



Rabo de Peixe

Fish Tail

Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel

Producer Joaquim Pinto. **Production company** Presente Lda (Lissabon, Portugal). **Director** Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel. **Screenplay** Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel. **Director of photography** Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel. **Sound design** Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel. **Editor** Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel.

DCP, colour. 103 min. Portuguese.

Premiere 7 February 2015, Berlinale Forum

World sales Presente Lda

Rabo de Peixe is a village in the Azores that is home to the largest collection of artisanal fisheries on the whole archipelago. Joaquim Pinto and Nuno Leonel first came here at the end of 1998 to see in the New Year. After befriending a young fisherman named Pedro, they decided to make a film with him over the following year, a TV documentary later tampered with by the broadcaster and shown only once.

They have now edited the same material into something new, a tender essay rooted in friendship and fascination. The two of them follow Pedro out to sea to land mackerel and swordfish or just drink in the atmosphere of the island: rippling fish shoals, fireworks over the harbour, a procession through slender white streets, bodies on black sand. Themes emerge unobtrusively: the virtue of working by hand, industrial restrictions, the slippery concept of a free man. Here, friends can easily commandeer the camera, there's enough room for sea monsters and stories and the very grain of the footage adds to its beauty.

By the end, Portugal has the euro, songs are sung and somebody is missing. A bygone era, near and yet far, images of happiness of things no longer there.

James Lattimer

The courage of the fishermen

Footage for *Rabo de Peixe* was originally shot with the support of a public broadcaster in co-operation with fishing associations who were looking for a record of disappearing small-scale fishing methods and skills. Our approach was not well received and were asked to remove all scenes that, according to them, 'gave a bad image of fishermen and fishing communities', as well as specific references to particular characters. A fifty-five-minute version was then produced and broadcast once by Portuguese public television. Fourteen years later, industrial methods have replaced traditional fishing tackle, standardised labour relations have superseded the old communal organisation of work, and countless small open boats have given way to a small number of large, modern boats with electronic equipment. Even the topography has changed: Rabo de Peixe's small port has been destroyed and a huge structure intended for industrial fishing has been built with EU funding. The scale of these changes made us want to re-edit the movie according to our original plan. Our new feature version is designed to do justice to the bravery of the young men depicted in it and their struggle to maintain a cherished tradition. Since filming, many have given up the sea, unwilling or unable to adapt to predatory industrial fishing practices. Some have joined the ranks of the unemployed. Others have emigrated to America. A few are keeping up the fight for sustainable fishing.

Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel

The declining volume of fisheries

To help with understanding the framework of our shared experience with these fishermen, we quote a small text we wrote in 2000, before starting the year-long shooting:

The report

The recent United Nations report PAGE (Pilot Analysis of Global Ecosystems), which is the result of the most ambitious project ever undertaken in relation to global ecosystems, discloses to an alarming extent how close we are to the breakdown of the various ecosystems.

Coastal/maritime ecosystems are deeply affected: fishing fleets exceed the oceans' sustained production capacity by forty per cent; trawling destroys large areas of the ocean bed. The declining volume in fisheries relating to more than one third of fish species will lead to very grave economic consequences for more than a billion people worldwide.

Focus on: the Atlantic Ocean

One of the threatened species is the Atlantic swordfish. In the 1960s, the introduction of long lines of up to sixty kilometres in length, equipped with thousands of hooks reaching the depth of the swordfish feeding grounds, along with highly sophisticated methods of fish detection, are in large part responsible for this situation.

Focus on: the Azores

Since 1960 the population of the Azores has been in decline, reaching the current figure of about 240,000. São Miguel, the largest

island of the archipelago, is sixty-five kilometres long and sixteen kilometres wide. The island is made up of two volcanic massifs separated by a central low altitude chain.

Focus on: Rabo de Peixe

The parish of Rabo de Peixe (meaning 'Fish Tail') is situated on São Miguel's northern coast. Its inhabitants' main activity is small-scale fishing, which is still carried on with the use of traditional methods. The lack of any harbour means that all boats must be beached. This involves hoisting them on to land after the working day. These open crafts have not been subject to much change during the last decades. The only improvement was abandoning sails in favour of motor engines some twenty years ago.

Rabo de Peixe's entire population involuntarily feels the huge effects of the drop in Atlantic fish stocks, the causes of which are so clearly explained today. However, full awareness of the situation continues to be confused, probably the result of a lack of information. We regularly hear the blame for successive lean years' catches being attributed to simple bad luck.

Joaquim Pinto, Nuno Leonel

A free man

It is clear enough that one kind of work differs substantially from another by reason of something which has nothing to do with welfare, or leisure, or security, and yet which claims each man's devotion; a fisherman battling against wind and waves in his little boat, although he suffers from cold, fatigue, lack of leisure and even of sleep, danger and a primitive level of existence, has a more enviable lot than the manual worker on a production-line, who is nevertheless better off as regards nearly all these matters. That is because his work resembles far more the work of a free man.

Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*



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Joaquim Pinto was born in Porto, Portugal in 1957. He was the sound designer for more than 100 films, working with directors such as Manoel de Oliveira, Raul Ruiz, Werner Schroeter and André Techiné. Between 1987 and 1996 he was the producer for some 30 films, including João César Monteiro's *Recordações da Casa Amarela / Recollections of the Yellow House* (1989). He

directed several short films before making his first feature-length film, *Uma Pedra no Bolso / Tall Stories*, in 1988.

Films

1989: *Uma Pedra no Bolso / Tall Stories* (91 min.). 1989: *Onde Bate o Sol / Where the Sun Beats* (89 min.). 1992: *Das Tripas Coração / Twin Flames* (66 min.). 2013: *E Agora? Lembra-me / What Now? Remind-Me* (156 min.). 2013: *O Novo Testamento de Jesus Cristo Segundo João / The New Testament of Jesus Christ According to John* (Co-director: Nuno Leonel, 129 min.). 2013: *Fim de Citação / End of Quote* (Co-director: Nuno Leonel, 89 min.). 2013: *Rabo de Peixe / Fish Tail*.



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Nuno Leonel was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1969. He works as a set designer, cinematographer, sound editor, film editor, and actor. He has been making films with Joaquim Pinto since 1996, and in 2009, Leonel and Pinto founded the Presente publishing company.

Films

1995: *Schizophrenia* (16 min.). 1996: *Surfavela* (Koregie: Joaquim Pinto, 38 min.). 2013: *O Novo Testamento de Jesus Cristo Segundo João / The New Testament of Jesus Christ According to John* (Co-director: Joaquim Pinto, 129 min.). 2013: *Fim de Citação / End of Quote* (Co-director: Joaquim Pinto, 89 min.). 2015: *Rabo de Peixe / Fish Tail*.