600 portfolios and auditioned around 250 young men and women. Some had previous experience in TV and cinema, like Lara Tremouroux, Felipe Frazão, and João Vithor Oliveira, but the vast majority of the young cast was formed by students from local drama schools who had their breakthrough on the big screen with Medusa.





The soundtrack of the film is very contemporary, whether it is the religious pop songs, or the general music choices, from R&B to 70's thriller songs. Can you tell us more about the role you give to music in your films?

The idea for the soundtrack began early on, in the process of writing the script, when I wrote the lyrics to Jesus is my True Love, a version of the Brazilian pop song Sonho de Amor. Medusa's Church is pop and wants to attract more followers, so what could be better than a catchy theme song?

The choice of phonograms navigated through my own personal taste and through songs with lyrics and rhythms that helped to convey the feelings in the scenes, such as Cities in Dust (Siouxsie & The Banshees) and Uma Noite e 1/2 (Renato Rocketh) – an incredibly famous Brazilian pop rock song performed by singer Marina Lima.

Another feature of the soundtrack are the covers, such as Wishing on a Star, recorded by Mari Oliveira, and Baby It's You, which received a new version for the film combining R&B and electronic beats, and was performed by Nath Rodrigues. Also, it was important for me that all the songs in the film were sung by women.

As for the incidental music, it was composed by Bernardo Uzeda – a partnership that started in my very first short film – and was influenced by John Carpenter, Tangerine Dream, and Goblin.

The end of the film is striking, without spoiling it, could you tell us a bit on the creative process and this need of scream from our protagonists. Is it some kind of allegory of nowadays Brazil?

Throughout the centuries, the symbols associated with the image of Medusa were transformed and reinterpreted. In the 20th century, it became a symbol for the feminist movement and even an inspiration for brand logos like Versace's. Her face, which was previously seen as a symbol of evil, as something obscure, began to represent the rage restrained in women. A rage that society tries to silence in many ways, but when this rage gets pushed to the limit, it can spread into several snakes, it can be transformed into something powerful. That is the starting point for the face of Medusa as a catalyst for change. Her image – propagated over the centuries through the arts, like in Caravaggio's Medusa, and still so present in our imaginary – is associated with the rage that all women keep inside, as the result of centuries of oppression. And this rage, when exposed, can be contagious. The scream, and the contorted face while shouting, is a symbol of that fury as it confronts the world and finds support in other women.

How does it feel to be back in Cannes at the Directors' Fortnight where you already had your short selected in 2012?

It is an old dream come true. I feel truly honored with the invitation to premiere Medusa at the Directors' Fortnight. After such a hard and devastating one year and a half for Brazil and the world, I hope this movie brings reflection to people, as well as laughter, tension, joy, and a bit of lust.





CAST

MARI OLIVEIRA

MARI

LARA TREMOUROUX

MICHELE

JOANA MEDEIROS

KAREN

FELIPE FRAZÃO

LUCAS

BRUNA G

CLARISSA

CAROL ROMANO

VIVIAN

JOÃO VITHOR OLIVEIRA

JONATHAN

BRUNA LINZMEYER

MELISSA

THIAGO FRAGOSO

PASTOR GUILHERME





CREW

DIRECTOR:	ANITA ROCHA DA SILVEIRA
SCREENPLAY:	ANITA ROCHA DA SILVEIRA
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:	JOÃO ATALA
ART DIRECTOR:	DINA SALEM LEVY
EDITOR:	MARILIA MORAES
SOUND DESIGN:	BERNARDO UZEDA
SOUND ENGINEER:	EVANDRO LIMA
SOUND MIXER:	GUSTAVO LOUREIRO
SOUNDTRACK:	BERNARDO UZEDA AND ANITA ROCHA DA SILVEIRA
COSTUMES:	PAULA STRÖHER
MAKE-UP:	MARIA INEZ MOURA
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR:	FERNANDA NAKAMURA
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:	TARCILA JACOB
PRODUCTION:	BANANEIRA FILMES
CO-PRODUCTION:	MYMAMA, BRISA FILMES, TELECINE, CANAL BRASIL AND CAJAMANGA
PRODUCER:	VANIA CATANI

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