

SUJO

PRESSKIT





SUJO

A FILM BY

ASTRID RONDERO AND FERNANDA VALADEZ

2024 Mexico, USA, France 4K 1.85:1 5.1 125 mn

EnAguas Cine Production presents



LOGLINE

When a cartel gunman is killed, he leaves behind Sujo, his beloved 4-year-old son. the shadow of violence surrounds Sujo during each stage of his life in the isolated Mexican countryside. As he grows into a man, Sujo finds that fulfilling his father's destiny may be inescapable.

SYNOPSIS

After a cartel gunman from a small Mexican town is murdered, Sujo, his beloved four-year-old son, is left an orphan and in danger. Sujo narrowly escapes death with the help of his aunt who raises him in the isolated countryside amidst hardship, poverty, and the constant peril associated with his identity. When he enters his teens a rebelliousness awakens in him, and like a rite of passage, he joins the local cartel. As a young man, Sujo attempts to make his life anew, away from the violence of his hometown. however, when his father's legacy catches up with him, he will come face-to-face with what seems to be his destiny.





DIRECTORS' NOTE

We are Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez and we are writers, directors, and producers from Mexico. Sujo is our second feature as directors and our third creative collaboration on a feature film. We believe the strength of our films comes from us being part of a minority and that we are committed to telling the stories of our time. And what a time it is in Mexico. Thousands of kids have become orphans due to the violence of the drug cartels. Some of them are children of the victims, "the collateral damage" of the drug war. But others are the sons and daughters of the people who actively participated as perpetrators. This is a story about these "others." We wondered - what is the inheritance of these kids, what awaits them? and then came the question that shaped this story - what would it take for a young man to challenge what appears to be his destiny?

Sujo became the tale of two origins: that of a name and that of a man. In the tale of a cartel gunman naming his son after a horse, we aim to talk about transcendence, about hidden inheritances, about the dreams we fulfill without us knowing: dreams in the minds of our mothers and fathers, and their mothers and fathers before them. A flow of human experience that connects us all and is not oblivious to the hopes of previous generations.

Formally, Sujo is a coming-of-age story told through the many characters that meant something in Sujo's life: the people who loved him, taught him, and left behind as he grew up. It is an episodic film. And that's one of the aspects that excited us the most as directors: our goal in this film was to explore narratively, formally, and visually. Sujo has a visual narrative that changes as the episodes change as if every secondary character were a season in Sujo's life. We wanted each episode to have its atmosphere. And as we were exploring texture, light, and mood, we decided to shoot each episode with a different set of lenses that were key in that exploration.

The film has different levels of reality. Not in a flashy or stylized way, because we were looking for something more ancient and primal. Like beliefs and imagery that come from the first women and men, elements as magical as they are mysterious and real, like the fire, like a starry night, like death. So we want the episodes to be like the faces of a prism, each one adding a piece and a layer of a more complex object. In the end, the whole film is a portrait of this young man, Sujo. A portrait but also a promise of the man he deserves to be.



A young man in a dark hoodie is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the right. He is standing in a dimly lit street at night, with blurred lights and buildings in the background. The overall mood is contemplative and somber.

THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE FILM

When we were working on our previous film *Identifying Features*, we came across a particular book of chronicles called *Levantones* (the taken) written by the great Mexican journalist Javier Valdez, himself later a victim of violence. It wasn't a special story that caught our attention but more an atmosphere that he managed to share with deep humanity and utmost respect: real accounts of both victims and perpetrators, women, men and children, all caught for one reason or the other in the drug cartel violence that runs rampant in Mexico.

Deep within, there is also the inspiration of *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy, which is one of Astrid's most beloved books. The stories of orphans in turbulent times are a way to see ourselves finding understanding under the most hopeful light. The name Sujo comes from a Mongolian legend that Fernanda read as a child, a story of friendship between a boy and a horse. So as is usual with us, the project was born of an encounter of ideas, memories, and things we love.

All of it led us to *Sujo*, a story of an orphan growing up in a Mexico stricken by drug violence, poverty, and high hopes, a tale of a young man fighting against repetition and finding his real self.

ASTRID RONDERO AND FERNANDA VALADEZ



CO-DIRECTORS ASTRID RONDERO AND FERNANDA VALADEZ

Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez are Mexican writer-directors and producers. Through their collaboration for over 15 years, they have produced two feature lengths, *THE DARKEST DAYS OF US* (2017) and *IDENTIFYING FEATURES* (2020) as well as three short films, *OF THIS WORLD* (2010), *IN STILL WATERS* (2011) and *400 BAGS* (2014).

IDENTIFYING FEATURES received awards in Sundance, San Sebastian, Zurich, Thessaloniki and a Gotham Award for Best International Film. *SUJO* is their third feature film together.





CAST



JUAN JESÚS VARELA (SUJO)

Juan Jesus' first approach to acting was in 2018 when he was casting for a film in Guanajuato. During the process, Juan was able to develop his acting skills by taking a workshop with the actress Lizeth Rondero. He was finally selected for one of the main roles in the film entitled IDENTIFYING FEATURES, directed by Fernanda Valadez. His role in this film gave Juan his first nomination at the Mexican Academy as a male revelation. Juan has participated in two music videos for the rapper Santa Fe Klan and recently worked with Amat Escalante in his latest film. SUJO (Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez) is his first leading role in a film.



YADIRA PÉREZ (NEMESIA)

Yadira Perez Esteban was born in Mexico City. She studied at the National School of Theatrical Arts of INBAL. She has an extensive career on the stage in Mexico. She has collaborated with directors like Jimena Montemayor in the film MUJERES DEL ALBA and alongside Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez in their new feature film SUJO.



SANDRA LORENZANO (SUSAN)

Sandra Lorenzano is a novelist, poet, and « ARGEN-MEX» essayist (born in Argentina and exiled to Mexico in 1976). A researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, she is currently the President of the Consultative Assembly of the National Council to Prevent Discrimination. She is a regular contributor to various media in Mexico and Latin America. She has a wide and recognized literary works that stand out titles such as the novels SAUDADES and LA ESTIRPE DEL SILENCIO, and the poetry book ABISMOS, QUISE DECIR (Abysses, I wanted to say). Sandra recently participated as an actress in the film SUJO directed by Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez.

CREW

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY XIMENA AMANN

Ximena Amann is a cinematographer based in Mexico City. She has worked in feature films and series for multiple platforms like LA CABEZA by Joaquín Murrieta for Amazon Prime and EL CHAPO for Netflix. She recently finished COMO AGUA PARA CHOCOLATE for HBO MAX. She directed the photography of Astrid Rondero's first film, THE DARKEST DAYS OF US.

EDITOR SUSAN KORDA

Susan Korda grew up in NY City and Vienna, Austria where she attended Med school before returning to NY to study filmmaking at CCNY.

With David Leitner, she directed and produced the award-winning documentary VIENNA IS DIFFERENT and from her 2-year Fullbright Fellowship in Berlin, she produced the award-winning personal documentary ONE OF US.

Her narrative short SALOMEA'S NOSE received the best film and directing awards.

She shared the Mexican Ariel in Editing IDENTIFYING FEATURES by Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez, Al Reinert's Oscar-nominated and Sundance-crowned documentary FOR ALL MANKIND and Sandi Du Bowski's Teddy Award winning TREMBLING BEFORE G-d. As producer, Korda worked on Emily & Sarah Kunstler's William Kunstler: DISTURBING THE UNIVERSE as well as WHO WE ARE: A CHRONICLE OF RACISM IN AMERICA in collaboration with Jeffrey Robinson. As story consultant Korda worked on Alan Berliner's THE SWEETEST SOUND and FIRST COUSIN ONCE REMOVED.

Susan Korda currently teaches at Columbia University and is a guest Mentor at Berlinale Talents.

CO-PRODUCER JEWEL ROSS (US)

Jewel Ross produced in the last two years BRUISER directed by Miles Warren (Toronto 2022) as well HOW I LEARNED TO FLY by Simon Steuri and is now in post-production with two new movies.

Jewel Ross is most known as the long-time manager of international auteur filmmakers like Barry Jenkins (US), Robin Campillo (France), Gabriel Mascaro (Brazil), Bora Kim (South Korea), Carmen Jaquier (Switzerland) and others.

CO-PRODUCER ALPHA VIOLET (FRANCE)

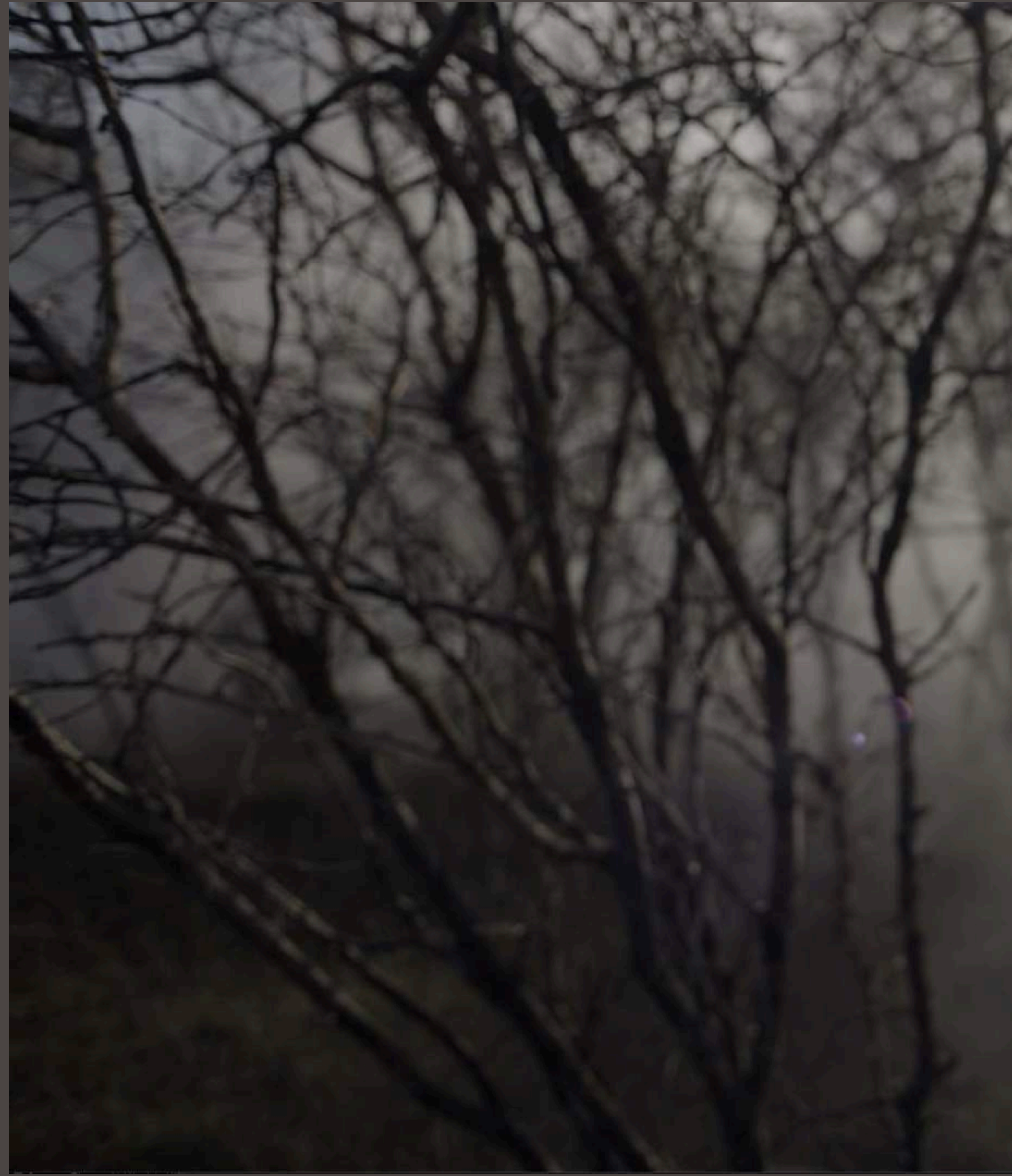
Associated together with the Sales Company ALPHA VIOLET, the team has coproduced UTAMA directed by Alejandro Loayza Grisi (Sundance 2022) and TÓTEM by Lila Avilés (Berlinale 2023, short-list Best International Feature Film Mexico -96th Academy Awards®).

CAST

SUJO Juan Jesús Varela
NEMESIA Yadira Perez Esteban
SUSAN Sandra Lorenzano
JAI Alexis Jassiel Varela
JEREMY Jairo Hernández Ramírez
SUJO (child) Kevin Uriel Aguilar Luna
ROSALIA Karla Garrido

CREW

SCRIPT, DIRECTION Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez
PRODUCERS Astrid Rondero, Fernanda Valadez, Diana Arcega
CO-PRODUCERS Jewel Ross, Virginie Devesa, Jean-Baptiste Bailly-Maitre
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Gus Corwin
CINEMATOGRAPHER Ximena Amann
EDITORS Astrid Rondero, Fernanda Valadez, Susan Korda
PRODUCTION DESIGN Belén Estrada
SOUND DESIGN Omar Juárez Espino
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK Astrid Rondero





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