

Les Films d'Antoine / Tobina Film / Roxbury Pictures

and co-producers

Fado Filmes / Acontracorriente

present

INSENSIBLES

(International title : PAINLESS)

A film by

Juan Carlos Medina

featuring

Alex Brendemühl
Tómas Lemarquis
Irene Montàla
Derek de Lint
Juan Diego
Felix Gomez

SYNOPSIS

On the eve of the Spanish Civil War, a group of children who are insensitive to pain are locked up in a hospital deep in the Pyrenees. In the present time, David Martel a brilliant neurosurgeon has to find his biological parents in order to get a transplant he needs to survive. In his vital quest he awakens ghosts from his country's past and is confronted with the terrible fate of the children who feel no pain.

France / Espagne / Portugal – Running time : 101 minutes – 2012

Release date France : 10 octobre 2012

Download the press pack at www.distribfilms.com

DISTRIBUTION

Distrib Films
33, av Sainte-Foy
92200 Neuilly-Sur-Seine
tel : 33(0)1 78 14 08 70
info@distribfilms.com
www.distribfilms.com

PRESS OFFICE

BOSSA NOVA / Michel Burstein
32, bd Saint Germain
75005 Paris
tel : 33(0)1 43 26 26 26
bossanovapr@free.fr
www.bossa-nova.info

PRODUCTION NOTES

Filming began on PAINLESS with a 4 million euro budget in July 2011, starting with three weeks on location in the countryside of Catalonia around the Spanish town of Canfranc, in the mountainous region of the Pyrenees.

For the four weeks of interiors, the crew set up in the Catalan Audiovisual Park, about 40km out of Barcelona. The building constructed under Franco was once a hospital, and is now a film and television studio. The main sets (the sanatorium, padded cells, hallway, false-marble stairs, laboratory and Berkano's den) were built in Madrid and transported by truck to the studios to be put together by Art Director, Iñigo Navarro, known for his work with Woody Allen (VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA), Juan Antonio Bayonna (THE ORPHANAGE) and James Mangold (NIGHT AND DAY).

The initiative for the production came from ex-film journalist François Cognard who, with his new company Tobina Film, (producers of AMER by Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani) joined forces with Antoine Simkine ex-CEO of Duboi, who have provided visual effects for over a hundred films. Simkine himself moved on to production with his company Les Films d'Antoine (ÉCOUTE LE TEMPS by Alanté Kavaïté, ON THE SLY by Olivier Ringer and SONS OF NORWAY by Jens Lien).

They were joined by Spanish company Roxbury Pictures headed by Miguel Angel Faura (producer of two quite unusual Spanish films : AGNOSIA by Eugenio Mira and BLIND ALLEY by Antonio Trashorras). Faura's experience as assistant director and set designer in many genre films (DAGON, ARACHNID and FRAGILE) was invaluable for PAINLESS , as was the input from major Spanish distributor, A Contracorriente Film. Portugal was also represented in this European co-production by Fado Filmes, which is run by Luis Galvao Teles, who has directed and produced over thirty films since the mid-seventies.

PAINLESS was filmed using the most advanced digital camera the 'Arri Alexa' (also used for filming DRIVE by Nicolas Winding Refn and MELANCHOLIA by Lars Von Trier).

Make-up effects came from DDT, a Spanish company well known for their work on HELLBOY (1 and 2) and PAN'S LABYRINTH by Guillaume Del Toro. Make-up artists David Marti and Montse Ribé made numerous prosthetic props and effects from latex (aging, scars, various wounds, burns, bullet in the head and a severed tendon). Some of the pieces were further enhanced by digital visual effects such as the flames from the scene of the little girl on fire. These were handled by Onirikai Studio, a Spanish company specializing in visual effects, who are also responsible for the matte paintings in PAINLESS .

INTERVIEW WITH JUAN CARLOS MEDINA

When did you start writing PAINLESS?

About eight years ago while I was directing my third short film, MAUVAIS JOUR. I had written a few different versions which I wasn't satisfied with, when I met Luis Berdejo – who would become the screenwriter for the REC films – at a festival where we were both presenting short films. His personality and our common taste in filmmakers like Paul Verhoeven made me think that he could bring something to the PAINLESS script. Especially since he had asked me to read one of his scripts on the subject of hidden family secrets, which is one of the themes of my film.

Like many first feature length films, PAINLESS is partly autobiographical. What role does your own history play in the film?

My father is Spanish and throughout my childhood I sensed that there was something dark in the past on that side of the family. There was a sort of omerta until I was in my thirties. This was when my father decided to talk to me face to face and tell me about his buried past : that my great grand-parents had been executed as communists during the civil war by one of Franco's generals, a bloodthirsty tyrant who had taken over the region where they lived. So my grandmother became a war orphan and gave birth to my father in extremely difficult circumstances just after the war. She suffered from hunger and poverty. My father was taken in by a captain in Franco's army. This captain brought him up until the age of fifteen before dying from complications with a wound he received during the siege of Madrid. So, I know that my grandmother and my father suffered from the ravages of the war for a long time. But they weren't the only ones. In those generations in Spain you can feel the burden of the past still weighing heavily upon them, with awful stories that no one necessarily wants to remember. Because it was a civil war, and people from the same family could be fighting against each other. It's as if they'd thrown the past behind a wall so that they could forget about it.

So PAINLESS is very much anchored in this buried past in Spain?

One of the main points the film seeks to make is the importance of talking about this compulsory memory lapse that happened after Franco's fall from power. Because since the amnesty law was passed in 1977, no-one talks about this troubled past which caused major divisions and disagreements within families in Spain. It is the same amnesty law that was recently used to see Judge Garzon suspended from the bar - simply because he was trying to shed some light on what happened to the tens of thousands of people who disappeared under Franco. There has never been any official recognition of these crimes of the past, not like in Germany with the Nuremberg Trials for example. And the legacy of the civil war is still poisoning the minds of a part of the country. Today in 2012, young Spaniards know absolutely nothing of the tormented underside of Franco's time. They are totally unaware that the Nazis were co-operating with the Spanish fascists even before the Second World War began. These important historical aspects are echoed in the unfolding of the plot in PAINLESS via the characters but above all through the central metaphor of the film.

The film shows us that it's important to go back to the past. Even if it's just to be able to deal with the future, be it personal or collective. But I don't show all this directly. I just try to show that the difference between good and bad is complicated and hazy.

Were you influenced by other films in constructing the script?

I was traumatized by the Russian Film GO AND LOOK (also known as COME AND SEE) by Elem Klimov which shows war through the eyes of a child who is subjected to it. But also, and particularly by THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE by Victor Erice made forty years ago, it tells the story of civil war from the point of view of a little girl. There's the really beautiful sequence where a travelling cinema comes into the village to project Universal Studio's Frankenstein, before the girl meets the monster at the riverside, just like in James Whale's film. This eruption of the fantastic and monstrous in metaphoric form is something I tried to convey in PAINLESS. I actually tried to tell my story from two points of view: that of the child, and that of the neurosurgeon searching into his past.

What's the primary message of the film?

To be able to accept suffering; what suffering shows us of truth and how it shapes us. I wanted to do a film with a character that embodies this issue. Until the day that I discovered this illness, insensitivity to pain, which helped me anchor the script in something more physical, more visceral - which was bound to be more adapted to cinema. I did some research on insensitivity to pain and met quite a few doctors and then I came across a database. Some of the medical reports that I read inspired the film, like the children who hurt themselves without feeling pain. Some even die at a very young age after causing themselves harm, before anyone else even understands what's going on. So I got to wondering what happens when at a young age you learn to test the limits of your body, without feeling the slightest pain? Because it's a rare condition, often associated with problems of inbreeding and found mainly among families in isolated rural areas, religious issues tend to turn up. Things like 'has he been attacked by demons?' To stop these children mutilating themselves or even killing each other, it was decided that they should be locked up in cells. We see this in PAINLESS.

The film is split between different genres : melodrama, political, horror, war ... What were the feelings you wanted to elicit from the viewer?

I'd like them to feel the same feelings I did when I saw the films that got under my skin and made me think, and those that gave me aesthetic shock. Without wanting to make any kind of comparison, I felt like that after seeing ROBOCOP, THE GODFATHER 2, THE DEVILS, BARRY LYNDON and ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA.

How did you go about the casting?

I auditioned most of the actors in Barcelona, way before the filming started, down to the smallest parts. I wanted to be sure that everyone was in tune with their character. This was very complicated because giving small parts to talented actors is always difficult. We started the casting at the end of February and found the very last actors two weeks before we started shooting, four months later. I even got to choose some of the actors

from the Catalonia National Theatre with whom I rehearsed for several weeks. As for Tomás Lemarquis who plays Berkano, I discovered him in the wonderful Icelandic film NOI ALBINOI. He has an extraordinary physique, with a discreet strangeness. I was charmed by the seriousness of his attitude to work and his selflessness. Very early on, he started preparing his body so that he would fit the part. First he slimmed down with a diet that made him lose all his body fat, then he started working out intensively.

Do you think the film will be talked about in Spain, given that PAINLESS tackles the history of Spain under Franco?

Actually, following the work of Erice and other filmmakers like Narciso Ibanez Serrador (ISLAND OF THE DAMNED), Guillermo Del Toro has already explored the subject in his wonderful films THE DEVILS BACKBONE and PAN'S LABYRINTH, two films that admirably combine the imaginary worlds of genre film and the trauma of Spain's past. But the supernatural is always present in Del Toro's films : ghost stories and parallel worlds... they are features of his universe where the amazing and the sordid co-exist. Of course PAINLESS is linked to this movement but the only 'fantasy' in the film is more on the scientific side. It's more like Mary Shelley or HG Wells than Bram Stoker...

How did you handle the necessary but never voyeuristic violence?

It's a question of balance. It's true that there are a few disturbing moments, but I never wanted it to be a gory film. Concerning the eternal debate about violence : I think that film in general, and PAINLESS in particular, belongs more to the realm of dreams and nightmares. ... there's no way that it has the same value or effect as real violence. Real violence is an abject thing, nauseating and repugnant, but in film like in dreams, violence is more like a cathartic movement of the spirit, it's about creating a shock, creating feelings that help you lead the viewer where you want to go. I wanted PAINLESS to be hard-hitting, fierce and intense. A film that would get under your skin and have an aesthetic quality that would live up to the subject. With a subject like that it had to be a head-on, traumatising approach... in some ways a little flamboyant, or baroque perhaps. It's true that in the most disturbing scenes like the little girl on fire, even though perhaps a little exaggerated and poetic, in essence this scene is nothing more than an extrapolation of stories I'd read in the medical files I'd explored during my research on the Nishida Syndrome.

Yes, this sequence is very disturbing. How was it devised?

It was very difficult because we shot it at night with two six-year-old girls who weren't allowed on the set for more than four hours at a time. On top of that we had to wait for the right light - between dusk and darkness - before we could start shooting. So for the special effects we used the burn make-up made by DDT on the little girl's arms as she caught fire. Then in post-production we added digital flames. The combination of mechanical special effects and visual effects makes the sequence work very well.

Berkano's scars and ageing make-up are also very striking ...

Tomás Lemarquis' make-up for the final sequence took six hours. In fact he very bravely agreed to sleep a whole night with the make-up on. But the next day he had an allergic reaction! So the false scars really were marked on his skin for several days!

How did you choose the musical composer Johan Söderqvist?

I'd loved the orchestra soundtrack in LET THE RIGHT ONE IN which was exactly the sort of musical language that I was seeking for PAINLESS. Johan is an extremely conscientious composer. Once he decides to work on a film he is literally immersed in it. Consequently we worked a lot together - he really needs to discuss things with the director. We would talk two or three hours a day on Skype while I was editing and he would suggest many different things before leaving me to choose. It's a different method to the theoretical approach of Morricone who would go back to his home with the script, or the final cut, and write the entire score from A to Z. Johan works more empirically like a musical laboratory assistant, doing experiments with bizarre instruments and strange sounds. In fact, in his studio in Stockholm, he has an amazing collection of instruments each one stranger than the next, as I discovered when I stayed with him over there. Bit by bit through a process of experimentation, the musical atmosphere of the film developed. Then Johan fine-tuned the orchestration and the twelve pieces were recorded in Bratislava. I think he successfully created some magnificent themes.

Juan Carlos Medina

(Screenwriter-Director)

Part French and part Spanish, Juan Carlos Medina spent some of his youth in Spain before arriving in Nantes where he spent two years in a prep class studying for the entrance exam to the famous Fémis Film School (Ecole nationale supérieure des métiers de l'image et du son) before starting to write screen plays, while following a course of film at the Sorbonne at the same time. Tired of studying theory, he took things into his own hands and bought a 16mm camera and ten reels of film and went off into the desert in Spain near Saragosse with a couple of friends to film his first short film TRINITAD (2000), a sort of tribute to Carl Dreyer's and Luis Buñuel's experimental films. Medina went on to make another two more narrative shorts, this time with more resources : RAGE (2001) and MAUVAIS JOUR (2003), filmed at la Défense in Paris and featuring Aurélien Recoing. While he was at it, he started writing the screenplay for PAINLESS , which during a long period of rewriting won the Sopadin Junior Prize in 2005, awarded yearly by film professionals to a script in development. The script was also selected by the Equinoxe screenwriters' workshops sponsored by Paul Higgins and Mary Sweeney. Medina finally made PAINLESS , his first feature length flm, during the summer of 2011.

ON CAMERA

Àlex Brendemühl

(David)

Starting his career by studying drama at the Theatrical Arts department of the Real Escuelade Arte Dramático in Madrid, Àlex Brendemühl of German and Spanish descent has become one of the most renowned actors in Spain. From the mid-nineties on he started showing up in secondary roles in TV and film. But in 2003 he really made his mark playing a cold blooded assassin in LA HORAS DEL DIA (THE HOURS OF THE DAY) by Jaime Rosales, which was selected for the Director's Fortnight at Cannes. Increasingly focussing on cinema, Brendemühl is starring in EL BOSCO by Oscar Aibar, along with American actor Tom Sizemore and in WAKOLDA by Lucia Puenzo plays the sinister Josef Mengele, the Angel of Death.

Tómas Lemarquis

(Berkano)

Franco-icelandic Tómas Lemarquis was born in 1977 and grew up in Iceland until the age of twenty when he went to Paris to study drama at the famous Cours Florent. Then he went back to Iceland to study art at the Reykjavik School of Fine Art. In 2003 he was acclaimed for his role in NOI ALBINOI by Dagur Kari, an Icelandic poetic comedy, in which he played a young drifter, living as a recluse on a fjord cut off from the outside world. This role led him to get involved in other films, short films and television series mostly produced in Iceland. In parallel with his acting career he continues to work as an artist showing his collages and drawings in different galleries across Europe. Recently Lemarquis made an impression in CHATRAK by Vimukthi Jayasundara, a French-Hindu co-production selected by Director's Fortnight in 2012. He will also appear alongside Tilda Swinton, John Hurt and Jamie Bell in SNOWPIERCER, Korean director, Bong Joon-ho's next film, inspired by Transperceneige, the cult comic book by Jean Marc Rochette and Jacques Lob.

Derek de Lint

(Doctor Holzmann)

Born in 1950 in the Hague, Derek de Lint has been one of the most renowned actors in theatre, film and Dutch television for the past forty years. He is best known for his roles in Paul Verhoeven's films SOLDIER OF ORANGE (1977) and BLACK BOOK (2006). Speaking French, English and Dutch fluently, he had a short period in America in the mid-eighties playing in films such as THREE MEN AND A BABY, THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING and the blockbuster catastrophe film DEEP IMPACT. But it was especially his role in the 1996 to 1999 POLTERGEIST series, playing Derek Raines, the director of a secret society fighting against the forces of evil, that made him really popular with the public.

Bea Segura

(Magdalena)

Bea Segura appeared in more than fifteen Spanish TV series in the mid-nineties and is particularly well known for HOSPITAL CENTRAL, in which she played nurse Mónica de la Fuente. One of her most memorable film roles was in HIERRO by Gabe Ibáñez, a psychological thriller about a child who mysteriously disappears, selected for the Semaine de la Critique at Cannes 2009.

OFF CAMERA

Johan Söderqvist

(Composer)

Johan Söderqvist, from Sweden studied composition and musical arrangement at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. After playing keyboard in several jazz bands he wrote his first soundtrack in 1991 for AGNES CECILIA by Anders Grönros. Working for television documentaries as well as for film, Söderqvist has composed over fifty soundtracks, such as those in Susanne Bier's films AFTER THE WEDDING, BROTHERS and REVENGE. It's also thanks to him that LET THE RIGHT ONE IN has such a sublime sound track. Johan was nominated best composer at the European Film Awards for this vampire drama by Tomas Alfredson

Luis Tinoco

(Visual Effects)

With more than fifteen years' experience in digital animation and special effects, Luis Tinoco has worked on a dozen feature films (such as INSIDE by Andrés Baiz and BLIND ALLEY by Antonio Trashorras), as well as various short films, telefilms and TV adverts. His company Onirikal Studio won the award for the best special effects two years running in 2010 and 2011 at Fantasporto International Film Festival, for THE VALDEMAR LEGACY and THE VALDEMAR LEGACY II : THE HIDDEN SHADOW. Tinoco also won a Goya in 2009 for his animated short MALACARA Y EL MISTERIO DEL BASTÓN DE ROBLE.

Alejandro Martinez

(Director of Photography)

Born in Mexico in 1973, Alejandro Martinez became a cinematographer in 1999 after studying film at UCLA in California. He then worked on some 1300 commercials and 50 video clips before his debut in feature films in 2006, with STAY ALIVE by William Brent Hall, an American horror B-movie, which takes place in the world of video game fans. He went on to direct the photography for various films like the fantasy thriller KILOMETRE 31 by Rigoberto Castañeda, MEMORIA DE MIS PUTAS TRISTES by Henning Carlsen and the terrifying drama HIERRO by Gabe Ibáñez which attracted attention at the Semaine de la Critique, in Cannes 2009.

CAST

David	Àlex BRENDEMUHL
Berkano	Tomas LEMARQUIS
Anais	Irene MONTALA
Judith	Silvia BEL
Professor Holzmann	Derek DE LINT
Nurse Magdalena	Bea SEGURA
Adan	Juan DIEGO
Young Adan	Felix GOMEZ
Berkano (children)	Ilias & Mot STOTHARD
Benigno's Mother	Alicia PEREZ
Ines	Liah OPREY

PRODUCTION

Direction	Juan Carlos MEDINA
Screenplay by	Juan Carlos MEDINA Luiso BERDEJO (original idea by Juan Carlos Medina)
Producers	Antoine SIMKINE François COGNARD Miguel Angel FAURA
Co-produced by	Luis GALVAO TELES Adolfo BLANCO LUCAS
Executive Producers	Manuel MONZON Isaac TORRAS
Cinematography by	Alejandro MARTÍNEZ
Film editing by	Pedro RIBEIRO
Casting by	Pep ARMENGOL Luci LENOX
Music by	Johan SÖDERQVIST
Art Direction by	Iñigo NAVARRO
Costume design by	Ariadna PAPIÓ
Director of Production	Ester VELASCO
Sound by	Frédéric LE LOUET
Story-board Artist	Alexis FIBLA
Special effects by	Raúl ROMANILLOS
Digital Visual Effects by	Luis TINOCO
Make-up effects by	DDT
Visual Effects by	ONIRIKAL

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