

Published October 21st, 2015

'Marshland': (La Isla Minima)

By Sophie Braccini



image provided

When two teens disappear in the sparsely populated rice-growing marshland of southern Spain in 1980, two homicide detectives, with vastly different personalities, are sent to solve the mystery in the film "Marshland" - a tense, dark thriller.

The officers represent the two sides of Spain that have been fighting throughout the 20th century. The older detective has a shady past, while the younger is eager to move forward and is ready to challenge any resurgence of a hated history.

The detectives' job will prove difficult in this remote region.

In this portion of Spain, people do not talk much and they are stuck in the not so distant past of the brutal Franco dictatorship. General Franco died in 1975; the first democratic elections were held in 1977.

The secrets the two men uncover are as dense and opaque as the waters of the countryside's vast labyrinth of canals. Director Alberto Rodriguez said he was inspired by "2666," the novel by Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño, who was interested in a series of 1993 murders of women in northern Mexico. In "Marshland," secrets slowly emerge and collusion between local politicians, industrialists and

the Civil Guard, which had a prominent role during the dictatorship, persist.

Rodriguez shows his interest in Spain's transition period between 1975 and 1982, as his country tried to free itself from 40 years of fascism. The Franco regime was the result of the victory of the forces on the extreme right against the left during the Spanish Civil War, ending in 1939.

The film opens beautifully with aerial views by photographer Hector Garrido of the wetlands of the Rio Guadalquivir in southern Spain. This esthetic opening helps shed light on this lesser-known region of Spain, and properly sets the scene for this complex mystery.

"Marshland" is Rodriguez's sixth movie. Audiences should be warned that this is an adult film with disturbing images and storylines portraying torture and extreme acts of violence against women. The reason why the director chose to portray such violence so vividly is explained at the end of the film, as well as the obsessive presence of birds, which contribute to the movie's beauty and feeling of unrest.

In an interview with a European magazine, Rodriguez said about his two main characters, "The first one is motivated by his fear of dying, while the second thinks mostly about his career. But there is no obviously good one or bad one in this story; it would be too simple. However, the question raised by the movie is: is the young policeman right to put this colleague's past behind? What future can we imagine for justice in our country? Is compromise the right solution? At what price? During the last 30 years, our politicians from the left or the right have concentrated on moving forward, fearful of opening old wounds. But it could be a better idea to heal the open wounds, so they close at last."

Various countries have dealt differently with the horrors of their past; South Africa, for

example, made the choice of calling out the abuses before forgiveness could be earned. Many others, like Spain, just moved on.

The remarkable success of "Marshland" in Spain, which this year earned nine Goya Awards - the Spanish equivalent of an Academy Award - may mean that enough time has elapsed since Franco's death and Spaniards are ready to look their past in the eye.

"Marshland" will be shown for one week beginning Oct. 30 at the Orinda Theatre as part of the International Film Showcase. For information, visit lamorindatheatres.com.

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[back](#)

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