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**FESTIVAL DE CANNES**  
Official Selection - Un Certain Regard



OFFICIAL SELECTION 2012

# WHITE ELEPHANT

(ELEFANTE BLANCO)

**A FILM BY PABLO TRAPERO**

**Starring Ricardo Darín, Jéréemie Renier, Martina Gusman**

## **PRELIMINARY PRESS NOTES**

**Country of Origin:** Argentina  
**Format:** 35mm/Color  
**Sound Format:** Dolby Digital  
**Running Time:** 120 minutes  
**Genre:** Drama  
Not Rated

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## **SYNOPSIS**

In the “Villa Virgin”, a shantytown in the slums of Buenos Aires, Julian (Ricardo Darín, *The Secret in Their Eyes, Carancho*) and Nicolas (Jérémie Renier, *In Bruges, Atonement*) – two priests and long-standing friends – work tirelessly to help the local people. Nicolas joins Julian in overseeing the construction of a hospital following the failure of a project he was leading in which paramilitary forces assassinated members of the community. Deeply troubled by his actions, Nicolas finds solace in Luciana (Martina Gusman, *Carancho, Lion's Den*), a young, attractive atheist social worker. As Nicholas’s beliefs wane, tension and violence grow between the slum’s drug-dealing cartels and when work on the hospital is halted by ministerial decree, the faith of the entire community is put to the test.

## **INTERVIEW – DIRECTOR PABLO TRAPERO**

### **What is the connection between the film and our times?**

ELEFANTE BLANCO (WHITE ELEPHANT) is a film that connects with different periods of time, almost always accompanied by the work that these priests do in the villas (shantytowns), and we can say that, especially in the Hidden City, which is where this film takes place, they have been working there since the late sixties up until now. Many years have gone by, many events - not to mention even tougher stories - have taken place since then, and not just in this neighborhood, but in the country. What unites this place as a whole after all these years is the people who, generation after generation, have lived in the villa; at first it was a smaller place and then it started to grow and, now, it is practically a city unto itself. What we can see in the film is not just the current situation of this neighborhood, but the generations that grew up there, many of them never having the possibility of leaving the villa and, over the years, always accompanied by these priests who work by side by side with them, doing different things with the locals.

### **Do you believe that the Catholic Church has done some soul-searching and decided to rectify its position in regards to the repression?**

In regards to the death of Father Mujica, there are two schools of thought. Because, up to now, they are just theories, there has been no trial, and justice has never cleared up who was responsible for his death. One group, or a part of history, says that it was the Triple A (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance), in the seventies; they were part of Perón's government. Another says that it was the Montoneros, a leftist movement that also belongs to Peronism. So it is still not clear, it has never been cleared up, we don't know who the truly responsible parties for Father Mujica's death are, or if the Church knew about it, or heard about it or actually took part in the death of Father Mujica. And we'll never really know for sure. What happened in the seventies was also very paradoxical because, as we all know, there was a part of the Church that backed the repression, while another part of the Church fought it, like the collective of priests known as the "Priests of the Third World", who also suffered mysterious deaths and disappearances. Priests who fought against what was happening in the seventies. So, like in so many parts of society, in Argentina, in the very same place, just as happened in the midst of the families, there were two distinct positions. The Church was divided into one part that supported the repression and the military government, and another that was against it and with the people, they fought it and some paid with their lives, and it all takes place at the exact same moment in history.

### **What can we learn today from the discourse that runs through WHITE ELEPHANT?**

The different forms of social exclusion and, in general, the villas or the shantytowns or whatever they're called in different places, in different countries, are the perfect places to see clearly why there is an organization, a parallel society, that shelters those people who, in some way, are trying to enter the system. It is more obvious in the villas where

people from the inland are trying to make their way to the capital to take refuge, but economical and social differences block their path. They can only make it as far as the villas; that's the most they can aspire to. The same thing happens in relation to other countries. There are people living in the villas of Buenos Aires that have come from many different communities in Latin America, and who have come in search of progress, so that generates a strong contradiction, a tension between what some believe is progress and others consider exclusion. For many people who have left extreme poverty behind, the villa is truly a great step forward, a step nearer resources and even infrastructures. And, for people coming from the city, quite often it is the place where they end up after having "fallen" from the social structure.

### **What do you think a movie about (politically) committed priests has to offer in 2012?**

A film that speaks about committed (involved) priests is actually speaking about committed (involved) people. *WHITE ELEPHANT* gives us a glimpse of a large portion of people who silently work, with commitment and day-by-day, to change things, to change something, at least in those neighborhoods. The film lets us see not only what Nicolás and Julián, the two priests, do, but what Luciana and the work group that accompanies them do. A work group made up by anonymous people who work on a daily basis, fending off everyday difficulties, then structural problems, political, social and economical problems that cannot be fixed by a social worker or a priest or a person who, selflessly, comes to the villa to try to work with the people there. What you really see in the film is that there are a lot more people than we thought, and many more than we could have ever imagined who are truly involved on a daily basis and who, in the long run, may actually bring some relief to the daily troubles of the inhabitants of this neighborhood.

### **During your work as the director, what did you try to imprint on the characters?**

Obviously, in the film there are three main characters, the three we identify most clearly. Julián, played by Ricardo Darín, who is the voice, in a way, of the generation that continued with the work of the "Priests of the Third World"; he represents the generation right after them, how that movement thinks nowadays and where their involvement resides. Julián is a character that comes from a well-off, middle-class family, who has felt the pull of social commitment and has strayed from the path laid out by his family and opted to work for the poor. On the other hand, we have Nicolás: he belongs to the next generation, the generation learning from Julián's generation. Nicolás, played by Jérémie Renier, is the foreign priest. In the film they call him the "gringo priest", he has travelled all around the world, not just around Latin America, on humanitarian missions. When the film starts we realize that the connection between Julián and Nicolás did not start in Argentina, but during the trips Julián made following the tradition of the "Priests of the Third World", spreading the word through different countries.

Nicolás has a more everyday outlook, and his work is a bit more distant from the

Liberation Theology of the seventies. He is more worried about the relationships with the inhabitants than with religion, and that is clear from the very first moment. His way of working, which is what makes him clash with Julián, basically puts religion to one side, and focuses on establishing more direct and personal relationships, and this generates friction between them. The relationship between Nicolás and Julián, that represents the work from the religious side, is complemented by Luciana's outlook. She is a social worker who has been working with Julián for years, assisting the locals in the different tasks they carry out in the canteen, in the drug rehab workshops, providing academic support, sewing workshops, etc. Different activities that allow them to get closer to the locals, and that give the locals a chance to find a way out, an occupation, quite often outside the religious and political structures, that is another way of carrying out social works. And then, there are a lot of characters that represent the different voices in the neighborhood: the immigrants, the boys that fight a daily battle to stay away from the trouble that the neighborhood often represents. And then we see other locals that become characters, people who really find a place to belong in the villa, because they've been there for generations, because it's their neighborhood, it's their place, much more so than we can ever see from outside: "a place of transit, a stepping stop, an emergency stop". Many of the locals in the film and their families have been there for three or four generations. For other characters, we realize that the villa is a place of refuge, a stronghold, especially for drug traffickers and other criminal activities. Sometimes we catch glimpses of illegal gambling, and other activities that feel protected by the "walls" of the villa.

### **What lesson should Argentinean society learn from its past?**

The past in any country and in the private life of any person is too vast to teach any single lesson. I believe that the past of Argentina, due to its complexity, like the past of an individual, makes us learn every day in the present. I believe that all our pasts make us reflect daily in the present; a country advances when it is capable of reflecting on its past. I don't believe in totalizing reflections, or in totalizing answers, I think that a way to learn from the past is to reflect on it constantly, to use the past as a mirror. The best thing one can learn from the past, or from a traumatic situation - and I think this is what the question was referring to - is that we cannot forget the past, we must remember it to make a better future. But I don't consider myself qualified to evaluate what happened to a society as a whole because I do not believe there is a single answer. What can happen for sure is that, if we look back, we can probably build a better future, and that is a common denominator for any country, for any person.

## **DIRECTOR - BIOGRAPHY**

Pablo Trapero began his international career in 1999 with his first feature MUNDO GRÚA. The black and white, 16mm film marked a turning point in Argentinean Cinema, and encouraged numerous young directors into their first features. MUNDO GRÚA had its international premiere at the Venice Film Festival, and went on to reap awards and critical acclaim at film festivals around the globe.

In 2002, Trapero's second feature, EL BONAERENSE premiered in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival, and once more the director received widespread critical and audience acclaim. That same year, he formed his own production company, Matanza Cine, in Buenos Aires, through which he has produced ever since, not only his own features but those of other Argentinean and Latin American filmmakers. Further features as director include FAMILIA RODANTE (Rolling Family) (2004) which debuted at the Venice Film Festival, NACIDO Y CRIADO (Born and Bred) (2006 - Toronto Film Festival), LEONERA (Lion's Den) (2008 - Cannes Film Festival, Official Competition) and CARANCHO (2010 - Cannes Film Festival, Un certain regard. All these films have been commercially released in Argentina and abroad and also presented in major film festivals around the world. Apart from his features films he has made short films such as INTERSECCIONES, SOBRAS, (from "Stories on Human Rights"), NÓMADE (included in "25 Miradas - 200 Minutos") and NAIF (from «Visual Telegrams»)

His most recent feature WHITE ELEPHANT (ELEFANTE BLANCO) and 7 DAYS IN HAVANA (to which he contributed one of seven short films) are both screening in the 2012 Cannes Film Festival.

## **RICARDO DARÍN – BIOGRAPHY**

Ricardo Darín was born in 1957, in Buenos Aires. From a young age, he has been considered part of the new generation of TV and stage actors, starring in hits such as “Nosotros y los Miedos,” “Compromiso y Mi Cuñado en TV”, “Extraña Pareja”, “Taxi”, “Sugar”, “Necesito un Tenor” and “ART”, one of the most successful works of the past few years in Argentina and Spain.

With almost 40 films and over 20 national and international prizes to his name, including 5 Cónдор de Plata (Silver Condor) and 2 Konex Awards, as well as recognition at the Valladolid, Sant Jordi, Havana and Biarritz Film Festivals, Darín is widely considered the most prestigious and influential of Argentine actors, and one of the finest in all of Latin America and Spain. His filmography includes EL MISMO AMOR LA MISMA LLUVIA, NUEVE REINAS, EL HIJO DE LA NOVIA (Academy Award® nominee), LUNA DE AVELLANEDA, EL AURA, EL SECRETO DE SUS OJOS (Academy Award® winner), CARANCHO and UN CUENTO CHINO.

2012 sees Darín involved in various film projects, such as ELEFANTE BLANCO (WHITE ELEPHANT) by Pablo Trapero and TESIS DE UN HOMICIDIO by Hernán Goldfrid. In 2007, he made his directorial debut with LA SENAL, in which he also starred.

## **JÉRÉMIE RENIER – FILMOGRAPHY**

- 2012 MY WAY - Florent EMILIO-SIRI
- 2011 THE KID WITH A BIKE - Jean-Pierre and Luc DARDENNE  
Golden Globes nominee for Best Foreign Language Film  
Cannes FF - Grand Prix
- 2010 POTICHE (TROPHY WIFE) - François OZON
- 2009 TOMORROW AT DAWN - Denis DERCOURT  
Cannes FF - Un Certain Regard
- 2008 LORNA'S SILENCE - Jean-Pierre and Luc DARDENNE  
Cannes FF - Official Competition
- 2008 SUMMER HOURS - Olivier ASSAYAS
- 2008 IN BRUGES - Martin McDONAGH
- 2008 GUILTY - Laetitia MASSON  
Berlin FF - Panorama Selection
- 2008 PRIVATE PROPERTY - Joachim LAFOSSE  
Venice FF - Official Selection
- 2005 THE CHILD - Jean-Pierre and Luc DARDENNE  
Cannes FF - Palme d'Or
- 2003 WORK HARD, PLAY HARD - Jean-Marc MOUTOUT  
César nominee - Most Promising Actor
- 1999 CRIMINAL LOVERS - François OZON  
Venice FF - Official Selection
- 1996 THE PROMISE - Luc and Jean-Pierre DARDENNE  
CICAE Award, Cannes FF 1996

## **MARTINA GUSMAN-FILMOGRAPHY**

2011 UNA BALA PARA EL CHE - Gabriela GUILLERMO

2010 LA VIDA NUEVA - Santiago PALAVECINO

2009 CARANCHO - Pablo TRAPERO

2008 LEONERA - Pablo TRAPERO

2006 NACIDO Y CRIADO - Pablo TRAPERO

## **CAST**

Julián  
Nicolás  
Luciana

Ricardo Darín  
Jérémie Renier  
Martina Gusman

## **CREW**

Director  
Production Companies

Pablo Trapero  
Morena Films (España)  
Matanza Cine (Argentina)  
Patagonik (Argentina)

Co-Production  
Producers

Full House (France)  
Juan Gordon  
Pablo Trapero  
Juan Pablo Galli  
Juan Vera

Screenplay

Alejandro Cacetta  
Alejandro Fadel  
Martín Mauregui  
Santiago Mitre  
Pablo Trapero

Production Manager  
Production Designer

Juan Lovece  
Juan Pedro de Gaspar

Art Director  
DP

Fernando Brun  
Guillermo Nieto

Editors

Pablo Trapero  
Nacho Ruiz Capillas  
Carlos Lidón

Sound  
Original Music  
Wardrobe

Mychael Nymann  
Marisa Urruti

Hair  
Make-Up

Alberto Moccia  
Carolina Oclander

Special Effects

Federico Cueva