QUINZAINE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2026

DEATH HAS NO MASTER

A film by Jorge Thielen Armand

Image: 1.88 I Sound: 5.1 I 106' I Venezuela, Canada, Italy, Luxembourg

International sales
Lucky Number
sales@luckynumber.fr

International PR
Wolf Consultants
hello@wolf-con.com
+49 178 547 0179

Please download press materials from:
http://wolf-con.com/download

Logline

When the heiress to a colonial cacao plantation in Venezuela comes from abroad to claim her inheritance, she is forced to confront the land's current occupants as well as its dark, violent legacy.

Synopsis

Caro travels to Venezuela to sell her late father's cacao plantation, only to find the family mansion occupied by its former staff, who are determined to remain at all costs. As Caro takes justice into her own hands to claim the inheritance she believes is hers, she sets off a struggle that unearths the violence buried in the land and its memory.

In conversation with Jorge Thielen Armand

Your work spans fiction and hybrid forms incorporating documentary or autobiographical aspects. What were the origins of and inspirations for Death Has No Master? What made you want to turn more firmly towards fiction and a genre-oriented framing for this film?

I have a recurring dream in which I find myself in an abandoned building. In the dream I have been there for too long, I am searching for something, perhaps someplace to hide or an exit. It's a dark labyrinth where I feel disoriented, tired, filthy. In the rooms sometimes I find familiar faces, but also strangers, hanging around and taking heavy drugs. Or sometimes simply a decaying emptiness. When I wake I am reminded of home, of what I left behind in Venezuela 21 years ago. I worry I will find nothing and nobody of mine if my return comes too late. It is the nightmare of going back and finding out that your old self has rotted from the inside out. The weight of being a stranger in your old refuge. This is the genesis of *Death Has No Master*.

This is a film about returning home to realize you are a foreigner in your own land, and thus a permanent foreigner everywhere. A film for those who left somewhere and find sorrow upon their return. The process hasn't been linear or mainly intellectual, but rather physiological. I allowed my process to be invaded by what reality brings in front of my eyes, by what I dream at night, and by literature. I considered at the beginning adapting a short story written by my grandmother, Matilde Daviu, but instead I found myself ruminating on her story's title *La Muerte No Tiene Dueño* (*Death Has No Master*) and giving it a new meaning for my film.

What came to me is a story where we follow a foreigner whose history is wrapped up in a mansion in the middle of the jungle. She goes to this place of bad memories intending to get rid of it, by selling it, but she instead becomes possessed by its ghosts, her ghosts, its entrapping beauty, and the intrinsic violence embedded in the land and its history. As I see it, she never really meant to sell this place. The whole thing is an excuse to be immersed in something that can't be explained, only felt. A vice. A vice in which we seek love, pleasure, memory, all while it hurts—in a satisfying, necessary way.

Where are we in the film, and what is the history that has marked this place? Why did you want to set a film here?

Death Has No Master takes place in contemporary Venezuela, a country that has undergone a painful transformation in the last thirty years that has amplified social division and resentment. Given the censorship we face as Venezuelans, making

new films in our contemporary context is about forging our memory and, hopefully, a mythology. It's a country where nothing is what it seems. Where trust is difficult, and one is always walking on quicksand. Such uncertainty can induce fear to the point where one may start to hallucinate. It's a place where there can be no sense of time or reality. Its history, among many things, has been characterized by indomitableness, from even before the Spanish arrived—this was the land of the fierce Caribe Natives, so feared by the Spanish that they were fought without mercy for centuries—until their numbers were decimated and their power broken. Then it became a place of pirates, of El Dorado, of fortune seekers, gamblers, storytellers, illusionists, and of one crazy drug we love called oil. The indomitable and hedonistic spirit of Venezuela lies in that unique history. Its paradoxes produce stories and images I find surreal, poetic, absurd, and humorous. I set my film in Venezuela because it's the place where a story like this can actually be genuine. When I film in Venezuela I feel catharsis.

Why did you decide to use more abstract scenes to convey this ever-present darkness. How do they function as a kind of living spectre, a ghost of history and the past?

The living spectre of the past haunts all of us. It's the weight of history and of our own life. The non-realistic elements are at the heart of the film. In them resides the reasons behind its character, her pain, fear… they are a key to the film. Dreams contain our purest desires, but are we responsible for them? Do we control them? Do they influence what we do in real life? Can they suddenly find themselves in our flesh and possess us?

What made you want to shape this story around a woman, a daughter, and why was it important that she was raised abroad? How did you decide to cast Asia Argento and what did she bring to the character and the filmmaking process?

Caro is inspired by several women in my life that I admire. Writing a female character like this was a challenge, but I knew exploring systemic violence with a female protagonist would make for a more complex film. I was interested to represent a middle aged female character we don't see much in cinema—Caro doesn't work or have a job, she doesn't have family, she's not a wife or a mother. She's an outcast. The decision to cast Asia Argento came suddenly to me. I saw her photo and something in my gut told me she was going to be Caro. I was interested in her history, and I knew that with all the pain she's been through, she would bring a life to my character that can't be written. I generally approach casting like this, I look at what the person's eyes provoke in me and then I learn who they are. If I think those things will change the script for the better, I embrace it. Asia evokes a darkness born from lived hardship, particularly in relation to her father—echoing the film's protagonist. Caro's character embodies what we suffer from in the West: isolation, fear, mistrust, and the pressure to fit into the capitalist imperative that every human being must be productive. I knew one of the challenges would be the fact that Asia didn't speak Spanish, but she took on that challenge and learned Spanish for the role. She joined me in Venezuela for

an entire month before the shoot, and we worked intensely on rehearsals with the non-professional actors. We visited locations together, and rehearsed in the actual spaces. She was a fierce collaborator, who took on a lot of risks to make this film in Venezuela with me.

The supporting cast also bring distinctive tones and personalities, especially Sonia played by Dogreika Tovar and Roque played by Jorge Thielen Hedderich. Did you still work with many non-professionals for this film?

Most of the cast were non-professional actors. For the role of Sonia I wanted a strong, clever, and sensuous woman—one you could imagine would put up a good fight against Asia—we looked at professional actors first, but I wasn't satisfied with the limited options in Caracas. But then the location scout took us to a coastal village called Patanemo. When you enter this place, you know it's special. Your car snakes down a vertiginous road into a vista of mountains brooding out from the sea and lagoons covered in bright red birds. The place is not only beautiful, but its people are incredibly gifted. The people of Patanemo are endowed with talent in music, speech, dance, resilience, and a spicy humour. Dogreika is from Patanemo, as are many others who appear in our film. Patanemo became the base for our casting, and also the location for the town in our film.

This was her first time ever on camera, but she's a natural and just understood cinema faster than anyone I've ever worked with. Together with my casting director/acting coach, Tatiana Mabo, we worked closely with Dogreika and all the non-professional actors to get ready for the film. We employed a series of concentration exercises, and rehearsed directly on location using the scenes.

Jorge Thielen Hedderich is my father. He was the protagonist of my film La Fortaleza. And I think he's the best actor in Venezuela, that's the main reason why I'm working for him for the third time. But also he has lived intense situations like the one in our film and works with cacao in his real life, so he knows the world of this film very well. Working with him this time was easier than ever. Not only do we understand each other better after three films together, but also he's proudly sober since we premiered La Fortaleza six years ago.

We also see the multi-racial make-up of Venezuela in the film. What are some of the underlying dynamics and subtle nuances that inflect the story?

Venezuela's racial make-up is highly diverse. The country had a history of mestizaje dating back to colonial times, and received several waves of immigration from around the world in the last century. 500 years ago, when the first colonizers settled in Venezuela, they imposed a caste system in which the Spanish were at the top, followed by the criollos, mestizos, and so forth—basically a gradient of skin color and ties to Europe. This system was legally dismantled starting with the independence movement and concluded in 1854 with the final abolition of slavery. This caste system however remained in the collective consciousness of the nation. For me the question of who owns land doesn't have an answer. It's no coincidence the racial representation inside the house is as diverse as it can be.

These characters display some of these inherited behaviours that were passed down with the caste system, but they also embody contradictions that might make some Western viewers question their own assumptions.

As in *La Soledad*, the house is very present and exists almost as a character in the film. Can you tell us about the specific 'casting' process for the house here? How did you want to shoot it and use it to create atmosphere in the film?

The location scout began in 2021, four years before our shoot in 2025. I do this early on so I can bring life to my scripts. When we arrived to the house it was painted in bright yellow, and nothing was inside—no lamps, no toilets, no cables, no windows, no doors, not even the staircase—everything had been looted, it was just the skeleton of the house. Choosing this location represented a big leap of faith for everyone involved in making the film. Our budget and time were simply not enough. But this mansion from the 1800's in the middle of a lush jungle was too good to pass up. Our character needed something worth risking your life for, and this was the most magnificent location I came across in the whole of Venezuela and Colombia. It was our own *Fitzcarraldo*. By embracing this challenge, an energy of resilience and courage was ignited in our whole team.

I always imagined I would see this house moving on its own, so we employed zooms partly stemming from this idea. Sound, however, is one of the most distinct qualities this place has in my film. I see every film as an opportunity to excavate my personal history, and this time I was able to find a set of magnetic tapes my great-uncle recorded in the late 60's. These strange sounds can mean different things to different people, and that's what's so interesting about them.

We made the patio of the house a central location because it resembles a theatre. This is where the spectacle happens. The setting of the tragedy.

As for the plantation around the house, Cacao is a Venezuelan symbol. It was also a main commodity of the Spanish empire. Cacao is associated with passion, sensuality, and it's also a fruit that cross-pollinates across its different species. One fruit can contain a variety of genetically different beans inside. I find these notions poetic.

What about the way violence is used or portrayed in the film? It is always present, yet there's also a certain restraint. How did you want to make use of genre conventions without firmly falling into them?

Violence is ever-present in the film, assumed as a normality, as endemic. But progressively, the film begins to display it in a more outward and graphic way. The restraint comes in the waiting. By focusing closeups on characters grabbing or manipulating weapons—the whip, the knife—we wanted to single out these acts and portray violence as a character, a spectre that looms over the film and over Venezuela as a whole. It's not black and white; it can often feel justified.

But one thing is certain: it always brings consequences, deep wounds that are very difficult to heal. Once the film gets physically violent and life-threatening, we made decisions to personify violence. For instance, it was important that Roque's blood would spill on Asia's face—a direct, graphic representation of the result of her actions, of her guilt. The whip placed beside the family portraits? Everything is loaded with intergenerational history. Through all of this, we are building toward catharsis. The kind that hurts first, then releases.

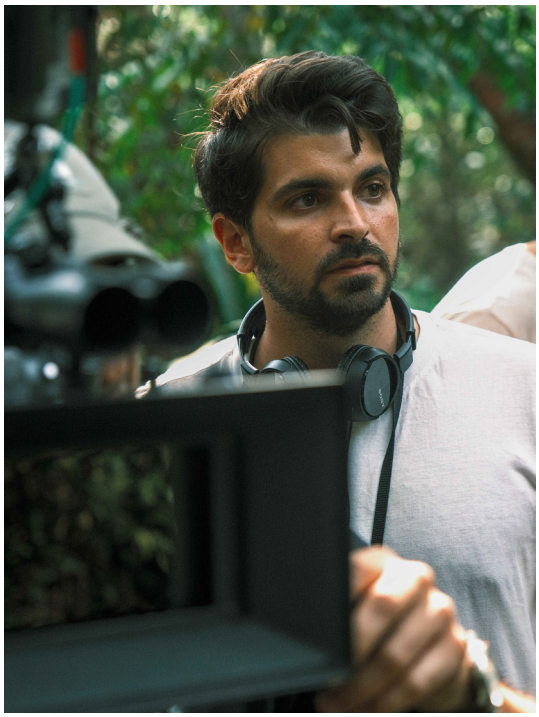
How do you think the film tackles the notions of justice and the law? Who is in the right, if anyone? Can there be a conflict between legal, moral or historical legitimacy?

The film brings us into a world where the law is relative, and subjective. Corruption abounds, and the only reliable law is that of the jungle. The survival of the fittest. Might makes right. Law mutates depending on the situation. It's interpreted on the spot. In the film, justice is delivered in the form of violence and revenge, a matter of honour, or a means to a solution—take for instance the story the taxi driver tells Caro. "Thank god they killed all the criminals." There is a lot of irony in that, but also shows the resilience of Venezuelans to cope with the spectre of violence that runs through daily life. Or the hotel clerk, who spent four years chasing a man trying to kill him, but found him dead by his own hand instead. We are engaged in a vicious circle of violence. And of course there is a conflict between legal, moral, and historical legitimacy — these three notions in conflict could very well represent Caro (legal), Sonia (moral), and Yoni (historical legitimacy) — but these are just notions we've conceived as a society. Land isn't owned, it's controlled by the use of force. It is occupied, until it's not. And force can be the law, too. Isn't law inherently the threat of violence?

The moment when the story takes place is undefined, almost out of time, but the film seems to resonate with what's happening in contemporary Venezuela.

I think *Death Has No Master* speaks to the collective darkness Venezuelans feel: the lack of agency over our future, the betrayal by domestic and international systems, and the impulse to resort to corruption and violence in the absence of rules—which ultimately brings tragedy. I am drawn to property disputes because these conflicts mirror the murderous quality of classism, and our fractured society shaped by colonial history and systemic collapse. But this darkness isn't limited to Venezuela; it is symptomatic far beyond its borders. Caro is driven mainly by money, she's unable to establish healthy relationships with anyone or anything, and that reflects a contemporary condition of nihilism, our drive toward self-destruction when the only rule left is power.

Biography
Jorge Thielen Armand



Jorge Thielen Armand (Caracas, 1990) is a writer, director, and producer. He studied communication and cinema in Montreal. He is a founding partner of the Venezuelan-Canadian production company LA FAENA.

His films have been presented in both art venues and film festivals such as the Venice Biennale, Sundance, IFF Rotterdam, Busan IFF, London Institute of Contemporary Arts, New York Museum of the Moving Image, the Istanbul Biennial, Visions du Réel, BAFICI, Cartagena IFF, Cairo IFF, Filmfest München, Cineteca Matadero Madrid, La Casa Encendida Madrid, Goa IFF, Havana IFF, the American Museum of Natural History, Texas Bullock Museum, Centro de Arte Los Galpones in Caracas, among others.

His work has been acquired by ARTE La Lucarne, MUBI, HBO Europe, Filmin, Kinoscope, AppleTV, Amazon, and other platforms. His films have had cinema releases in the UK, Venezuela, and Colombia.

Jorge has been granted several fellowships such as the Guggenheim Fellowship, The Rockefeller Foundation – Bellagio Center, Résidence Chalet Mauriac, Südkulturfunds 100 Artists Prize, Cine Qua Non Lab, and the Venice Biennale College. He is an alumnus of ScriptLab - Torino Film Lab, TIFF Studio, Berlinale Script Station, and BAFICI Buenos Aires Lab.

His first film, *La Soledad* (2016), was presented at the 73rd Venice Film Festival. His second feature *La Fortaleza* (2020) was presented in Competition at the 49th International Film Festival of Rotterdam. In 2025 Sundance Film Festival presented his short film *Pasta Negra*. *Death Has No Master*, starring Asia Argento, is his third feature film, presented at the 58th edition of Quinzaine des Cinéastes in Cannes Film Festival.

Filmography

As writer, director, producer

Pasta Negra (2025) - short
La Fortaleza (2020)
La Soledad (2016)
Flor de la Mar (2015) - short

Biography & filmography
Asia Argento

Asia Argento is an Italian actress, director, and screenwriter, among the most recognizable and independent voices in contemporary cinema. She has built an international career working across Italy, France, and the United States, standing out for her radical and highly personal artistic choices. As an actress, she has appeared in works directed, among others, by Sofia Coppola, Olivier Assayas, Abel Ferrara, Bertrand Bonello, and George A. Romero. As a director, she has created films presented at major international festivals. Over the course of her career, she has received numerous accolades, including two David di Donatello awards for Best Leading Actress for *Perdiamoci di vista* (1994) and *Compagna di viaggio* (1997), as well as a Nastro d'Argento for *Incompresa* (2014), the latter directed by herself. Her artistic research combines visceral sensitivity, creative freedom, and a bold, innovative vision.

Actress

Stronger than the Devil (2025) — dir. Graham Guit
The Book of Joy (2024) — dir. Camille Lugan
Queens of Drama (2024) — dir. Alexis Langlois
La Storia (2024, TV Series) — dir. Francesca Archibugi
Padre Pio (2022) — dir.Abel Ferrara
Dark Glasses (2022) — dir. Dario Argento
Without Sun (2021) — dir. Banu Akseki
Do Not Disturb (2012) — dir. Yvan Attal
Dracula 3D (2012) — dir. Dario Argento
Drifters (2011) — dir. Matteo Rovere
Islands (2011) — dir. Stefano Chiantini
The Last Mistress (2007) — dir. Catherine Breillat
Go Go Tales (2007) — dir. Abel Ferrara
Boarding Gate (2007) — dir. Olivier Assayas
Mother of Tears (2007) — dir. Dario Argento
On War (2008) — dir. Bertrand Bonello
Transylvania (2006) — dir. Tony Gatlif
Marie Antoinette (2006) — dir. Sofia Coppola
Land of the dead (2005) — dir. George A. Romero
Last Days (2005) — dir. Gus Van Sant
Cindy: The Doll Is Mine (2005) — dir. Bertrand Bonello
The heart is deceitful above all things (2004) — dir. Asia Argento
xXx (2002) — dir. Rob Cohen
Scarlet Diva (2000) — dir. Asia Argento
New Rose Hotel (1998) — dir. Abel Ferrara
Traveling Companion (1996) — dir. Peter Del Monte
The Stendhal Syndrome (1996) — dir. Dario Argento
Let's not keep in touch (1994) — dir. Carlo Verdone
Queen Margot (1994) — dir. Patrice Chéreau
Close Friends (1992) — dir. Michele Placido
Red Wood Pigeon (1989) — dir. Nanni Moretti
Zoo (1988) — dir. Cristina Comencini
Sogni e bisogni (1985, TV Series) — dir. Sergio Citti

Director

Incompresa (2014), 67th Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard selection
The heart is deceitful above all things (2004), 57th Quinzaine des Réalisateurs, Cannes
Scarlet Diva (2000)

Cast

Caro	Asia Argento
Sonia	Dogreika Tovar
Maiko	Yermain Sequera
Roque	Jorge Thielen Hedderich
Yoni	Arturo Rodríguez
Policewoman	Jericó Montilla
The tenant	José «Chindito» Aponte
Man at the hotel	Rafael Gil
Hotel singers	Juan Francisco Borges
	Teresa Bracho
Hotel guests	Ana Helena Anglade Armand
	Gumercindo Aponte
	Luis Puche
Violent men	Abilio Torres
	Armando Monteverde
Wounded soldier	David “el gringo” Tiburcio
Kidnapper	Roberto “el loro” Conde
Young Caro	Nesdeymar Escobar
Police officers on the road	José Dolores López
	Gleubis “Toty” Sanchez
	Humberto Colina
	Edinson Figueroa
Driver	Morris Merentes

Credits

Director	Jorge Thielen Armand
Screenplay	Jorge Thielen Armand
Director of Photography	Luis Armando Arteaga
Sound	Sylvain Bellemare
Production Design	Matías Tikas
Editing	Felipe Guerrero
Music	Vittorio Giampietro
Producers	Stefano Centini
	Jorge Thielen Armand
	Arantza Maldonado
Executive Producers	D.D. Wigley
	Yuki Arai
	Mo Scarpelli
Co-Producers	Rodrigo Michelangeli
	Alexandra Hoesdorff
	Désirée Nosbusch
	Joe Torres
Associate Producers	Andres Figueredo
	Justin Ambrosino
With support of	Telefilm Canada
	SODEC
	Film Fund Luxembourg
	DGCA -Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivo MIC
	Guggenheim Foundation
	Canada Council for the Arts
In association with	The Godmother
	Y.K. Well Enterprise
	Lucky Number
	Outpost MTL
	Forerunner Films
	Cinemateriales
Production companies	La Faena
	Volos Films Italia
	Faits Divers Media
In co-production with	Tres
	Deal Productions
International sales	Lucky Number