

REEL SUSPECTS

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LA FORTALEZA

A film by Jorge THIELEN ARMAND
108 min, Venezuela, France, Netherlands, Colombia,
2020
Spanish



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OFFICIAL SELECTION
**INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM**
2020

LOGLINE

When riots break out in Venezuela's capital, Roque heads for the Amazon jungle to restore the abandoned lodge he built during happier, healthier days. As the jungle closes in on him, good friends encourage bad habits and whisper promises of finding gold.

SYNOPSIS

Middle-aged Roque gets kicked out of his parents' house into the burning streets of Caracas, where Venezuela's economic crisis has flared up. Desperate to sober up, he returns to the abandoned lodge he built during happier, healthier days in the Amazon jungle. Dense vines, fever dreams and poisoned water close in on him, while good friends with bad habits whisper promises of gold. In his fragile state, Roque joins the indigenous locals in illegal goldmining, controlled by Colombian guerrillas. Faced with the darkness of the merciless land, he reaches deep inside himself to find a way out.



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DIRECTOR' STATEMENT

“My father was away for seven years in the Amazon during the ‘90s. He built a tourist lodge with the help of the Pemón tribe, where tourists from all over the world later arrived; he prepared their meals and took them on adventure excursions. It was his dream come true. But his success faded along with Venezuela’s tourism industry; its appeal was lost due to crime and political instability. Trying to hold on to his dreams and wanting to prove himself worthy, my father decided to remain in the Amazon to pursue illegal gold mining, an endeavor that almost cost him his life. I visited when I was young, it was the only way I could spend time with him. The visions of swimming in the river with my indigenous friends are still vivid, and father’s legends about tepuy mountains once being giant trees never left my mind. Father once kicked me out of our hut in the middle of the night; he was drinking. I still remember the stars ahead of me that night, not above, for the air was clear of nearby lights.

As an exiled Venezuelan I am invaded by a feeling of loss, a longing for something that is no longer there and that might never return. I was 15 when my mother and I left Venezuela. I separated from a culture—and a life—entirely built on family. The years that followed I watched how my family disintegrated along with the country. The economic crisis and a regime that promotes violence made most of us leave. The houses of my childhood are now in ruins, the streets are desolate, and the places we used to vacation are now controlled by guerrillas from Colombia who work with the government to ravage the land in search of gold.

Inspired by the true stories of my father, LA FORTALEZA follows his return to the Amazon jungle to rebuild our abandoned tourist lodge—and to rebuild himself in an attempt to quit drinking. Making the film became a way for my father and I to confront the distance between us, the pains of the past, and the inner violence this has unleashed. I set out in search of fortitude, to immortalize my father and a place I can no longer recognize in memories.



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DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Jorge Thielen Armand is a director and producer. In 2015, Jorge founded La Faena with Rodrigo Michelangeli, a production company dedicated to art-house films. His debut feature LA SOLEDAD (2016) premiered at the 73rd Venice International Film Festival and garnered over a dozen awards across a 50+ festival run, including the Miami Film Festival's Audience Award and the French Critics' Union Prize in Biarritz. The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and MUBI released the film theatrically in the UK. Jorge's documentary FLOR DE LA MAR (2015) won the Jury Award for Best Documentary Short at Cine Las Americas International Film Festival, and was exhibited at many festivals around the world including Margaret Mead, Sarasota, and RIDM. He holds a Communication Studies BA from Concordia University, and is an alumnus of the Venice Biennale College, TIFF's Writers Studio, and the Berlinale Talent Campus.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

LA FORTALEZA (2020), 108 min, drama

LA SOLEDAD (2016), 89 min, drama

FLOR DE LA MAR (2015), 24 min, documentary





ABOUT THE CREW

Rodrigo Michelangeli -screenwriter/ cinematographer/producer

Rodrigo Michelangeli is a Venezuelan filmmaker based in Toronto. He is the co-writer, cinematographer and producer of the feature film *LA SOLEDAD* (2016), which premiered at the 73rd Venice International Film Festival. His short experimental documentary about student protests in Venezuela, *BULLETS OF PEACE* (2014) premiered at the TIFF Bell Lightbox (Jayu Human Rights Film Festival 2014). As a Cinematographer Rodrigo has worked in several projects including the hybrid documentary 'Leftover,' which won the 2014 Toronto Film Critics Association Award; He's an alumnus of RIDM's Talent Lab, Hot Docs Accelerators Program, Venice Biennale College and BAL. He founded La Faena Films with Jorge Thielen Armand.

Felipe Guerrero -editor/co-producer

Felipe Guerrero is a Colombian producer, director, and editor. As a producer, he has produced all the films under his own direction (*OSCURO ANIMAL* 2016, *CORTA* 2012, *PARAÍSO* 2006, and he has often obtained international funds and co-productions in Europe and Latin America. He has a two-decade-long career as an editor for films widely awarded and exhibited. In 2012 Felipe founded mutokino, a company focused on exploring the diverse aesthetic practices in contemporary cinema, such as *LA FORTALEZA* (2020), *LOS CONDUCTOS* by Camilo Restrepo (2020) and *MARIANA* by Chris Gude (2017).

Leila Bordreuil - composer

Leila Bordreuil is a Brooklyn based cellist and composer from Aix-en-Provence, France. She works in the realm of Noise music, improvisation, New Music and sound-art. Her cello playing is often improvised, and mainly focuses on texture variations and a collage of phantom overtones and pitched utterances. Through an original vocabulary of extended techniques, preparations, and imaginative amplification methods, her instrument is used as an abstract resonant body to challenge conventional cello practice. Her composed works draw from a similar texture-based musical aesthetic, but also focus on the relationship between sound and space. In her site-specific electro-acoustic compositions, architecture is the foundation of the piece and musicality arises from an organized spacialization of sound.

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ABOUT THE ACTORS

Jorge Roque Thielen - ROQUE

Jorge Roque Thielen is the father of Venezuelan director Jorge Thielen Armand. He lives and works in Caracas. He previously performed in his son's debut feature *LA SOLEDAD* (2016), which premiered at the 73rd Venice Film Festival. He is the main character in Thielen Armand's second feature film *LA FORTALEZA*, a film inspired by Roque's true adventures and in which he plays a version of himself.

Yoni Naranjo - YONI

Yoni Naranjo is a Pemón fisherman from Arekuna, a remote village in the Amazonian region of Venezuela. Yoni has been a friend of Roque for twenty years. *LA FORTALEZA* is his first film.

Carlos "Fagua" Medina – FAQUA

Carlos "Fagua" Medina is a Colombian actor and actor coach. He studied with Adrienne Weiss at Columbia University in New York. He also studied Fátima Toledo's acting method (*CITY OF GOD*) in Sao Paulo, Brazil. *LA FORTALEZA* is his first feature film as an actor.

Leudys Naranjo - LEUDYS

Leudys Naranjo is a Pemón cook working in the gold mines of southern Venezuela. She is Yoni's niece and *LA FORTALEZA* is her acting debut.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCERS

Rodolfo Cova – producer

Rodolfo Cova is a producer of more than twenty feature films. His projects have visited Cannes, Venice, Berlin, San Sebastian, Toronto, Karlovy Vary, Mar del Plata, among others. His most recent films are *APRIL'S DAUGHTER* by Michel Franco (Special Jury Award Un Certain Regard Cannes 2017), *LA FAMILIA* by Gustavo Rondon (Semaine de la Critique 2017) and *FROM AFAR* by Lorenzo Vigas (Golden Lion, Venice International Film Festival 2015). Rodolfo produced the 2014 Goya Best Ibero-American winning film *MY STRAIGHT SON* and was nominated again in 2017 with *FROM AFAR*.

Manon Ardisson - producer

Manon Ardisson is BAFTA-nominated producer and managing director of Ardimages UK. She produced the BFI-backed feature film *GOD'S OWN COUNTRY* (2017) by Francis Lee, which premiered at Sundance, winning the Special Jury Award for Directing in the World Dramatic competition. *GOD'S OWN COUNTRY* won 4 British Independent Film Awards in 2017, including Best Feature, and was BAFTA nominated for an Outstanding British Film Award in 2018. Manon also co-produced *LA SOLEDAD* (2016) by Jorge Thielen Armand, the first feature about the current Venezuelan crisis. The film premiered at the Venice Film Festival and was released in UK theatres by the Institute of Contemporary Arts and MUBI.



Marleen Slot – co-producer

Founded by Slot, Amsterdam-based Viking Film makes high-quality films for Dutch and international audiences with a special focus on arthouse and animation. Most recently, DIRTY GOD competed in Sundance in 2019 and opened IFFR. ROJO premiered at TIFF and San Sebastian in 2018. Viking Film coproduced OSCURO ANIMAL by LA FORTALEZA editor and co-producer Felipe Guerrero (IFFR competition 2016).

Louise Bellicaud and Clair Charles-Gervais /In Vivo Films - co-producers

In Vivo Films was founded in 2015 by Louise Bellicaud and Claire Charles-Gervais. In Vivo Films aims to support directors and writers from various backgrounds and countries. Recent productions include ABOU LEILA (2019) competed in the Cannes Critics' Week, with LA FORTALEZA and LOSE EUROPEOS released in 2020.

Kim Jackson - producer

After launching a producing career working with Universal Pictures on Steven Spielberg's (MUNICH) and Spike Lee's (INSIDE MAN), Kim Jackson began championing independent filmmaking. Her critically acclaimed production BLUE CAPRICE premiered at Sundance and opened New Directors/New Films at MoMA. Kim was nominated for a Spirit Award for producing. She has been the driving force behind more than a dozen award-winning and theatrically released independent films including CHILDREN OF GOD and GUN HILL ROAD. She executive-produced KING COBRA, starring James Franco and Christian Slater. As the co-founder of SingularDTV which launched the blockchain- powered entertainment studio Breaker, she produced Alex Winter's feature-length documentary TRUST MACHINE: THE STORY OF BLOCKCHAIN, THE HAPPY WORKER by Duwayne Dunham, and Keith Bearden's ANTARCTICA with Chloë Levine and Kimie Muroya.

Zach LeBeau - producer

Zach LeBeau is the co-founder of SingularDTV (2016), which launched its content-driven blockchain-powered entertainment platform Breaker in January 2019. Zach has traveled and lived in over fifty countries, working extensively in entertainment, finance and technology along the way. When Zach discovered blockchain, he realized he could combine this innovation with his previous experience to create a global, decentralized entertainment industry. Zach is an artist himself, having penned the novel MONKEY ME and written and directed the sci-fi feature THE SCIENTIST, starring Bill Sage.



Breaker

Founded in 2016, SingularDTV launched its content-driven entertainment platform Breaker in January 2019. Built with creators in mind, Breaker empowers content owners with blockchain tools for rights and revenue management. Audiences from all over the world can find bold independent content on Breaker's mobile and desktop apps. www.breaker.io.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Country	Venezuela, France, Netherlands, Colombia
Duration	108 minutes
Language	Spanish
Image	Color
Screening Format	2K DCP / 5.1 Surround Sound / Flat 1.85:1
Shooting Format	Arriraw 2,8K
Shooting Location	Venezuela

CAST

Roque	Jorge Roque Thielen
Yoni	Yoni Naranjo
Fagua	Carlos "Fagua" Medina
Leudys	Leudys Naranjo

CREW

Directed by	Jorge Thielen Armand
Written by	Jorge Thielen Armand, Rodrigo Michelangeli
Edited by	Felipe Guerrero
Produced by	Rodrigo Michelangeli, Manon Ardisson, Rodolfo Cova, Zach LeBeau, Kim Jackson, Felipe Guerrero, Louise Bellicaud, Claire Charles-Gervais, Marleen Slot
Director of Photography	Rodrigo Michelangeli
Production Designer	Matias Tikas
Sound Designer	Eli Cohn
Music Composer	Leila Bordreuil