



Silver Bear  
73<sup>rd</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Jury Prize

MIDAS FILMES  
PRESENTS

# MAL BAD LIVING VIVER

a film by JOÃO CANIJO



ANABELA MOREIRA

RITA BLANCO

MADALENA ALMEIDA

CLEIA ALMEIDA

VERA BARRETO

NUNO LOPES FILIPA AREOSA LEONOR SILVEIRA RAFAEL MORAIS LIA CARVALHO BEATRIZ BÁTARDA LEONOR VASCONCELOS CAROLINA AMARAL  
DIRECTED BY JOÃO CANIJO DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LEONOR TELES EDITING JOÃO BRAZ TV ASSISTANT DIRECTOR INÉS GARCIA MARQUES SOUND TÍAGO RAPOSINHO SCENARIO JÓHANNE AND MI ELSA FERREIRA ART DIRECTION NÁDIA HENRIQUES COSTUME DESIGNER SILVIA SIOPA  
PRODUCTION MANAGER JOANA CARNEIRO REIS WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF ICA - INSTITUTO DO CINEMA E DO AUDIOVISUAL FUNDO DE APOIO AO TURISMO E CINEMA, RTP - RÁDIO E TELEVISÃO DE PORTUGAL, CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE ESPOSENDE  
CO-PRODUCTION FRANÇOIS D'ARTEMARE / LES FILMS DE L'APRÈS-MIDI PRODUCER PEDRO BORGES PRODUCTION MIDAS FILMES WORLD SALES PORTUGAL FILM  
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## MAL VIVER

 73<sup>rd</sup> Internationale  
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Competition

In a family-run hotel, by the Portuguese northern shore, lives a group of women from different generations of the same family, whose relationships with each other have grown poisoned by bitterness. They try to survive in the declining hotel, as the unexpected arrival of a granddaughter to this oppressive space stirs trouble, reviving latent hatred and piled-up resentments.

127' | 4K | 5.1 | color | Portugal / France 2023



## MAL VIVER JOÃO CANIJO

“The location of the film is fundamental in bringing the project’s intentions to fruition, as it could only happen somewhere from which no escape was possible. A place where the actresses are forced to be alone and with each other, even if they wish to run away. A place that the characters’ life depends on. The choice was a remote hotel by the Portuguese shore, which functions like a prison, since the characters can’t leave.

The film stems from the idea of how mothers determine their daughters’ disgrace, and how they, in turn, will determine their granddaughters’ disgrace. It’s a film about the anxiety of being a mother and how it undermines the ability for unconditional love. Three generations of women who fall victim to their mothers’ anxiety: a grandmother’s anxiety made her unable to be a mother to her daughter who was unable to be a mother to her granddaughter.

The actresses don’t transform, they adapt to the situation and the circumstances of the characters, without ceasing to be the same people. The screenplay was created over two years of discussions and rehearsals with the actresses, in order to get the truth from each of them. “

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

**2023**

**Mal Viver** (Bad Living)

*Berlinale, Competition*

**Viver Mal** (Living Bad)

*Berlinale, Encounters*

**2017**

**Fátima** · *Rotterdam*

**2011**

**Sangue Do Meu Sangue**

(Blood of my Blood)

*San Sebastián FIPRESCI Award; Toronto*

**2007**

**Mal Nascida** (Misbegotten)

*Venice, Orizzonti*

**2003**

**Noite Escura**

(In the Darkness of the Night)

*Cannes Un Certain Regard*

**2000**

**Ganhar A Vida** (Get a Life)

*Cannes Un Certain Regard; Toronto*

**1985**

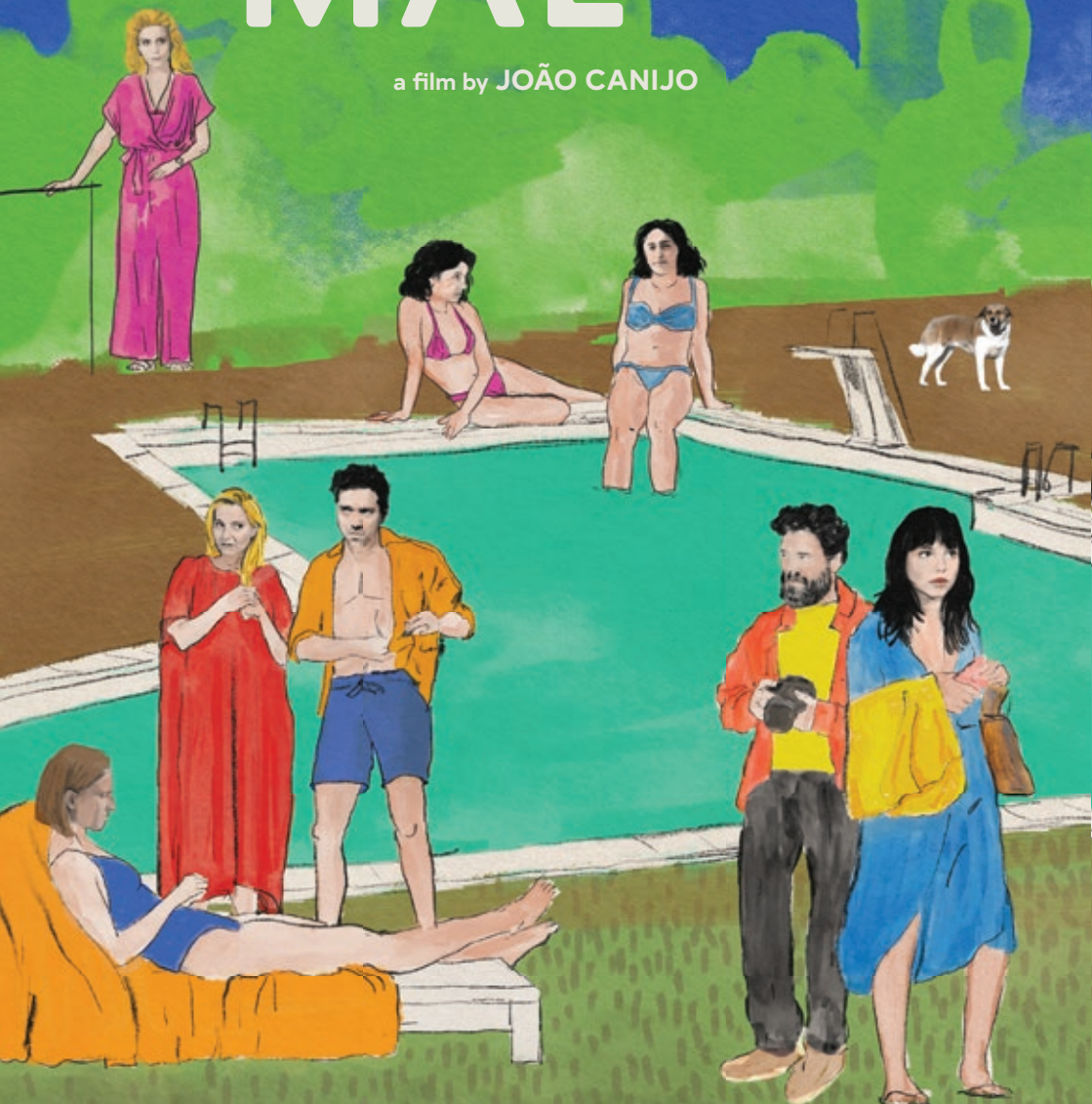
**Três Menos Eu** (Three Less Me)

*Rotterdam, Opening Film; Toronto*



# VIVER MAL LIVING BAD

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## VIVER MAL

 73<sup>e</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Encounters

A hotel by the northern shore of Portugal welcomes its guests over the weekend. A man is torn between being present for his wife and the space that his mother takes up between the two of them. A mother encourages her daughter's marriage to enable her own love affair with her son-in-law. Another mother lives through her daughter, preventing her from making her own decisions. Three families at the end of their cycles of acceptance.

124' | 4K | 5.1 | color | Portugal / France 2023





## VIVER MAL JOÃO CANIJO

“*Viver Mal* is a mirror to *Mal Viver*. In a mirror, the reflected image is inverted and the image in this film shows what could only be imagined in the other: the hotel guests who, in the first film, are mere shadows and fleeting figures, appearing in fragments, are now the protagonists. And the members of the family who run the hotel, the protagonists in the other film, are now shadows and fleeting figures, appearing in fragments, disturbing the narratives of the guests’ stories in this one.

The life and the dramas of the hotel-running family are glimpsed in upsetting fragments, which fuel the viewer’s imagination while adding dramatic dimension to the characters of the guests, which shift from being isolated to living in a world with other people, where they can be observed. *Viver Mal* shows another point of view over the same time and the same space; one point of view showing the dramas that the other only allows fragmented glimpses of.”

### ABOUT STRINDBERG

If anyone ever worked obsessively on egotism, as a cause for living badly with oneself and with others, that someone was August Strindberg. Hence the natural choice of seeking inspiration for the hotel guests’ stories on Strindberg plays which are paradigmatic examples of different forms of egotism. Three plays were selected: *Playing with Fire*, about a husband who can’t commit in his relationship to his wife, but who, when he senses he might lose her, realizes he loves her, after all; *The Pelican*, about an overbearing and selfish mother who goes as far as to encourage her daughter’s marriage so as to enable her own love affair with her daughter’s husband; and *Motherlove*, about another mother who lives through her daughter in such a way that it prevents her child from living a great love. The plays were only used as inspiration and were not directly adapted. Rather, they were used freely as a motif for a totally reformulated rewriting, placed within our time.

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# AN INTERVIEW WITH JOÃO CANIJO

BY DANIEL RIBAS

For the last two decades, João Canijo has been a vital reference in contemporary Portuguese film. In nine features and two documentaries, his films reveal the subliminal forces which act upon and shape the contemporary Portuguese collective imagination. Over this period of time, he has investigated the most sordid and turbulent transformations in Portuguese society and the historic and social contradictions caused by those transformations. Tracing a map of a diverse and marginal country, these films attest to how families are the troubled setting of sociological change, where violence looms as an instrument of power and conflict.

From the industrial town of Sines in *Sapatos Pretos/Black Shoes* – as well as a Portuguese community in France (*Ganhar a Vida/Get a Life*), a rural whorehouse (*Noite Escuro/In the Darkness of the Night*), a north-western village (*Mal Nascido/ Misbegotten*) – to a public housing neighbourhood on the periphery of Lisbon (*Sangue do Meu Sangue/ Blood of My Blood*), these films discuss the periphery as a place where economic and sociological changes coexist with traditions of patriarchal violence. Throughout his work, João Canijo has also been on the search for everyday reality, fine-tuning a method with his actors, so as to provoke a contamination with reality. This method also affirms his place in contemporary film, with a directorial style which explores the performance of the scenes, making it so the camera is an attentive observer of that reality. That is also why these films attempt a confusion between fiction and documentary, which is the authorial mark of his work.

A culmination of his oeuvre, *Mal Viver/Viver Mal/Bad Living/Living Bad* (2023) is a diptych that puts all of these dimensions into play, focusing on a hotel and the pulverization of the unity of space and time, transformed into two films with complementary angles: the story of the family running the hotel (*Mal Viver*) and the stories of the guests who temporarily occupy it (*Viver Mal*). If the first film was built from the director's experience and from his work with its actors, the second one is an adaptation of three plays by August Strindberg: *Playing With Fire*, *The Pelican* and *Motherly Love*.

**In presenting your films, you always submit that they stem from an essential premise. In this new project, what was the starting premise? And how does it relate to the premises in the other films?**

This project stems from one fundamental concept: anxiety. That is, how anxiety can prevent love; and how

the manifestation of that love can prevent one from living. Anxiety that prevents one of the protagonists from having a normal relationship with her daughter: anxiety towards the responsibility of raising her. The anxiety of having to love her daughter keeps her from loving her.

**This premise is also present in your previous films.**

There's an Ingmar Bergman quote that has become very important to me (I first read it when I was twenty and only got it twenty years later): a film has to come from an idea that is present in every scene and in every shot. I only realized it completely in *Blood of My Blood*. This conception of cinema doesn't mean it has to be evident, but it is crucial for there to be an idea that drives the films.

**In this new project there is also a driving force: the playwright August Strindberg, and his successor in film, Ingmar Bergman.**

Over the last few years, I've realized Bergman is becoming more and more important to me. Not so much in the formal aspects, but more so in the way that he works on the subject matter. And, like everyone knows, Strindberg was Bergman's spiritual master. Because anxiety has everything to do with Bergman, and, because of his relationship to Strindberg, I went and read all of Strindberg and got a lot of ideas out of it. The truth is that it comforted me. And then, when the guests appeared (the second part of the project), at a later stage, I thought it would make perfect sense to work on loose adaptations from Strindberg.

**But then there's the next part, which is very important in your process, which is working on the text with the actors.**

Or creating the text with the actors, in fact. This film comprises two very different work processes. In the case of *Bad Living*, there's a bigger manipulation, because I already knew where I wanted the actresses to get to, but I wanted them to get there in their own way. I already had many structured ideas; even the key scenes and the key dialogues existed already. However, there was also a therapeutic research: I went through a process to remember things I had forgotten, or that I was blocking out, from my personal life. That work was very important for the structure of the script. I went to therapy for over a year (I didn't mislead the therapist: she knew what it was for). And a lot came from there and the script was very organised. So, there was some degree of manipulation to get to the subject of anxiety. In *Living Bad*, the process was completely different: it came out of Strindberg's plays. So, we went about deconstructing the plays to adapt them to the actresses I was working with. I didn't write

any dialogue. It all came out of the rehearsals. Maybe some lines of dialogue in *Bad Living* weren't written: they are reminiscences.

**This process implies that your work with the actors begins long before the shooting. And that's a fundamental part of your method.**

It's not just my method, it's also master John Cassavetes' and Mike Leigh's, who do the same. Shakespeare did the same thing, and Strindberg, in the preface to *Miss Julie*, says the same. It is from this work that the screenplay is born. These are not really rehearsals: they are discussions with the actors, at length, all of which are recorded. The ideas that make up the scenes come from there. In the case of *Living Bad*, the scenes already existed, more or less, because they are in the plays; in *Bad Living*, they also existed in my head, to a great extent, and the screenplay was crafted out in the rehearsals. After these discussions there is a long break, in which a screenplay is made out of all which was generously given in the rehearsals. And then there is an improvisation over the written scenes. That's where the final dialogues come from. In the shooting, there is no improvisation.

**You have said that you work with women because you think they are much better than men.**

They are much more generous, they have a much bigger capacity for laying themselves bare, for being there.

**Why did you choose to make a film in a hotel?**

The choice of the hotel was very simple and practical. After the hellish experience of making *Fátima*, I wanted a single location. And then I thought – maybe a bit under the influence of Strindberg, even though none of his plays are set in a hotel – that it might be interesting to use a declining hotel, which was no longer viable (it's not the case in reality, but that's how it appears). And, so, the hotel idea appeared very early on.

**Right, it stems from anxiety, but it also stems from something else, which you've talked about before, and that is still present, albeit more faded, in *Bad Living*: the life of families in Portuguese culture is still heavily influenced by the constrictive ideology that comes from having endured a very long dictatorial regime.**

It is a defining idea in this project: all families are dysfunctional. And families are extremely violent within themselves. The gist of it is: the grandmother's anxiety ruined her daughter's life; the daughter's anxiety will ruin her granddaughter's life. And this is passed on directly from grandmothers to granddaughters and great-granddaughters. And it's claustrophobic because they can't get out of themselves.

**Ever since *Blood of My Blood*, your kind of cinema, which was already leaning that way, is about observing the real. Long shots, smooth camera movements. There's a desire for the scene to come alive on its own, and on the actors' performance.**

The idea, in the first place, is to avoid illustration. I mean, avoiding the imposition of a point of view, as that is a paradox, because even if you try to impose one, the performance is always going to be different. That is the research that I do, continually. – Then I finally found someone [Leonor Teles, the director of photography in these two films], much younger than I am, but who speaks the same language. And we have the same spiritual masters, so it was truly an artistic collaboration. It's formal research, which is unfinished, and it starts mainly with the formal aspect of things. – There's a formal aspect which has to do with Bergman and the reading I've been doing lately, which is about making films about things which are profoundly meaningful to me, which make profound sense and are profoundly important to me. Like Bergman did. So my situations are, I won't say autobiographical, but they are vital to me. And that has been my rediscovery of Bergman, over the last five years.

**What is your relationship with Portuguese film and with film at large? We know there are authors you like, such as Bergman. You worked as an assistant for Manoel de Oliveira. In *Mal Viver*, a scene from a João César Monteiro film appears.**

César is not an idol of mine. I was César's friend. And I found him immensely funny. He had a truly extraordinary sense of humour and we got along very well. It's not so much an homage as it is, 'look, César is alive'. And it's my favourite film of his [A *Comédia de Deus – God's Comedy*]. No one teaches anybody anything, but I memorized some of the things Mr. Oliveira said. First, when you're doing whatever it is in art, you've got to be honest with yourself. And Mr. Oliveira was also extremely loyal to me. And I to him. But I don't have a master, nor do I have any references in Portuguese film. My masters, in the meantime, have changed a bit – because now I'm looking for my own methods. But it's mostly Cassavetes and his Chinese disciples. When I first discovered Cassavetes, in the early 1990's, it was a revelation, especially seeing the audition scene in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. The girl is doing the audition and we don't see her face, nor Ben Gazzara's face. We see Gazzara's back and the girl's legs. And it's all there. It's the opposite of illustration. Without seeing anything, you see everything. And the same with the Chinese filmmakers: especially Hou Hsiao-hsien and Wong Kar-wai.