



Rio Corgo

Maya Kosa, Sergio da Costa

Producer Joëlle Bertossa, Luís Urbano, Sandro Aguilar. **Production companies** Close Up Films (Geneva, Switzerland), O Som e a Fúria (Lisbon, Portugal). **Written and directed by** Maya Kosa, Sergio da Costa. **Director of photography** Sergio da Costa. **Editor** Telmo Churro, Sergio da Costa, Maya Kosa. **Sound design** Miguel Martins. **Sound** Ricardo Leal, Adriano Santos, Bruno Moreira.

DCP, colour. 95 min. Portuguese.

Premiere 25 October 2016, Doçlisboa

Silva has trodden many paths over the course of his life, paths that criss-cross the north of Portugal. He's made ends meet as an umbrella repairman, a farmer, a shepherd, a barber, bricklayer, miner, gardener, clown and magician, so many peaks and troughs. Now his steps echo in the narrow streets of a remote village, where he has moved into an empty house. He wears a suit and cuts a striking figure with his richly embroidered sombrero, the white bundle over his shoulder, his cowboy boots, walking stick and the rings on his fingers. He could be a character in a picaresque novel. The locals avoid this strange wanderer, except for a young girl who is receptive to both him and his stories. She preserves his legacy, she puts a crown on his head. So too does the film, by adapting and staging Silva's personality for the big screen. It approaches the old man's visions, crises and phantasms with empathy and invention, transposing them into splendid Cinemascope images, to the sound of Portuguese songs from the 1970s. When the vagabond sets off on his final journey, you know that he and his world of imagination are more than welcome guests in the cinematographic realm.

Birgit Kohler

Hallucination and poetry

Rio Corgo weaves together concrete facts of the protagonist's biography and the fantastical elements that often sprout from his vivid imagination. Such an imagination could be seen as total madness or as a beautiful way to sublimate reality. We chose the second interpretation.

From a documentary approach based on keen observation, we slowly glide toward fiction in order to share with our audience the experience of Silva's hallucinated reality. Like him, we both need a break from a world too often rational and pragmatic. And through that small gap, let us access a world of strange poetry.

Maya Kosa and Sergio da Costa

"He really was an apparition to us"

Is Rio Corgo fiction or a documentary film?

Sergio da Costa: For us, the terms fiction or documentary film are mostly of practical value while shooting: we use them as technical jargon when making decisions in our work. It never plays a role when we develop our initial ideas for a film or when we give it its final form.

Maya Kosa: Fiction, documentary film – these terms are part of our conversations with the production company and the broadcaster. When we had to find funding for the project, it was difficult to explain what we had in mind. When the film was complete, we could explain our path a bit better. But really, this distinction has no meaning for us. Our approach is very free in this regard.

This isn't a film 'about'; it's a film 'with' – especially with Senhor Silva, who may also be a character.

Sergio da Costa: I wouldn't say a 'film with'. I see *Rio Corgo* as an adaptation of Silva's life. Nor is it a film 'about' Silva; rather, it's about a theme that comes from him: his biography and everyday life. We tried to film his life as an adaptation, the adaptation of a person.

Maya Kosa: It was a drawn-out work process that went through repeated changes. At the beginning, we collected a wealth of information about Senhor Silva and used it as a basis to write a script, as for a traditional feature film.

How did this person appear to you? Because he's like an apparition: he seems to belong to this landscape, this world, and at the same time to not belong to it.

Maya Kosa: At that time, we were working on a film about the village Sergio comes from, Pedralva, near Anadia in Portugal. Silva really was an apparition to us. He lived in the next village. Gradually we began to get involved in his daily life, and soon he was open to having an adventure with us. But it was a problem that he moves from one village to the other from time to time. We decided to follow him. Silva is like a street artist. His calling is to entertain people. His tricks and songs – it's sort of all part of his mission. When we met him again a few months later, he had changed completely: he was no longer the cheerful man we knew, but was in a physically desolate condition. There was a reason for that: he had recently been treated in the psychiatric ward of a hospital, where they injected him with psychoactive drugs against symptoms of so-called craziness. At that time, we already had plans for

a project with the other Silva we had known. Now we had to work with his changed self. When we viewed the footage we had shot, we realised we had to film him in nature. First, for visual aesthetic reasons; second, it created a tie to Silva's life as a vagabond. He'd been wandering on foot through Portugal since he was a child. But first we filmed him as a dead man in the snow; that was pivotal for further work on the film and story. Silva said, 'I feel a death in me.' In the film, we turned it into a more imaginary, spiritual death.

From a certain point on, the viewer clearly senses that there will be a trek and that the character of Silva is preparing to leave one place to reach another.

Maya Kosa: Yes, the last shot is inspired by photos of the Swiss writer Robert Walser, who died in 1956 during a stroll in the snow. We wanted to show someone who flees so he can die in nature. As brutal as that sounds, that's what's going on in this trek in *Rio Corgo*. That is also the only explanation for the crises that Silva goes through.

Silva had to put himself intimately into this character in this film, because he participates in the ritualisation of a death that is his own. Was there a moment when you had the impression that the protagonist's body was no longer Senhor Silva's, but had become a fiction? That another being appeared in the film?

Sergio da Costa: Yes, there was this change, but it developed continuously, like the conversations and meetings we had with Silva. When we began recreating a character, another character emerged in parallel: our little Frankenstein, a character nurtured from several sources, collectively imagined.

Maya Kosa: It took two and a half months to shoot the film, with only one interruption when we wrote, interviewed Silva again and introduced to the plot the girl, who doesn't really exist. At that time, we didn't even plan for the next day, but abandoned ourselves entirely to this intuitive process. We were afraid of what we would experience while shooting, because after a certain point his crises began to drive the narrative.

At some moments, Silva seems to look at himself as if he were standing outside his body.

Maya Kosa: That's really how he felt. Things weren't going well for him. Some days, he was totally present; on others, it was hard to work with him. It was a constant struggle, and we had to consult with each other a lot. I don't know whether he thinks about himself. The sequence with the dead wife who appears to him – played by our assistant director – corresponds to his visions, which we re-staged.

Did Silva ask at any time what the point of the film was?

Maya Kosa: He was incredibly devoted and often said he was doing it all for us. At the same time, we realised that was his way of teasing us. We showed him the dialogue we had written, and he always found formulations that were better than ours. A joke he made could lead to a whole scene. One time I asked him how he did his laundry, and he answered in bemusement, 'How do I do the laundry? With my feet.' And I replied, 'Then Senhor Silva will do that in the film, too.'

At the centre of Rio Corgo is a character; but the title refers to a landscape and maps a territory in which everything, the whole world, is possible, like in David Lynch's Twin Peaks.

Sergio da Costa: Actually, for a long time our working title was 'The Magician'. But we always thought it was wrong to focus too much on the character. We didn't want to limit the viewer's perception. That's why we have the title *Rio Corgo*; the river is very close to our location. This decision has to do with what you said: opening it, so the whole world can be put in it.

Maya Kosa: Besides, Silva's crises always had something to do with water: in the bathtub, in the river. That was a powerful element for the film.

What was the relationship between the protagonist and the people who live in the village? In a certain way, the film seems to have been shot to protect him. At a certain moment, Rio Corgo is transformed into a ballad that accompanies him on his last walk: musicians play and sing for him in a car.

Sergio da Costa: It's difficult to give a clear answer to this question. Every time I see Silva's trek and the musicians playing at the end, I sense a truth: I am touched by the freedom of this walking character.

Maya Kosa: All the people in the film belong to the same family, the only family in the village that accepts Senhor Silva. Everyone else has prejudices against him, because he drinks and because of the way he dresses. When we arrived in the village, the residents responded to us in the same way; to top it off, we spoke with a strange accent. But this one family opened itself up to us: Ana, the girl in the film; the grandma; the father, who plays the concertina; the mother, who plays a role in the hospital scenes – they were all on our side, and we made use of their willingness to work with us.

Starting from our first meeting with Silva, his songs always accompanied us. He always had a powerful connection to music. We owe the sequence you mentioned to a coincidence: we had driven to a waterfall to shoot some footage, and there we met these young men with their guitars who didn't mind us filming them.

At this point, the film seems to position itself in relation to the character – and with that, you take an emotional stance.

Sergio da Costa: Yes, it really was a matter of feeling. That sequence with the music playing in the car grew out of our empathy. Completely intuitively, we decided to use this song when Silva leaves. This empathy and a feeling of fascination accompanied us the whole time that we were shooting the film.

After a certain moment, a sequence of ritually charged actions and gestures clearly emerges in the film.

Maya Kosa: *Rio Corgo* also tells a story of tradition and initiation. The girl receives a legacy from Silva. He senses that he is about to disappear, and he begins telling his story: about his childhood, his deceased wife, and the visions. The girl is the person who will take his place after his death.

Sergio da Costa: Silva wasn't particularly interested in what we were doing. We tried to explain his role to him, but he preferred to be in action, to do things and not to theorise.

Maya Kosa: While we were shooting, we wanted to show him what we had already filmed, but he didn't even look at it. He said he wanted to see it on the big screen.

Vasco Câmara, in: Público, 23 October 2015



Maya Kosa was born in Geneva in 1985 to a family of Polish origin. In 2010 she earned a degree in film directing from the Haute École d'Art et de Design in Geneva. Following *Aux Bains de la reine*, *Rio Corgo* is the second film she has made with Sergio da Costa. Maya Kosa works as a writer, an assistant director and an editor. She divides her time between Portugal and Switzerland.

Films

2008: *Avant le sommeil* (5 min.), *Ulica Pogodna* (20 min.). 2010: *L'Ingénieur et le prothésiste* (22 min.). 2012: *Aux Bains de la reine* (126 min., co-directed by Sergio da Costa). 2015: *Rio Corgo*.



Sergio da Costa was born in Lausanne in 1984 to a family of Portuguese origin. In 2010 he completed film studies at the Haute École d'Art et de Design in Geneva. Following *Aux bains de la reine*, *Rio Corgo* is the second film he has made with Maya Kosa. Sergio da Costa works as a director, an editor and a director of photography. He divides his time between Portugal and Switzerland.

Films

2009: *Entretien avec Almiro Vilar Da Costa* (29 min.). 2010: *Snack-bar Aquário* (37 min.). 2012: *Aux Bains de la reine* (37 min., co-directed by Maya Kosa). 2015: *Rio Corgo*.