

# HEARTLESS

a film by NARA NORMANDE & TIÃO

PRESS KIT





CINEMASCÓPIO, LES VALSEURS and NEFERTITI FILM  
present



# HEARTLESS

a film by  
**NARA NORMANDE & TIÃO**

BRAZIL, FRANCE, ITALY  
FICTION / PORTUGUESE / 2023 / 93'  
FORMAT: 2.39:1/ SOUND 5.1

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# Synopsis

Summer 1996, north-east coast of Brazil. Tamara is enjoying her last weeks at the fishing village she lives in before departing to Brasilia for her studies. One day, she hears about a teenager nicknamed Heartless after a scar she has on her chest. Over the course of the summer, Tamara feels a growing attraction to this mysterious girl.

# Interview

## with NARA NORMANDE & TIÃO

***Heartless is a long version of the short film of the same name that you directed in 2014 based on Nara's childhood memories. Could you elaborate a little bit on how the project came to life?***

**Tião:** There is indeed this connection with the short film, but I don't know if I would call it a long version of the short film because there are many different things in the feature. In the short, there are the memories that Nara brought to the film, and then when we made the short, we met a lot of nice people like Eduarda Samara who plays the protagonist Heartless. So with this experience, we started thinking about the feature, and we realised that we had many more things to explore than what we had planned. The main character of *Heartless* grew a lot later. There's a big difference between what we wrote about the character and what she became after we got to know her in person. She wasn't an actress before the short, but she became a very talented one. She did several projects, including a role in *Bacurau*, and we are such fans of her that we asked her to collaborate with us on the script for the feature. So much of the protagonist's experience is the actress' own stories that we incorporated into the script.

**Nara:** And not only did we get to know her better, but we developed a relationship with her after the short film. Over the years, we always went back there, and we got to know more about her, and about her father, who plays himself in the film. So we brought this documentary layer to the film, which we couldn't explore in the short film because there was another proposal.

***Most actors are non-professional. How did you find them and how was working with them?***

**Nara:** As Tião mentioned, Eduarda Samara became an actress after her involvement in the short film, and later she worked on several projects. The adult actors are all professionals, except for Heartless' father, who plays himself. However, for the young characters, who form the core of the film, we wanted to add a documentary layer by casting

young people from the region. One of the main characters, Tamara, portrayed by Maya de Vicq, is actually my cousin and she spent her childhood in Guaxuma, the beach where the film is set. I had previously mentioned to Tião that she could be a suitable choice for the role of Tamara. At the time of writing the script, she was only 9 years old, but now she's 15. Before shooting, we conducted a camera test with both her and Eduarda, and it turned out great. As for the boys, we conducted an extensive search within the region.

**Tião:** Indeed, we interviewed nearly 1,000 teenagers for these roles. Some were challenging to find, while others were more easily discovered. And by the way, Eduarda was the very first person we interviewed when searching for actors for the short film.

***What was it like filming the sex scenes with these young non-actors?***

**Nara:** It was always a little tense, but ultimately everything went very smoothly. We kept the set with very few people during those scenes. In the pool scene, for instance, we even used a small ball to ensure there was no direct body contact. It felt almost like a performance or a dance. We embraced the playful aspect of these "performances", always trying to make them feel very comfortable, so in the end it was very relaxed for everyone.

**Tião:** We extensively discussed these scenes during the film's preparation, focusing on the approach we would take. Oddly, at times it felt like we were more concerned about them than the actual actors themselves.

***Speaking of the film's themes: it seems to me that besides the almost platonic love story between the protagonists, Heartless is, above all, a film about class; which is perhaps one of the defining themes of contemporary Brazilian cinema...***

**Nara:** Yes, the main story of the film is indeed interwoven with class themes. Especially for those of us who come from small places like where I grew up near the beach, we're constantly exposed to different social circles. As kids, we don't really notice these differences. It's only as we grow up that we realize the disparities. And understanding that the people you've spent so much time with have different realities, without the privileges you had, or that you might never see them again... it's really tough.





**Tiãõ:** Our interest has always been in exploring the complexity of these relationships and portraying the intricate nature of this place. This complexity is not only in the physical sense, like the contrast between its beauty and the prevalent violence, but also in the way Nara mentioned these relationships. Tamara's character grows up thinking that she and her friends are all the same, but gradually she starts to see that the reality is not quite like that.

***Moving on to its themes, Heartless is also about corruption. Not only the corruption that occurs in Brasilia - which is portrayed in the film through the news of politician PC Farias' death on television - but also the corruption of morality.***

**Tiãõ:** Yes, this held great significance for us. The use of PC Farias' death served a dual purpose: situating the film in a specific time, in 1996, and highlighting one of the pivotal chapters in Brazil's political history.

**Nara:** It's worth mentioning that PC Farias came from Alagoas, the state where the film is set. And from there also emerged figures like former president Collor and deputy Arthur Lira... it's quite crazy, isn't it? And they endure...

**Tiãõ:** There was even a day when we had to momentarily interrupt filming due to a Collor's rally happening in the streets... but yes, the "small corruptions" of certain characters held significance within the narrative. It wasn't solely about the theme itself but also intertwined with the concept of class. It's not a simplistic matter because anyone can be implicated: whether it's Vitor, who originates from the middle class, or Galego, who does not... thus, corruption

disregards class distinctions.

***Speaking of Galego's character, one of the film's strong themes revolves around parent-child relationships. We are introduced to Tamara's mother, to Heartless' father, and Galego's father, which is perhaps one of the most heartbreaking moments in the film.***

**Nara:** Yes, indeed. I'd say that the theme of parent-child relationships emerged quite spontaneously, without extensive planning. Heartless's bond with her father developed naturally as we worked on the characters and listened to their shared stories. This connection was deeply moving, and we sought to enhance Heartless' character through her relationship with her father. As for the other characters, the parent-child dynamic evolved organically, serving as a way to support the complexity and emotional weight they carry.

**Tiãõ:** It's not only that these relationships emerged spontaneously; in fact, we became more aware of some of them during the editing process. As we were editing, we decided to put together specific scenes involving parents, just because we realized that there was this narrative thread going on.

***Let's talk about the fish. The film portrays a multitude of fish, of various types and species, including a dead whale which was also featured in the short film. I also came across information that you stumbled upon an actual dead whale on the beach. Without wanting to speculate too much about the film's symbolism, could you talk a bit about the significance of these fish?***

**Nara:** Gee! (laughter)

**Tiãõ:** The whale had an update from the short film to the feature...

**Nara:** To us, it held importance to incorporate these more fantastical elements into the film. This was mainly to establish a connection with the characters' emotions, bringing in these creatures from diverse origins, each evoking unique feelings and sensations... Our aim was to explore a realm that isn't solely rational, to elicit a reaction and immerse in the characters' emotions. The animals native to that region have always held great significance in the lives of the people there.

***The visual aspect of the film is very impressive, with all those colors exploding on the screen and a meticulous and eye-popping composition work. How was the color palette chosen?***

**Nara:** Actually, we don't really like working with color palettes. We wanted vivid colors and we wanted to play with that a little bit. The place itself had this very strong thing about it. We didn't want to make everything too plastic or aseptic, so we tried to work with the color of the sea, which is the green sea of Alagoas, and to avoid that beautiful blue water and white sand thing, and also make some contrast with the clothes of the characters... We wanted something dirtier but with vibrant colors at the same time. I think choosing a color palette cleans up the look of the film a bit and I think it's good to leave that open.

**Tiãõ:** We also did some research on films that we liked, in digital, because we filmed in digital. But more than colors, we thought about how we wanted nature to be represented. What color of the sea do we like best on digital, what green of the bush do we like the most, what kind of shade and contrast... And so, in the first few weeks, we were fine-tuning this language with Evgenia Alexandrova [Director of Photography] and so we came to the conclusion that it would make more sense for the film to leave it with this more natural tone.

***Speaking of the films that served as reference for Heartless, I had Eric Rohmer's summer films in mind, as well as Lucrecia Martel's, which you, Nara, have mentioned as a strong influence before. I thought particularly about the pool in The Swamp and the ones depicted in Heartless. Both seem to symbolize aspects of bourgeoisie and decadence.***

**Nara:** I think I can speak for both of us: Lucrecia has always been an inspiration for us, her performances and the unique worlds she creates. It's always inspiring for us to revisit her films and observe her shooting techniques. That pool is quite fascinating; it even influenced us when constructing the scene with the Italians. However, I believe our most significant inspiration came from Alice Rohrwacher. Although we didn't shoot on film as we originally intended, considering Alice exclusively uses film, we were consistently amazed by her use of light and colors.

**Tiãõ:** Our appreciation for Lucrecia goes beyond her films. We find her as a person truly interesting. Her interviews are always insightful and inspiring. I remember attending a masterclass she held here in Recife, which was really cool. Moreover, we were also struck by the film *Low Tide* by Roberto Minervini, which was presented in Venice in 2012 and had a significant impact on us. It's also a film about a mother-son relationship, approached in a natural, intimate way





with the camera closely following the characters. We are also fans of the Dardennes, as seen in *The Kid with a Bike*, even though their filmmaking language is much stricter.

***There is a strong queer element in the film. In the 2014 short film, the narrative centered around a boy and a girl. However, in the feature, it unfolds as a lesbian love story, while also including a gay couple. What prompted the change in the sexual identities of the main characters?***

**Nara:** I see this change as something very organic. Presently, I identify as a lesbian woman, and there's an almost documentary-like and autobiographical quality to Tamara's character. In one of my previous shorts *Guaxuma*, an animated short film, I delved into deeply personal territory by adopting a first-person perspective. Given this context, we felt it would be more authentic and sincere to explore emotions and experiences that resonate with my own journey and memories. The change felt like a very natural progression.

***Kleber Mendonça Filho is one of the film's producers and the film is also produced by Cinemascópio, the production company he founded. How did this collaboration happen?***

**Tião:** As I was finalizing my short film *Muro*, Kleber together with Emilie Lesclaux, the co-founder of Cinemascópio, generously helped me finish the film's sound. During that period, Emilie was starting her journey in producing Kle-



ber's films. When we started on creating the short film *Heartless* we invited Emilie to take on the role of executive producer. So, when the decision to create the feature-length film emerged, it was only natural to once again involve Emilie in the project. Although the production was more Emilie's, we maintained sporadic interactions with Kleber. He reviewed several cuts of the film and shared insightful feedback, which prompted valuable reflections for us. He even gave suggestions for the poster design.

***And finally, what was it like to receive the news that the film would be in Venice, after the short premiered in Cannes?***

**Nara:** It was really good and a relief actually. There was a certain pressure for the feature to enter a big festival because the short had premiered at Cannes...so here we are! But yes, receiving this news was very important for us. We've never been to Venice, so we're really curious to see what the festival is like and how the film will be received there.

**Tiãõ:** And it was a very cool thing because on the same day we sent the film, they already called us.

INTERVIEW BY WELLINGTON ALMEIDA





# Nara Normande & Tião

Nara Normande was born in 1986 in Alagoas, Brazil. In 2014, she directed the short ***Sem Coração (Heartless)*** together with Tião, which received the **Illy Prize for best short** at **Cannes' Directors' Fortnight**. In 2018, her animated short film ***Guaxuma*** was selected for **Toronto** and won 70 awards, including the one for **Best Animation at South by Southwest Film Festival**. ***Sem Coração (Heartless)***, the homonymous film based on the short, is her first feature film.

Tião was born in Recife. In 2008, his film ***Muro*** was awarded with the **Un regard neuf Award for Best Short Film** at **Cannes' Directors' Fortnight**. His film ***Animal Político*** premiered at the **International Film Festival Rotterdam** in 2016.



# Filmography

## Nara Normande

2011	<b>Dia Estrelado</b>	short
2014	<b>Sem Coração (Heartless)</b>	short, co-directed with Tião
2018	<b>Guaxuma</b>	short

## Tião

2006	<b>Eisenstein</b>	short
2008	<b>Muro</b>	short
2014	<b>Sem Coração (Heartless)</b>	short, co-directed with Nara Normande
2016	<b>Animal Político</b>	feature film



# Credits

<b>Directors</b>	Nara Normande & Tião
<b>Cinematographer</b>	Evgenia Alexandrova
<b>Editors</b>	Juliana Munhoz, Eduardo Serrano, Isabelle Manquillet
<b>Production designer</b>	Thales Junqueira
<b>Costume designer</b>	Preta Marques
<b>Sound</b>	Lucas Caminha, Riccardo Spagnol, Gianluca Gasparini
<b>Music</b>	Tratenwald
<b>VFX</b>	Xavier Piveteau-Guyomarc'h, Alain Carsoux
<b>Producers</b>	Cinemascópio (Emilie Lesclaux & Kleber Mendonça Filho) - Brazil, Les Valseurs (Justin Pechberty & Damien Megherbi) - France, Nefertiti Film (Nadia Trevisan & Alberto Fasulo) - Italy
<b>Coproducers</b>	Vitrine Filmes
<b>In collaboration with</b>	Rai Cinema

# Cast

**Maya de Vicq**

Tamara

**Eduarda Samara**

Heartless

**Alaysson Emanuel**

Galego

**Maeve Jinkings**

Fátima

**Eules Assis**

Eules

**Kaique Brito**

Binho

**Erom Cordeiro**

Edu

**Ian Boechat**

Vitinho

**Lucas Da Silva**

Cidão

**Elany Santos**

Vânia