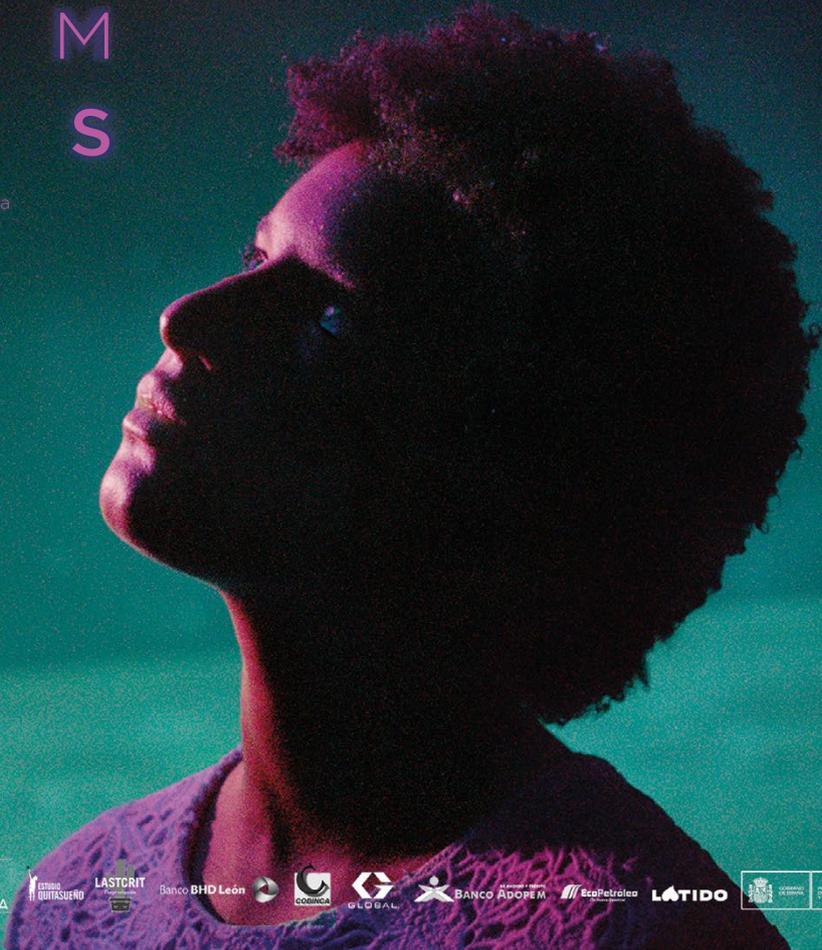


MIRIAM LIES

A Film by Natália Cabral and Oriol Estrada



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
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MIRIAM LIES

A quiet middle class world of good intentions begins to crumble when fourteen-year-old Miriam meets her internet boyfriend. While her family and friends prepare for her a traditional fifteen birthday party, Miriam doesn't know how to explain that her boyfriend is black.



MIRIAM Dulce Rodríguez
JENNIFER Carolina Rohana
TERE Pachy Méndez
MIGUEL Frank Perozo
FERNANDO Vicente Santos
DOÑA TERESA Ana María Arias
CLAUDIA Margaux Da Silva
TATA María Castillo
LA COREÓGRAFA Georgina Duluc
PATRICIA Beatriz Machuca
LAURA Cecile Van Welie
SORAYA Isabel Polanco

SCREENWRITERS AND DIRECTORS Natalia Cabral, Oriol Estrada
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS Natalia Cabral, Oriol Estrada
ASSOCIATED PRODUCERS Pablo Mustonen, Gabriel Tineo
COPRODUCERS Jordi Comellas, Paco Poch
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Israel Cárdenas
SOUND Amanda Villavieja
EDITING Oriol Estrada, Aina Calleja, Natalia Cabral
ARTISTIC DIRECTION Mónica de Moya
PRODUCTION MANAGER Lei González
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Gabriela Latorre
MUSIC Ernesto Paredano
MAKEUP Teda Pedie
COSTUME DESIGN Gina Terc
CASTING COORDINATOR Katyuska Licairac

DIRECTORS' NOTES

We perceive the story through the eyes of Miriam, the protagonists of the film, a girl that watches curiously the world around her. Miriam comes from a white family but her father is black; she is of mixed race, in a country where an important number of the population is also mixed, like her; but “fixing the race” (getting racially mixed with a white person) is highly encouraged.

In the film, Miriam’s family and friends know about her having a boyfriend, but they’re expecting a white boy from a family from their own social class. As the date of the party gets closer, Miriam will have to decide if she should take Jean-Louis to the party and face her family and friends or if she should forget about him, remaining within the social class that she belongs. It seems we are living in a time where identity

is a common concern everywhere. Different borders are being created between nations when it is easier than ever to travel and stay connected through the Internet. But what happens to her can happen to us all, when we look at ourselves in the mirror of “the other” and what we get is fear. “Miriam Lies” is a film set in Dominican Republic, the fastest growing economy in Latin America, still stuck in time with racism and social class conflicts. Through “Miriam Lies” we want to confront the audience with the conflict that can emerge when individual desire for love is faced with the social desire to be part of a community in which we can feel accepted and loved. Set in an aristocratic kitsch celebration, the intention of “Miriam Lies” is to share a point of view about the conflicts of race and class that still remain in the Caribbean and the world.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS

1.- What are some of the things that influence you and the way you film the differences of class and race in Dominican Republic?

Natalia Cabral: we made two documentaries before “Miriam Lies” that explored the conflicts of class and race in Dominican Republic. The first one was “You and Me,” the portrait of a love-hate relationship between an older, white, middle-class woman and her young black maid. The second one was “Site of Sites” a choral film that explored both sides of the construction of a luxury resort: on the one hand, you had the rich tourists lifestyle, on the other, the humble workers. It is not difficult to find images, sounds and stories that place us in front of the unfortunate spectacle of the differences between people in Dominican Republic. The whites there are the minority, but they have all the power and the blacks have very little and have to wear uniforms to survive at the mercy

of the rich. It’s very visual and violent, like an Ulrich Seidl film. For first-time visitors, the uneven landscape can be uncomfortable, even alarming, but for us Dominicans it’s quite normal, our everyday life. In these two previous films, “You and Me” and “Site of Sites”, we made formal decisions closer to an observational kind of cinema, which helped us generate some tension, discomfort and also some nervous laughs. In “Miriam Lies”, we decided to emphasize the story more, with a tense and uncomfortable ending that leaves the viewer thinking with a certain emotion that the story has been building up during the film.

2.- What attracted you to this story? How did you come up with the idea?

Oriol Estrada: We like films that deal with big issues in a subtle way, but with no concessions; we like those everyday life stories in which it seems that nothing important is apparently happening, but we feel in the air that a threat is constantly growing. We are attracted to protagonists when they are neither good nor bad and behave morally in a rather questionable way. I think it is the best way for the spectators to identify with the “hero” because as human beings, it is obvious that it’s practically impossible for us to have an exemplary conduct or life experience and that is surely what makes human kind so interesting. In the end that’s what makes art attractive, the possibility of seeing ourselves reflected in it with all our complexities.

“Miriam Lies” was born from this way of understanding cinema that we share. It all started with an anecdote of youth that Natalia told me.

I identified a possible film because the anecdote was politically and socially terrible, but at the same time very human, common and natural, so I encouraged her to write a film together based on that anecdote. She started writing from memories and I was shaping the story, looking for the strengths and eliminating weaknesses. Little by little other sub-plots appeared and the characters began to take shape and speak for themselves. Without realizing it, reality became a plot of fiction with a world of its own.

Natalia Cabral: Oriol’s point of view helped the anecdote become a script and achieve a broader perspective. He has great sensitivity and curiosity for Dominican Republic. We wrote the script together, perhaps an anecdote from my youth was the starting point, but as we were writing and producing, the film became a co-direction in a very natural and beautiful way.

3.- Is “Miriam Lies” an autobiographical, personal film? How much of your lives is in Miriam’s life and adventures?

NC: The anecdote that Oriol comments on is a situation that happened to me when I was a teenager. I met this boy online and I was hoping he’d be white when I met him. Then, when we agreed to meet personally in a public place and I saw from a distance that he was black, I ran away and never saw him again. This reaction I had was quite a surprise for me, because until then, I thought I was a “good person”, that I was the open minded in my group of friends and family. But as the years went by, as I remembered and analyzed on what happened, I realized that I could be like them, or even worse than them, and I understood that if I wanted to begin to talk about the problems that concern us as a society, the best way was to start talking about oneself.

4.- In the story, Miriam’s character is black, but she is accepted by those around her, while other black characters from the lower social classes are despised. Can you talk about this dynamic?

NC: I think that when you’re middle class you’re more accepted by middle class people even if you’re black than if you’re lower class and black. If you’re racially mixed like Miriam, it’s all about “fixing the race”. It’s something that people say to each other from time to time in the form of a joke or in the form of a sinful secret. The darkest member of a couple may hear: “Congratulations! You’re fixing the race” Or if that member is a woman and she’s pregnant, people around her may long for for the baby to come out white like the father. These are very common commentaries that are not necessarily said to hurt others, but they serve as a verbal affirmation of what we already see on a day-to-day basis in the way society is organized and how this social order is perpetuated.





5.- How did you find Dulce Rodríguez, the girl who plays Miriam?

Oriol Estrada: The first thing we did before shooting was to prepare the audition for the young protagonists. We knew that the most important thing was to find the ideal girls to play these roles. We needed two girls from different social classes to be great friends on screen. We knew that due to the racial and social class division in Dominican Republic, this was going to be difficult. We planned to cast the girls long before the shoot started and once we had the girls, we planned to work with them for months, so that they would get to know each other and create bonds between them and between us; that way, once they arrived on set, they would be comfortable and could simply be themselves and enrich the characters with their own personalities.

We saw over 500 girls, in every possible way. We searched through social networks, went to

schools, visited shopping malls.... In the end it turned out that Dulce was one of the first girls we saw and we really knew she was Miriam since the first interview. The longest one to appear was Carolina Rohana, which plays Jennifer, Miriam's best friend; from the moment we met Dulce until we met Carolina, almost 3 months passed by.

Dulce didn't have any experience in cinema or theatre, and in fact she didn't want to be an actress, at least until now. She signed up for the audition because of a bet she made with her sister, who saw through the social networks that we were looking for a girl of the same physique and challenged her to sign up. From the moment we met Dulce, she caught our eye because she looked so much like Miriam, she was a very intelligent, sensitive, very confident and somewhat rebellious girl. Also, she shares similar family conflicts with Miriam's character and what interested us the most was her ability to draw her own conclusions about them.

In that first interview we had with her, she spoke to us with great confidence about the contradictions of her life, and with the script in her hand, she understood better than us what could go through Miriam's head. She even suggested behaviors or reactions for Miriam's role that we hadn't thought of, but seemed totally logical. She always told us: I am Miriam.

6.- How did Miriam and Jennifer, played by Carolina Rohana, finally seem to be best friends in such a natural way?

OE: With Jennifer it was the opposite situation to some extent. We needed a very charming and innocent girl, a little naughty at times, who was not repulsive and made herself loved.

We thought Jennifer's profile would be easier to find than Miriam's and it turned out to be much more complicated. When it came to acting,

many of the girls we saw who looked very much like Jennifer exaggerated their performances and found it hard to understand what we wanted because of the influence of soap operas and artificial cinema they were used to. Carolina doesn't seem to be acting when she acts, she plays a lot, and sometimes it seems as if she doesn't remember what she has to say but suddenly she says it in her own way, with a very unexpected natural style. Once we had them both, Dulce and Carolina, we met once or twice a week for a year, so we got them to get used to each other and at the same time, we got to know them. At the beginning, we only played games and in this way the roles were created unconsciously; later on, we began to improvise with the script; all these exercises were so productive that when we got to the set, there were scenes in the film that were completely improvised and completely out of the girls' imagination.









7.- There are also performances by professional actors in the adult roles. What was it like to work with this mix of non-professional and professional actors?

Natalia Cabral: Initially we wanted the adults characters to be natural actors like the young girls, but we didn't have time to cast natural adult actors, so we tried professional actors from the Dominican Republic's film, theater and television. We casted them on the premise that even if they were professional actors, their personalities should be similar to the characters in the film. That's how we found Miriam's family, Jennifer's family and the other characters. Because the improvisation method proved to be so effective and exciting with the girl, we also used it with the professional actors. We wanted them to understand the intention of the scenes in the script, but we let themselves be carried away by the actions and reactions of the other actors. We were looking for a certain truth that you could identify at the time of shooting, that was more important to us than following the dialogues

of the script word for word. The words had to come from the living people who were the actors and all of them contributed with some detail of their lives. When professional and non-professional actors were together, we gave them a space of freedom to impress and challenge each other.

8.- How do you think the film will be received by the audience?

NC: We believe that to date, "Miriam Lies" is our most emotional and narrative film, so we assume that for a less specialized audience, the film will come out with more strength and interest than perhaps our previous works, which were quite successful at festivals but without much success with audiences. Anyways, guessing what the audience will think and feel is always a mystery, our encounter with them is an adventure full of unexpected reactions; so as always, we hope that the film will not go unnoticed, that the audience will be able to cross the border of fiction with us and that they will feel some satisfaction, some challenge for having crossed the line.

9.- What was the biggest challenge when making the film?

Oriol Estrada: We spent about 8 years trying to get the film up and running and we still didn't have the economic plan fully worked out while shooting. Anyways, during those long years of searching for funding, we had time to enrich the script and strengthen ourselves as filmmakers by gaining experience in filming other projects; but the easiest thing would have been to give up, so we took the difficult road and went on. Another great challenge was to work with a large team of professionals. In our previous films, we used to work with a very small team, only the two of us and a few very trustworthy collaborators, and in "Miriam Lies" we had to open up and share our ideas, concerns and insecurities with other professionals, sometimes more experienced than us, which in fact is never easy. There were also many personal challenges. We had to learn to work and live together through thick and thin. We are a couple and

have made our professional careers together. And each day is a challenge of resistance.

10.- How do you manage to work together in cinema and live as a couple?

OE: I don't think there are formulas for that. It requires mutual effort, passion and empathy, and even if you take into account those elements there is always a certain tension because as humans, we are loaded with contradictory feelings. Sometimes great decisions are made with simplicity and other times seemingly minor conflicts represent a great emotional stress in the relationship. One of the film ideas that we sometimes talk about is the one about filming ourselves making a film. If we make that project a reality one day, I don't know if people who repeatedly ask us how we manage to combine a couple's affective relationship with a work relationship will get an answer, but I'm quite sure they will get a good laugh.



Natalia Cabral and Oriol Estrada during the shooting of **Miriam Lies**. Dominican Republic, 2017



DIRECTOR'S BIO

Natalia Cabral (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic) and Oriol Estrada (Capellades, Catalonia, Spain) are award-winning filmmakers whose work live on the borderlines of fiction and nonfiction. Graduates of the prestigious EICTV Cuban Film School, Natalia and Oriol found Faula Films in 2012 in order to provide a creative platform for the development and co-production of independent filmmaking in the Caribbean.

Their debut documentary feature film “You and Me” premiered at Visions du Réel and won several awards at festivals like Cartagena, Trinidad & Tobago, Havana, Márgenes, Cine Las Américas and Santo Domingo, among others. Their second documentary film “Site of Sites”, supported by DOCTV Latinoamérica, premiered at IDFA

International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, was part of the Neighboring Scenes Showcase of the Film Society of Lincoln Center, was official selection at Biarritz, Cartagena and Lima, and was listed as one of the 35 best Latin American films of 2017 by Cinema Tropical.

“Miriam Lies” is the couple’s first fiction feature, co-produced by the Catalan auteur film production company Mallerich Films Paco Poch. Supported by FONPROCINE, IBERMEDIA and the Tribeca Latin America Fund, “Miriam Lies” was also selected at Ventana Sur’s First Cut platform and Guadalajara Construye. “Miriam Lies” will celebrate its world premiere on July 2018 at the official competition of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.

TECHNICAL INFO

Original Title: Miriam Miente
Internacional Title: Miriam Lies

Dominican Republic, Spain

Language: Spanish

Length: 90 min.

Format: Scope 2.39:1 / DCP / 5.1 / Color

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