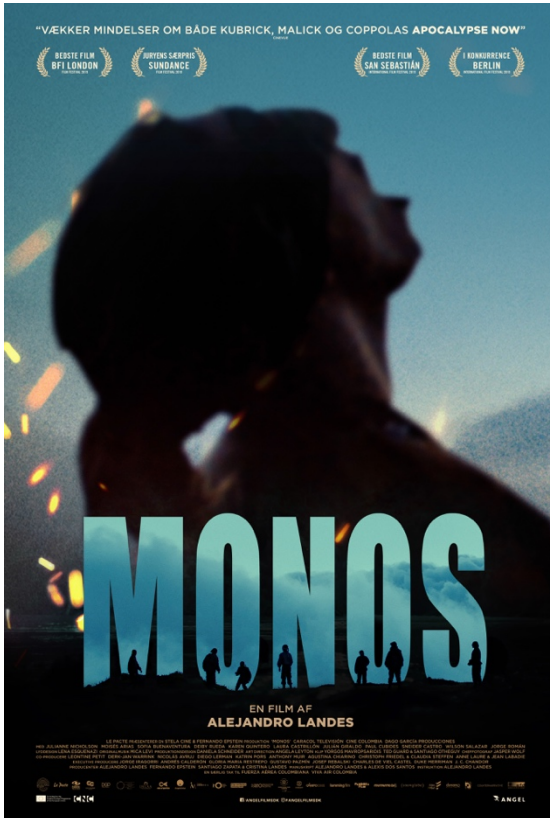


Angel Films præsenterer

MONOS



Premiere: 6. februar

Længde: 102 minutter

Censur: 15 år

Instruktør: Alejandro Landes

Premierebiografer:

Grand Teatret, Gloria Biograf,

Vester Vov Vov, Valby Kino, Biffen

Aalborg, Nicolai Biograf Kolding,

Øst for Paradis m.fl.

Synopsis:

På en fjerntliggende bjergtop et sted i Latinamerika hersker en gruppe unge guerillakrigere, hvis hverdag består af militærtræning, imens de vogter over deres kvindelige gidsel (Julianne Nicholson) og passer koen Shakira. Begge ting går helt galt...

I instruktør Alejandro Landes' mørke og utæmmede artfilm hersker galskab og kaos. Fra de barske bjerglandskaber til den dybe jungle bevæger 'Monos' sig fremad som en urkraft, der kommer mere og mere ud af kontrol.

Trailer og pressemateriale kan hentes på: <https://www.angelfilms.dk/monos>

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A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR AND CO-WRITER ALEJANDRO LANDES How did this project come about?

There has been a seemingly endless civil war in Colombia, a war with many fronts: paramilitaries, guerrillas, Narcos, the government, foreign actors and everything seems to be coming to a head. The fragile possibility of peace is in the air, and it's been a long time coming. *Monos* explores this moment through the prism of the war movie. Though this is my generation's first chance, this is not Colombia's first peace process and so it feels plagued by ghosts. These ghosts inspired me to shape the film like a fever dream.

How did the situation in Colombia directly inspire this movie?

The former President was given the Nobel Peace Prize last year for signing a peace agreement between FARC, the main guerrilla group, and the government, but this is a peace that was rejected in the ballot box by a referendum and had to be pushed through by executive decree. The agreement calls for all guerrillas brandishing machine guns in the mountains and jungles to give up their weapons and head into the towns and cities. It's still unclear how they will be received — will they be welcomed and helped to start anew or killed in the streets for revenge or forgotten? This question creates a ticking time bomb.

You drop the viewer headlong into an unspecified environment devoid of context. Discuss your strategy here...

The idea, from the story to the production design, was to create an atemporal world, out of place, out of time, far away from everything--- with this group of kids who is being trained and watched over by some unknown force. They're on a mission, part of a clandestine army. They're a squad of soldiers in the 'back' lines of a war— but also just a tight-knit pack of teenagers. Though the specifics of the Colombian civil war is the source of inspiration, the idea was always for the experience of the film to cross borders and exist as a world in and of its own.

What fascinated you about the subject of teenage commandos?

Most of us have dreamed, more than once, of running off with our friends to someplace far away and doing whatever we wanted without anyone watching over us, or telling us what to do. In *Monos*, youth serves as a metaphor for Colombia as a nation; it's a young country, still searching for its identity, and the dream of peace is fragile, tentative and recurring. Much more than an exploration of child soldiers, this film speaks to adolescence because it's then that we start fighting to understand who we are and who we want to become...It's a stage in life in which we are caught between wanting company and, just as desperately, wanting to be alone.

Monos looks to evoke this angst and conflict from the inside rather than create reactions of pity or outrage in the audience by depicting what for many is a foreign conflict.

What is their specific mission in *Monos*?

They're guarding a prisoner of war. Rebel groups all around the world take prisoners, for politics or money, to fuel their fight. Generally, the prisoner is cared for by the lowest rung of the hierarchy, which tend to be the youngest soldiers. Sometimes, kids. It's the cheapest way of keeping a hostage. These soldiers are generally positioned in the rear guard or a remote outpost but the conflict there can be just as intense and revealing as in the front lines.

Describe the group dynamic here — it's beyond political alignment, even gender...

In war, the lines get blurry. So do political affiliations. Left? Right? After a while, does it even matter? This is particularly evident in drawn-out conflicts with many fronts like Colombia, or Syria, where the fog of war opens the door to mercenary or purely personal fighting. There is no single protagonist in this film. The main character is the group: a teenage squad with the code name *Monos*. Through a fluid point of view, we follow this band as they try to stick together when things get more and more hazy.

Rambo, played by Sofia Buenaventura, is a fascinating character — she's almost post-gender...

In the screenplay, Rambo had a specific gender but during a year-long casting process it became surprisingly unimportant. In a way, after watching more than 800 casting tapes looking for Rambo, we became gender-blind. Sofia, who we first saw playing basketball and often goes by the name Matt, has a deep moral compass, as well as androgynous features and movements, that became Rambo.

There are no gender reveals in the story, as it's not important to the language and conversation of the film. I must say, though, it's been fascinating to see how, after a screening, half the audience has experienced Rambo as a boy and the other half with Rambo as a girl. And yet, does it change the deeper impressions of the film? I think not.

Why did you cast Julianne Nicholson in the role of Doctora, an American prisoner of war?

In an increasingly interconnected world, war is rarely local and foreign actors play a role. In *Monos*, this is experienced through the character of Doctora. Though we know little about her, she embodies foreigner, enemy, and mother.

What I found particularly attractive about Julianne is her innately tender and maternal nature, which makes her violent turn all the more interesting. Also, she has an iconic look to her that plays to the fable-like aspect of the story, like a dark *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* — Julianne is a looming tall, skeletal, white presence next to her young, rowdy, heterogeneous captors, creating a stark contrast.

The role was physically demanding, even weeks before the shoot. Julianne ate meagerly, put any vanity aside and was brave. She put herself at the mercy of kids that, even when acting, could exhibit a chaotic, pack mentality. She decided early on that she didn't want anyone to do her stunts — she did everything herself, including facing mad river currents and sliding down the face of a hill during a nocturnal landslide.

Describe the casting process for the teenage commandos...

A big casting team helped us look at more than 800 kids from all over Colombia. We chose 30 to participate in a mock basic training camp high up in the Andes mountains. For weeks, they did improvisation and acting exercises in the morning, led by Argentine actress Inés Efrón, and military training in the afternoon, learning how to carry a weapon, enter formations, somersault and shoot so they would move like real commandos. It's not the same as the boot-stomping of a regular army because clandestine fighters move in the shadows.

The military instruction was done by a former commander of a feared guerilla combat unit who deserted the FARC named Wilson Salazar. This is a man who, only three years ago, had a big price on his head: dead or alive. We were immediately taken by him and he ended up playing the role of the Messenger, the squad's main contact to The Organization.

By seeing the personal and group dynamics that emerged from this grueling training exercises, we chose the group of 8 who became MONOS. This pre-production process was everything, really. Having the cast live together in a remote setting for weeks, in very close quarters, created a unique, dynamic and shared experience, in front of a small crew and a camera, that bound them together even before production began.

Are they mostly non-actors?

The group comes from incredibly different socio-economic backgrounds and acting experience. The actor who plays Boom-Boom hails from the remote countryside, hauling vegetables for a living with his father, and has absolutely no acting experience, while the actor who plays Rambo is a skater from bustling Cali. Another cast member came to us from a theater program inside a strict boarding school for recovering teenage drug addicts. And one from Hollywood— Moisés Arias, who plays Bigfoot, hails from a Colombian family, but moved as a young boy to Georgia

and then Queens before having a career as a child actor on *Hannah Montana*. It's a real motley crew.

Prior to this project you designed Casa Bahia, a modernist home on Biscayne Bay in Florida that won an Architizer Award; did you take anything from that project with you into *Monos*?

When I was offered the chance to design a building, I jumped at it, though I didn't realize then how long and intense it would be. I approached the process like a film. Conceptually, the way you go about writing a screenplay is similar to drafting architectural plans and you confront those ideas on paper with the reality of construction, which is like a shoot. I was on site everyday, effectively directing the project, so I saw my mistakes go up in concrete and had to hammer them down, which translates to filmmaking. I think you have to destroy plans to create and I had the privilege to do that on both projects.

Casa Bahia, while luxurious, also resembles a bunker of sorts — like the stone bunker on the mountaintop in the opening scenes of *Monos*. ..

There's a rawness to Casa Bahia, in the way it incorporates raw wood, stone and concrete — it's unvarnished. In *Monos*, when the characters—mostly non-actors, in real locations, with natural lighting—look into the camera during a sequence shot, for instance, there's that same rawness, but also a formal idea. The film juxtaposes naturalism with a stylized *mise en scène*— the magic lies in the tension between the two, in the same way that Casa Bahia employs heavy, natural materials but within expansive cantilevers and reflective surfaces that give the structure a floating, lightness. I think there is a lot of emotion, tension in form and that's where I see architecture and film having a lot in common.

Describe the initial landscape of the movie, which is set on a remote mountainside outside a distant, unnamed city...

We were looking for something otherworldly and found these monumental, stone structures—remnants of an abandoned cement mine— in what looked like the top of the world. Their massive scale and simple geometry created such a specific sense of place but impossible to date or place on the map. I knew immediately we had found the film's opening location.

Also, this high mountain plateau is a unique environment—a floating, amorphous wetlands in the sky that holds the country's water reserves. Narratively, we follow the real path of water in *Monos* — trickling down the mountaintop, in a rolling downward spiral, until reaching a high pitch in the jungle rapids below.

Where did you film the opening sequence?

We filmed about a four-hour drive outside of Bogotá, in a national park called *Chingaza*, which is very high up — more than 13,000 feet. It's an incredibly physical environment because of the lack of oxygen, the cold, the wetness and the unpredictability of the weather. It was also the most silent place I've experienced. Shooting there was really tough but the remoteness and thin air put the entire and crew in a different state of mind, far from everything but the world of the film.

How did *Lord of the Flies* influence this story?

Lord of the Flies and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* have allegorical powers that span way beyond their specific time, conflict or country. Also, both novels have something that lingers in your subconscious, like a totem pole, like some sort of tattoo.

The second half of the movie is set in the jungle, as the chaos of the story intensifies. How did your shooting strategy differ compared to the opening scenes?

The vastness of the mountaintop was awesome —it's easy to see and feel, in this context, that you're a tiny grain of sand within the immensity of the universe. Under the jungle canopy, by contrast, you lose all sense of scale; it becomes harder to see outside of yourself, without context

and perspective. In *Monos*, we wanted the jungle to mirror this claustrophobia and distortion as the group begins to break apart.

Where did you shoot the jungle scenes?

We shot five hours from Medellín in the Samaná river, a spectacular place that until recently was completely inaccessible because of the fighting between guerrillas and paramilitaries. Also, the gold in the river draws illegal prospecting. Since not too long ago it was too dangerous for anyone to visit, the area remains largely unspoiled—a strange blessing of Colombia’s violence.

Was it difficult filming in the jungle?

We hiked down a steep jungle canyon to the river with a team of mules who carried our food and gear on their backs. Then, with the help of Colombia’s national kayaking team, we rafted down to a makeshift camp with military tents that had been built for cast and crew by a big family of gold miners that the location manager had befriended and hired. Looking back, it’s magic how a team of kayakers, gold prospectors and mules kept the jungle shoot alive for more than three weeks. Down there, it was just us, the river and a satellite phone for emergencies.

Describe filming the scenes in the water...

The actors had to choreograph their buoyancy between each other and the camera. We had a short time to film because their body temperatures, and how long they could hold their breath, dropped quickly. Shooting under water is hard, particularly in live, uncontrolled locations like a river or jungle pool, as opposed to a tank.

Fortunately, we had the help of Peter Zuccarini, one of the world’s premier water photographers, who shot things like *Life of Pi* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. He designs and builds his own underwater equipment and so it was privilege to have him, and his toys, with us for four days.

What was the morale of cast and crew while filming in the jungle?

I think everyone was at the outer limits of what they could do physically and intellectually. I was carried up the canyon on a stretcher one day because I couldn’t even stand-up and our medic was sure I had appendicitis. I remember crying in the stretcher, not because of the pain, but because I didn’t know when I’d be back and that it would be nearly impossible to build our jungle camp again. Fortunately, my appendix was fine and I was back soon.

Another day, after a torrential downpour, I was prepping for the shot as the actors were arriving, and we heard this loud snap at the top of the canyon. A tree started tumbling down the hill, landing right at Rambo’s feet. No one was hurt but everybody was shaken—the tree was enormous and it happened in seconds. Nobody could work the rest of that morning. But, by the afternoon, everyone soldiered on and we were shooting again. The crew and cast was resilient and I’m so thankful for what they did.

What was the morale of the younger cast members as you filmed in the jungle?

They went through all sorts of challenges and pains but what I found most incredible was that they — of all people on set — always felt they were making something special. They were sure of it; they made it so. This was on their shoulders to pull off, and they came to embrace that responsibility. They knew what they were getting into, and what's more, they fed off it.

Describe your collaboration with Alexis dos Santos on the screenplay...

I loved the energy and sensibility of what Alexis made in *Glue* and he came to the rough treatment I had written in a completely fresh and apolitical way, knowing little of Colombia. He stayed with me in my studio apartment and we watched films, like the Russian war movie *Come*

and See. We'd write separately, and sometimes on the same screen. Alexis made playlists for us to listen to. Even more than a collaborator, I consider Alexis a close friend.

What were some of your strategies for the score?

My previous film had no music where the source wasn't visible on-screen. I'm sensitive to music in film and believe it has to be used sparingly and with pointed purpose. *Monos* is monumental yet also minimal in its aesthetic, and Mica Levi stayed true to that with her music — it's very impactful, yet there's no more than 23 minutes of music in the movie.

In a film with so many protagonists, the key to the music was about creating character. In a way, it was like a *Peter and the Wolf* approach, playing to the fable quality of the film. The main musical characters are two epic whistles, made by Mica by blowing into empty bottles in her apartment. The first is an authority whistle, which is shrill and always the same. It evokes the presence of The Organization. The other is a bird-like whistle which speaks to the bond between the kids; it starts raw and gets more melodic as the film progresses.

Also, there's a timpani which has some bass and plays with the authority whistle to lay down "the law." This is the sound of the shadowy force that tries to control the group from a distance. Also, there are rises that act as a shot of adrenaline, directly inspired by EDM music, but Mica's shaped them to feel twisted and thicker— they stand on their own, without a drop. When there's a big leap in locations, the sound changes but the music doesn't— it acts more narratively than environmentally.

Why was Mica Levi the right composer for this production?

Mica connected with and understood the spirit of the film: the faces, the colors, the extremeness of the environment, the mash of costumes, the absence of a specific time, place or date. She's classically trained but can be equally as inspired by pop or heavy metal; she can mix synthesizer-driven music with a quartet. All this brings a very particular sensibility, a mixing of instruments, that made for a distinct, emotional and atemporal sound.

This is only Mica Levi's third film as composer, after *Under the Skin* and *Jackie*. Describe how she became involved in this project.

Mica came aboard after seeing an unfinished cut of the movie; she first sent me a whistle and timpani, which I loved, and we started working together. I went to London several times and we kept at it, working with a great music supervisor, Bridget Samuels.

For the mix, Mica and Bridget came to Buenos Aires to work with sound designer, Lena Esquenazi, and me. Lena, who is Cuban and studied sound in the Soviet Union, doesn't speak English. And Mica and Bridget don't speak Spanish. But, despite the language barrier, we encamped in a dark studio for weeks, interweaving the sound design with the music to create a single soundscape. They were intense days, with contested discussions, and one of the highlights of making this film.

What is the significance of the title?

It's a common prefix in Spanish and comes from the Greek word for "alone", and it's the codename of the squad in the movie. In terms of the arc of the story, we come a long way from the "band of brothers" at the beginning to the "last man standing" at the end of the film...

What are you trying to say through the violence you depict in *Monos*?

Violence is an inherent part of war and therefore an inescapable experience for this young squad and their hostage. The intention was not to depict a gory or romantic violence that on-screen can appear fun or brave but rather a real, chilling violence that is horrid even to the executor. War is inside of us, as a species.

Do you see hope for Colombia, and for the world at large?

I do, and that's why I made this movie. Certainly not as an answer but as part of a past, present and possibly future conversation. It's true that despite the peace agreement, some dissident guerillas have refused to put down their guns and paramilitary groups continue to kill social workers and union leaders. The situation is volatile and there's a lot of anger in Colombia and in the world today. This anger seems to be bubbling to the surface everywhere and maybe that's good because you cannot look away. You are forced to engage, to ask questions. *Monos*, at the ending, comes home in a very physical way, and confronts us with a question.

ABOUT THE TEAM

Alejandro Landes - Director / Producer / Co-Writer

Alejandro Landes is a Colombian-Ecuadorian director, producer, and screenwriter. A graduate of Brown University with a degree in Political Economy, Landes began his career in journalism,

writing for the Miami Herald and producing for political talk show Oppenheimer Presenta. His directorial debut COCALERO, a documentary about Bolivian labor leader Evo Morales's grassroots campaign to become the country's first Indigenous president, premiered in the 2007 Sundance Film Festival and was theatrically released in over 20 countries. In 2010, Landes was selected for Sundance Institute Director's and Screenwriter's Lab fellowships and a Cannes Cinéfondation residency, where he developed his first fiction feature PORFIRIO. The film, which Landes wrote, directed, and produced, premiered in Cannes Directors' Fortnight 2011 and won top prizes at many international film festivals. Based on a true story, it explores what drove a man paralyzed by a stray police bullet to hijack an airplane, and stars the real-life Porfirio Ramirez as himself. MONOS, Landes' second fiction feature, follows eight members of an adolescent rebel group watching over a hostage in the Colombian mountains. With an ensemble cast including Julianne Nicholson and Moises Arias, and a score by Mica Levi, MONOS will have its World Premiere at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival, followed by an International Premiere in the Berlin International Film Festival.

In addition to filmmaking, Landes has a passion for architecture and completed construction on a modernist Miami home of his own design, Casa Bahia, in 2015. He currently lives in New York.

Julianne Nicholson - Doctora

Notable film work includes BLACK MASS with Johnny Depp and Joel Edgerton, released by Warner Bros and AUGUST OSAGE COUNTY with an ensemble cast that includes Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts and Sam Shepard. The movie received the Best Ensemble honor from the Hollywood Film Awards, and was released by the Weinstein Company. Nicholson also appeared in multi-episode arcs on Showtime's MASTERS OF SEX. and as Esther Randolph in Seasons 2,3 and 4 of HBO's award-winning series, BOARDWALK EMPIRE.

Independent film work has been a staple for Nicholson beginning with a leading role in Hilary Birmingham's TULLY. Festival films to be released in 2016 premiered at Sundance and SXSW and include SOPHIE and the RISING SUN with Margo Martindale.

Her stage work includes roles she originated in Sam Shepard's latest play HEARTLESS, Melissa James Gibson's play THIS and Rattlestick's production of Adam Rapp's HALLWAY trilogy.

Moisés Arias - Patagrande

Moises was born on April 18, 1994 in New York City, USA, to Colombian parents. He is an actor and photographer.

Notable film work includes the remake BEN HUR (2016) from Paramount Pictures and MGM. Also ENDER'S GAME (2013) alongside Harrison Ford and the animated box office hit by Universal Pictures DESPICABLE ME 2 (2013).

Moises has over 1.5 million followers in social media.

MONOS was his first film in Spanish, which is something that he has wanted to do since the beginning of his career on Disney's TV Series HANNAH MONTANA.