

NEIRUD

a documentary by Fernanda Faya



NEIRUD

dir. Fernanda Faya - Brazil - 2023 - 72 min

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LOGLINE

Confronting family secrets, filmmaker Fernanda Faya pieces together the mysterious life of her aunt Neirud, a former circus wrestler known as "the Gorilla Woman."

SYNOPSIS

Neirud died shrouded in mystery, leaving behind no trace of her past. Confronting family secrets, the filmmaker pieces together the life of her enigmatic aunt, who toured Brazil as a wrestler in an underground all-female circus troupe throughout the 60s and 80s. As she investigates Neirud's controversial ring persona, Gorilla Woman, the filmmaker uncovers a taboo-breaking love story, revealing the surprising nature of Neirud's role in her own family.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

Chile Conecta 2022

Miradas Festival Rough Cut Lab 2023

SpCine Finishing Fund (Brazil)

Proac Finishing Fund (Brazil)

Best Feature Film

2023 Curitiba Int' Film Festival, Olhar de Cinema

Best Editing

2023 Curitiba Int' Film Festival, Olhar de Cinema

Best Screenplay

2023 Mix Brasil LGBT Film Festival

DIRECTOR STATEMENT

Fernanda Faya

My father took pride in having grown up among circus performers and in seeing that his own children carry on the love of this heritage. I grew up listening to my father tell stories about his atypical, free childhood, full of adventures in his mother's circus. My great-grandmother saved a tamer's life by shooting the famous lion Pacha, who was about to kill him; my great-grandmother's sister managed to escape an arranged marriage when she ran away on horseback at the end of her equestrian ballet act. These fantastic stories led me to start this film ten years ago. That could have been my movie. Reiterating this lineage's romanticised and fantastical aspect that goes back to my great-grandparents. This film is instead about what these stories ended up hiding and which would have disappeared had it not been for my almost obsessive curiosity for my enigmatic aunt Neirud.

Neirud: the only black person in our family, the only one who could lift my brother and me with just one arm, and who, as I grew up, would only reveal one or two things about her past as a circus performer herself. She died in 2014, leaving no trace of her life. My investigation became an archaeological effort. I excavated old home videos and photographs to find traces of Neirud and discovered a universe I hadn't heard about: women's wrestling in the circus. Not just that, but a troupe of women led by my grandmother, of which Neirud was a member.

The more I researched, the more I learned directly from former women wrestlers and their children that female wrestling was one of the most important and unknown facets of Brazilian circus history. I was surprised to learn that there is no documentation about these women in official archives and collections. Around that time, in my personal life, I was struggling to understand how to deconstruct gender roles within my very recent and heteronormative marriage, and the life stories of these women were living examples of challenging society's work and gender norms and using the circus as a way to exist outside of the sexist demands of their times. I realised that not just in broader social structures but inside my own family dynamics, the narratives mostly reproduced patriarchal standards, erasing female and predominantly lesbian stories.

Telling Neirud's story is a political act and a gesture of love. As I place her at the centre of this film, the invaluable cultural and artistic contribution of one of the pioneers in the art of wrestling, who became a trailblazer to subsequent generations, becomes evident. By unveiling the true relationship between Neirud and my grandmother, I can reimagine Neirud's role in the family. NEIRUD highlights a life-long devotion to a non-conformist life and an urgent affirmation of her existence.

FILM TEAM

FERNANDA FAYA | DIRECTOR and PRODUCER

Fernanda Faya is a filmmaker, cinematographer, and educator born and raised in Sao Paulo, and based in Queens, New York. Her first feature documentary NEIRUD won the Gran Prix and Best Editing Awards in June at Curitiba Int'l Film Festival (Olhar de Cinema). She is currently finishing the short doc ALONE TOGETHER and developing her first fiction film, BETE, recipient of Spcine Development Fund. Fernanda is a member of the Brazilian Collective of Female Cinematographers (DAFB); Her first film ONE FOR THE ROAD had its premiere at DOC NYC Film Festival and screened in festivals worldwide. She holds an MFA in documentary storytelling from Hunter College Integrated Media Arts program and is a professor of Cinematography at Brooklyn College in New York.

RICA SAITO | PRODUCER

Rica Saito graduated in Film Studies from the University of São Paulo in 2003. He works as producer, director, editor, and curator. Saito is the founder member of Temporal Filmes, a Production Company based in Sao Paulo, focused on film and TV content. He curated and produced the special film series CARTA BRANCA AO SUBMARINO VERMELHO, for the SAO PAULO INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL; directed and produced the documentary NOTAS PARA UM OLHAR DANÇAR, that follows the creative process of the prestigious Sao Paulo Dance Company, and aired on Curta! and Arte1 channels.

JULIA ALVES | EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Julia Alves co-created the production platform SANCHO&PUNTA, through which she produced films such as YESTERDAY THERE WERE STRANGE THINGS IN THE SKY by Bruno Risas (Cinéma du Réel 2020 - Best First Film), THE EMPLOYER AND THE EMPLOYEE, by Uruguayan Manuel Nieto (Cannes Directors' Fortnight 2021) and PRIVATE FOOTAGE, by Janaína Nagata (IDFA 2022 - The Beeld & Geluid Reframe Award). Her most recent works are NEIRUD, by Fernanda Faya (Curitiba IFF 2023 - Best Film), THE DELINQUENTS, by Rodrigo Moreno (Festival de Cannes 2023 - Un Certain Regard), in co-production with Argentina, Chile and Luxemburg, and THE BURITI FLOWER, by Renée Nader Messoria and João Salaviza (Festival de Cannes 2023 - Un Certain Regard, Ensemble Award).

YURI AMARAL | EDITOR

Yuri Amaral is an award winner Brazilian editor of independent documentary films. He recently received the Brazilian Cinematography Association's (ABC) Best Editing - Feature-Length Documentary Award for RACIONAIS: FROM THE STREETS OF SÃO PAULO TO THE WORLD by Juliana Vicente. Other accolades include: Special Jury Award at Havana International Film Festival, Best Feature Documentary at It's All True Film Festival, Best Feature by the Brazilian Film Critics Association (Abraccine), and Mix Brasil Diversity Film Festival.

JULIA ZAKIA | CINEMATOGRAPHER

Julia Zakia is a Brazilian cinematographer and director. Her work has been screened at festivals such as Clermont-Ferrand, The International Film Festival Rotterdam, Message to Man, Havana, São Paulo International Short Film Festival, It's All True International Documentary Film Festival, Ethnologic Film Festival – Belgrade, Rencontres Cinémas D'Amérique Latine de Toulouse, Biarritz, among others. She has directed five short films, and her photography portfolio includes one feature, a television series, and five short films. Credits as director and DP include: MY GRANDPA'S HAT, 35mm, 2004; ANONYMOUS SUITE, 16mm, 2005; "FIG TREE'S STORY, 35mm, 2006; TARABATARA, HD, 2007 (commissioned by the Government of São Paulo); GYPSY RIVER, HD, 2013 (commissioned by IBERMEDIA).

REVIEWS & PRESS

"Brazilian director Fernanda Faya, making her feature debut, explores the secret history of her Aunt Neirud and Grandma Nelly in this personal exploration of family and memory... Mixing archival film and video footage, Neirud alternates poetic lyricism with poignant anecdotes, the net result is a heartfelt ode to the pioneers of the past who have made today possible".

- [HAMMER TO NAIL](#). Neirud included in 15 Most Anticipated Films at DOC NYC '23.

"Neirud is not only a great love story, but an acute survey of Brazilian history and progress made in women's place in society... Along with Kleber Mendonça Filho's Pictures of Ghosts, Neirud chronicles changing Brazilian society through the bounds of first-person home movie narrative. Neirud works as a playful cinematic investigation with great warmth and heart."

- Dustin Chang, [SCREEN ANARCHY](#)

"Neirud is a fascinating story about race and identity, and queer life in last century's Brazil."

- James Kleinmann, [THE QUEER REVIEW](#). Neirud included in "LGBTQ+ highlights at 14th annual DOC NYC fest".

"It's an eye opening tale that makes you smile, makes you get misty and moves us to feel something more than just "I like this film". What a wonderful unexpected delight."

- Steve Kopian, [UNSEEN FILMS](#)

"...Faya is able to connect the past to the present and brings to light the usually unseen arbiters of what becomes important."

- Stephen Saito, [THE MOVABLE FEST](#)

"A work of tender homage, Fernanda Faya's debut feature-length documentary, Neirud, starts and ends as a personal story... The sum total of its parts is a tribute to love (both hidden and overt) and survival. That proves a poignant combination... She [Faya] edits everything into a beautiful mix of shifting images that evoke a dynamic tapestry of vibrant humanity."

- Christopher Reed, [HAMMER TO NAIL](#)

CREDITS

Director and Producer

Fernanda Faya

Editing

Yuri Amaral

Cinematography by

Julia Zakia

Co Producers

Rica Saito

Michael Wahrmann

Produção executiva

Julia Alves

Sound Editor and Mix

Guile Martins

Assistant Director

Rica Saito

Original Soundtrack

Chico Pinheiro

Cameras

Julia Zakia

Fernanda Faya

Rica Saito

Tatiana Stolpovskaya

Script Collaboration

Tainá Mühringer

Yuri Amaral

Script Consultants

Vanessa Fort

Tila Chitunda

Ana Flávia Cavalcanti

Editing Consultants

Andrea Kleinman

Ana Godoy

Manuel Muñoz Rivas

Jasmin Tenucci

Research

Julia Franceschini

Image Compositing

Caíque Veloso

Color

Samanta do Amaral

Titles

Felipe Chodin

Translation and Subtitles

Arlette Afagbegee

Production Intern

Cícero Manaus Júnior

Sancho&Punta Team

Julia Alves

Bruno Risas

Diogo Hayashi

Michael Wahrmann

Amanda Doria

Associate Producers

Kevin May, Hi-Fly'n Productions

Maria Monteiro

Legal Services

Drummond & Neumayr Advocacia

Unit Photography

Helena Wolfenson

Ilana Lichtenstein