

CINEUROPA

VENICE 2008 Competition / Italy

Bechis explores land of dispossessed in *Birdwatchers*

by CAMILLO DE MARCO



01/09/2008 - "We just want a chance to survive". **Eliane Juca da Silva** didn't hold back the tears before journalists who had just applauded **Marco Bechis's** film *Birdwatchers* [trailer]. Eliane stars in the film and belongs to the Guarani Kaiowá people from Mato Grosso do Sul, in central-western Brazil.

For Eliane the international showcase of the **Venice Film Festival** represents the greatest opportunity to draw the world's attention to the suffering of his people, who have lost almost all their own land, as it is deforested and usurped by breeders and cultivators of transgenic produce. According to Eliane, the natives are crowded into cramped reserves and cases of suicide among the young are on the rise.

(The article continues below - Commercial information)



Starting out from the universal "problem of the other" (as defined by Tzvetan Todorov), the Italian/Chilean director – best known for his two films about the Chilean dictatorship and "i desaparecidos" (*Garage Olimpo* and *Sons and Daughters*) – discovered the concrete case of the Guarani Kaiowá people, whom he learned about through the campaigns of the international association Survival, which defends indigenous populations. "I didn't need to invent much about this situation, after my numerous travels and encounters in Mato Grosso", explained Bechis. "But I had to *construct* the film and draw the subtle line between documentary and fiction".

For this reason, alongside professional actors (Italy's **Claudio Santamaria** and **Chiara Caselli**, Brazil's **Matheus Nachtergaele** and **Leonardo Medeiros**) Bechis cast local natives. Reversing the approach used in Roland Joffé's *The Mission*, in which the Guarani played background roles alongside Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons, the director brings the natives to the foreground of the film, making them protagonists.

His decision paid off: **Abrisio Da Silva Pedro**, who plays the young man destined to become a shaman and combat the evil embodied by the spirit Anguê; and **Ambrosio Vilhalva**, the leader of the group of natives who decide to occupy a piece of land that once belonged to them and who is murdered by the fazendero killers, both give, along with the other natives, a performance that effectively highlights the sharp clash between the New World, often based on tyranny, and a profound spirituality and ancient culture connected to nature.

The film was produced by **Amedeo Pagani**, who won the David di Donatello award for Best Producer in 2000 for Bechis' *Garage Olimpo*; and Brazil's *Gullane*, in association with Rai Cinema. *Birdwatchers* will be released in Italy tomorrow by 01 and is set to hit Brazilian screens in December.

(Translated from Italian)

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