

## the writing studio **conversations**

### **Interview with ramon salazar**

Piedras (Stones) tells the story of five women (and the relationships that develop between and around them) through their feet and shoes. Adela's tough heart will soon be warmed by the sensual intimacy of tango. Broken-hearted Leire is on the verge of falling from a go-go dancer's platform. Working class single mother Maricarmen is fed up with bunions from taxi-driving. Anita wanders the same block with her childlike eyes toward the sky in search of overhead planes. And bored chic Isabel insists on spending her husband's money buying everything in two sizes too small. Five Cinderellas without princes. All looking for second (or even third) chances.

Piedras is Ramon Salazar's first feature film. He received critical acclaim for his 1999 short film *Hongos*, which received 47 international awards, as well as a Goya (Spanish Academy Award) nomination. Born in 1973 in Malaga, Spain, Salazar studied theatre at the Malaga School of Dramatic Arts in and screenwriting at the Madrid Cinema School.

#### **Ready,set,go. A short film that has gone a long way, and a feature that is ready to go: 'Hongos' and Piedras. Between the two, the writing of a script and the search for actresses ready to walk in the shoes of the characters.**

Thanks to "Hongos" I did a lot of interviews and in every single one they asked me the same : are you working on something? Do you have a script? At the time I didn't and that embarrassed me, so I started to improvise. I said it would be a woman's film about the relationship between the kind of shoes they wear, and the title would be *Piedras*...Then came the moment I had no other choice but to take it seriously, because there was something in the story that really motivated me. Once the script was written, I started to chase actresses and actors to read it: Antonia San Juan, Najwa Nimri, Angela Molina, Enrique Alcides, etc. When Francisco Ramos called me to produce the film, the cast had already accepted.

#### **Solid title. Coincidences. Stories. Contrasts. Ramon Salazar wrote the script by thinking about things that weigh the most.**

A friend of mine who was working on his MBA showed me his notes on a conference. At that conference, the speaker filled a crystal urn with stones the size of fists. He asked if the urn was full and everybody agreed. Then he added some water and sand. What does this mean? In life, we first lay down the biggest stones: Love , Friendship, Family , Career , etc...Because after this, there is enough places for the rest: the less important things. If you do it in the opposite way, there might not be enough place for the bigger stones. The five characters are women that have been unable to lay down their big stones. The five characters are woman that have been unable to lay down their big stones properly. The film starts just when they need to find a place for those stones.

#### **I am those woman. Contradictions. Mirages. Points of view. The director confesses to have a lot in common with his female characters.**

I have always felt the necessity in life for finding the right place for the big stones. So far, I have put some in the proper way and some not. That's something that I have in common with the characters of the film...and with the rest of the human beings on planet Earth. Every woman in *Piedras* shows some virtue or some defect, not just mine, but those of everyone. We have all crawled, cried, or lied at one time or another for love.

#### **Five references. Winks. Sources. Ramon Knows that other worlds exist, but they all exist in film.**

Adela's story has something in common with Italian neo-realism. She is a woman of a strong character, solid, but with great sensitivity. The art direction, the lighting, the costumes, the hair and make-up are all taken into consideration in that same way. Her environment is colored by another time period, maybe the 1930s or 40s... Leire is a contemporary version of Shakespeare's character Ophelia. She is so obsessed with the love she feels for another person, that she gives up on herself. She is overwhelmed by the city... Maricarmen, on the other hand, has her feet more on the ground. She is urban, she lives in the present and confronts everyday problems with humour. Her life is pure 'cinema verite', but she turns it into something much lighter... Anita is a character from a fairy tale. She could have come out of 'Hansel and Gretel' or 'Tom Thumb'. She looks at things through innocent eyes and is surprised by everything. She expresses herself through external agents like: her drawings, music, the planes that fly over her head, the people that greet her...Isabel is portrayed in an atmosphere of a sophisticated comedy, although she has much in common with Dorothy from 'The Wizard of Oz'. She always takes the wrong road, without realising that all she has to do is click her heels three times to get back home.

#### **Main Character: Madrid. Discovery. Ambiance. States of Mind. A stranger's point of view changes any city into another one.**

In the film, Madrid is like the sixth female character. It's a kind of guide to the emotions of the other five women. Depending on how the sun rises on the city, so our characters will feel. I'm

from Malaga, but living in Madrid for four years now. At the beginning, I let the city guide me. I discovered Madrid little by little. I enjoyed being a stranger, because that influenced me. I showed these feelings in my short film 'Hongos', and also in PIEDRAS. The five women spend a lot of time out in the streets, and this changes their moods. The audience will recognize places such as the 'Gran Via', 'Alcala', 'Tirso de Molina', 'Alfonso XII', the 'Retiro' park, etc., as well as other not so well-known elements, as the suburbs, traffic and highways.

### **Buenos Aires-Lisbon. One way ticket. Return ticket. Two emergency exits. From Madrid to heaven or hell. Alternatives.**

Thanks to the short film 'Hongos' I was able to visit Buenos Aires and Lisbon. While writing the script of *Piedras*, I needed two cities that could serve as references for some of the characters. In Argentina, I discovered the tango and the expression: to tear up the floor ('sacar viruta al piso'). I became fascinated with the sound of dancing shoes sliding on the wooden floor. This sound was even louder than the music. And in Lisbon I found light, air, space and contrasts.

### **Crossing paths. What a coincidence. I can't believe it. It sounds incredible. The five stories told in PIEDRAS are actually only one (or 25).**

I strongly believe that if someone is destined to something, the signals multiply around him. I am attracted to chance, to coincidence and to stories that entwine with other stories. In *Piedras*, the characters are interrelated without knowing it. There are plenty of little details that create relationships between them. It was important for me to keep those little details in the final cut the film. For me they are crucial. My favourite shot is the one that I like to call 'the sleeping insomniacs'. It's a sequences of sequences edited over music. A wide-awake character looks at one who is sleeping, and this shot takes us another shot with the same situation but other characters and this goes on until there are no more possible combinations.

### **Musical scenery. Loneliness. Variations. Refrains for five voices. Selection of songs and distribution of melodies. One for each of them. And then all together.**

Each woman has a kind of music. Adela listens o karaoke songs at the club: from Rita Pavone to Jeannette. Classic easy listening. Then she discovers tango through Leonardo... Leire is more into singer-songwriters, like Natalie Merchant, Ani Di Franco, Ben Harper, although she works as a go-go dancer in a disco...Isabel prefers French music: Edith Piaf, Jacques Brel...And then there's the original score composed by Pascal Gaigne, who composed a theme for each character, with specific instruments, plus a piano theme for the moments of loneliness that ends up fusing together all the themes of the various characters.

### **Edward Hopper. Urban Painting. Lonely Women. Sad Beauty. The American artists as an aesthetic and stylistic reference.**

I like the way Hopper paints women, their states of mind and their personalities. I find them beautiful, although they are not in their best moments. For me it was important to show them pretty and beautiful in the film, specially when they are feeling bad. Each of the women in PIEDRAS is a reflection of a painting of Hopper. And sometimes we played with the same kinds of colours, with the same misty aspect that, in any moment, can clear up when the sun comes out or darken when it rains.

### **Actresses. To search. To convince. To conquer. To work with a cast full of extraordinary actresses may be dangerous for a newcomer.**

Each actress is a world apart. With Antonia San Juan and Monica Cervera we did a lot of rehearsal, because they like to work this way. With Angela Molina and Najwa Nimri we organized sessions just to talk, talk and talk. Just to get to know each other and to analyse the characters. And Vicky Pena arrived to the group later. We worked intensively on weekends, but they are all very experienced. The best part was working with them. And the relationship that remains now. On the set, we were like Siameses. At the beginning I was really scared. I looked at the photos and all I could say was: What a cast! How I can manage this! The truth is that they are all I could say was: What a cast! How I can manage this! The truth is that they are all extraordinary. Not one of them is a diva. They gave their all.

### **And the actors , too. Sexuality. Masculinity. Fragility. The male characters are an essential part of the lives of the five women .They are more than'espoletas'.**

The film was written from the female point of view, but that does not mean that the male characters are the important. I took the same amount of care, although they have less time on the screen. The male characters are not important. I took the same amount of care, although they have less time on the screen. The male characters are all important to the women: they justify their reactions. They take their own decisions, right or wrong, and suffer the consequences. Even I have a small role as a male nurse. Pedro Callja

