

Neon Bull (2018)

Major Credits

Director: Gabriel Mascaro

Screenplay: Gabriel Mascaro

Cinematography: Diego Garcia

Cast: Juliano Cazarré (Iremar), Maeve Jinkings (Galega), Vinicius de Oliveira (Júnior), Samya De Lavor (Geise), Carlos Pessoa (Zé), Alyne Santana (Cacá)

Production Background

Mascaro's second feature (following *August Winds*) successfully premiered in Europe at the Venice Film Festival and in North America at the Toronto Film Festival. *Neon Bull* was shot on location in northeast Brazil, an arid region transitioning from an agrarian to an industrial economy, marked by many new clothing factories such as the one seen in the film. Although it is a carefully scripted fiction, much of the work appears to be an anthropological documentary tracing the culture of the *vaquejada*, a traditional rodeo associated with the region. This observational style, mapping an institutional routine in the detached manner of Frederic Wiseman's acclaimed films, shifts at times, however, into a poetic or surrealistic cinema that has been carefully choreographed and dramatically lit. This contrast in styles—sometimes travelogue, sometimes art film—gives *Neon Bull* its peculiar, ambiguous quality.

The cast is comprised of actors, not cowboys. Cazarré is a star in Brazil; de Oliveira played the lead role as a child in *Central Station* (1998), which was nominated for an Academy Award.

Cinematic Qualities

1. Color: Mascaro contrasts a limited palette when shooting the arid environment and largely pale livestock with the vivid colors of the rodeo and Galega's seductive dance costumes. This strange combination is embodied in the early sequence when Iremar crosses a dried river bed flecked with confetti-like fragments of fabric discarded by the clothing plant.
2. Camera Position: Mascaro prefers long and mid-shots to close-ups, thereby situating his characters in the context of the environment and adding a compositional element to the frame.
3. Long Takes: The absence of conspicuous editing adds to the documentary feel of the film, especially for sequences in the truck or with the wranglers working with the animals. The long shot/long take methodology seems particularly effective in three nude scenes near the end of the film, the last of which extends for seven minutes.

Questions for Discussion

1. As exemplified by the astonishing scene in which the *vaqueiro* lies in the dirt with his horse and the climactic (pun intended) lovemaking in the clothing factory, Mascaro has described *Neon Bull* as "a film about the body as a place of transformation." How is your conception of the human body and its relation to other animals affected by his representation?
2. *Neon Bull* also depicts the transformation of an organic *family*. Cacá yearns to see her father, about whom nothing is known; Iremar's relationship to Galega remains in doubt throughout much of the film. Júnior's arrival changes the "family's" dynamics, as does Geise's. Does the film alter your understanding of what constitutes a family?
3. This film seems paradoxically *raw* and *poetic*, sometimes at the same moment. Mascaro's original artistic vision risks becoming pornographic at times, precious at others. Is there a controlling aesthetic discipline underlying the images as well as the narrative?