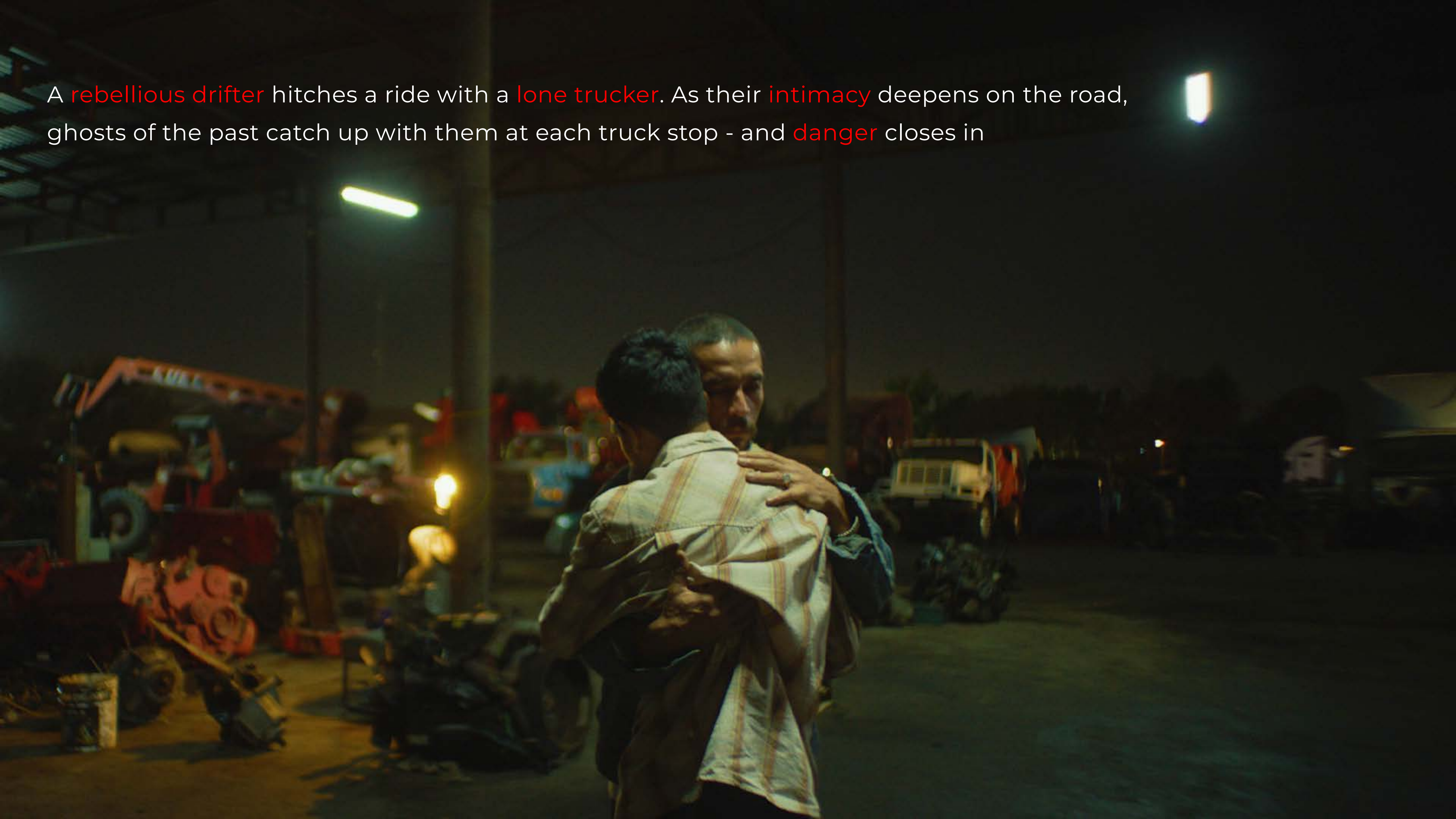


MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2025
Official Selection

ON THE ROAD

A FILM BY DAVID PABLOS

A **rebellious drifter** hitches a ride with a **lone trucker**. As their **intimacy** deepens on the road, ghosts of the past catch up with them at each truck stop - and **danger** closes in



SYNOPSIS

'**Veneno**', a rebellious young drifter, frequents roadside diners where he sleeps with truck drivers. Urgently needing a ride, he meets '**Muñeco**', a hard-edged driver who keeps to himself. He convinces Muñeco to take him deep into the hyper-masculine world of long-haul trucking across the north of Mexico. As they travel together and an unexpected intimacy builds between them, shadows from Veneno's past resurface, putting both their lives at risk.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“**On the Road** is a film that portrays a romantic relationship between two men in a hostile and dangerous setting — that of truckers and highways — governed by heteronormative and hyper-masculine norms. The story explores the protagonists’ struggle to express their emotions, shaped by a culture of machismo that affects both their social and intimate lives.

I was drawn to the idea of telling a story infused with homoeroticism within the world of truckers, where their unique adventures, the visual allure of that environment, and its brutality are shown — but also the warmth found in the brotherhood that emerges among men on the road. I think it’s a fitting setting to talk about masculinity and suppression through **Veneno** and **Muñeco** — the two leads — broken characters who, against all odds, find refuge in each other.

I believe it’s essential to keep making LGBTQ+ films in today’s context, where there are still so few representations in Mexican cinema. We’re living through challenging times in the fight for visibility, and it’s still rare to find projects that portray otherness from an intimate and honest perspective - approaching characters with empathy and respect.”

David Pablos, director

DAVID PABLOS

DIRECTOR

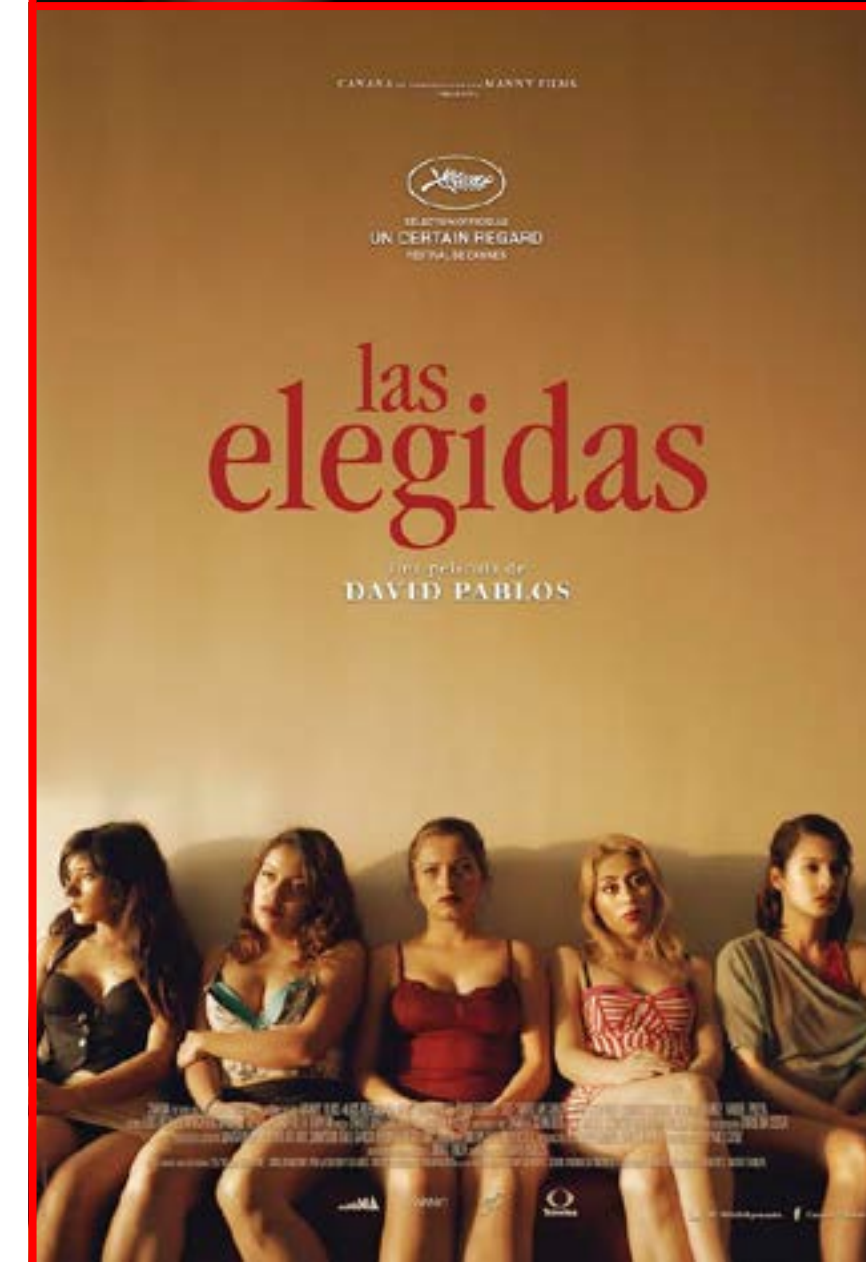
David Pablos is a Mexican writer and director whose films have received 26 nominations at the **Ariel Awards** (Mexico's national film academy awards).

He is known for films such as **Dance of the 41** (2021, Netflix) and **The Chosen Ones** (2015). He directed the first four episodes of Amazon's action western series **The Head of Joaquín Murrieta** (2023), which premiered in over 240 countries and territories.

The Chosen Ones competed at the **Cannes, San Sebastián, Zurich, and Stockholm Film Festivals**. The film was nominated for the **Goya Award for Best Ibero-American Film** and won five **Ariel Awards**, including **Best Film, Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Breakthrough Performance**.

His debut feature, **The Life After**, premiered at the **Venice Biennale** and won awards at the **Morelia International Film Festival**.

David holds an MFA from Columbia University. He is a member of Mexico's National System of Art Creators and of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Hollywood.



DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

What made you decide to situate this story in the world of long-haul truck drivers?

The idea for this story began over ten years ago, when I was working on a documentary series about the world of truck drivers. Through that experience, I got to know their lives up close, and I found them fascinating. I learned about the incredibly long journeys they take and the many hardships they face. I saw how they spend most of their lives on the road, and how many of them become 'addicted' to that lifestyle. Despite the challenges, most truckers say they wouldn't change it for anything—this is, for them, the best possible life they can have. In a country like Mexico, where highways can be dangerous and violence is a constant threat, they have to be extremely alert. There are certain routes they actively avoid because the risks are just too high. Then there's the issue of addiction: because the trips are so long, and they often go weeks or even months

without real rest, many become dependent on weight-loss pills and other drugs just to stay awake. Insomnia is common. A large number of truckers live with some form of addiction, and it's become completely normalized. Many of these drugs are sold in roadside restaurants called cachimbas, and for some, going a full week without sleep is sadly just part of the routine. What also struck me was the strong sense of fraternity that exists among them. They help each other, look out for one another—they form real bonds on the road. There's a deep camaraderie that I found very moving.

The person who first introduced me to this world was a photographer named Luis García. He's gay, and his father had been a truck driver. His homoerotic way of framing this hypermasculine world really inspired me.

In my previous work, a recurring theme has been the absent father, and in this story I wanted to combine that with a love story between two men in a world where masculinity is

performed in such rigid, exaggerated ways. I saw a chance to create a broader reflection on masculinity through their relationship—one that is marked by emotional absence and the need for connection.

Even though the story was conceived over a decade ago, I put it aside for a long time until I felt I truly understood the characters. During those years, I kept researching—reading about truckers, immersing myself in their world, spending time in cachimbas, and going out on the road with them. It was a long process of absorbing that experience and figuring out how to bring it into the story I wanted to tell.

At first, it wasn't easy to gain access. The world of truckers is quite closed, and many of them are reluctant to speak to outsiders. But once I earned their trust, I was able to gather essential first-hand accounts.

I wanted to portray the raw sexuality of encounters between men in these spaces—at garages, in truck stops, at roadside diners. There's a rawness in these moments that I found powerful and revealing. They say a lot about who these men are and how they live, emotionally and physically, in a world shaped by solitude, desire, and survival.

The world of Veneno and Muñeco is depicted as very precarious and the possibilities of violence are always present. Can you tell us about how and why you wanted to portray violence in the story.

My interest doesn't lie solely in violence itself, but in how, in recent years, we've learned to live alongside it—particularly here in Mexico. For over a decade now, violence has intensified, becoming a persistent backdrop to daily life. What fascinates me is how younger generations—those born into this climate of unrest—navigate a world where brutality is normalized, where horror blends seamlessly into routine.

But more than the acts of violence, I'm drawn to how it's perceived and internalized by society. What stories we choose to tell—or ignore. Through the world of truck drivers, I found a compelling lens through which to examine this harsh reality. Their perspective allowed me to approach violence obliquely, not with spectacle, but through the texture of lived experience. The film dissects a reality many would rather look away from, yet it never confronts the viewer with overt brutality—at least, not until a deliberate moment near the end. Until then, violence remains off-screen, present in suggestion, in tension, in the

truckers' stories and silences. When it finally does surface, it does so with purpose, tied intimately to the film's broader interrogation of masculinity.

Does my film reflect reality? Absolutely. It portrays the lived truth of truckers moving through regions of Mexico shaped by danger and fear. Though the tone of the film is stylized and its world carefully constructed, its core is rooted in the real—the emotional and psychological landscape these men inhabit is not fictional.

What strikes me most, and what disturbs me deeply as a Mexican, is how desensitized we've become. The weight of violence no longer registers in the way it should. We are bombarded with grotesque, unspeakable stories—stories that should shake us to our core—but they barely provoke a reaction. Violence has become part of our cultural DNA, and that numbness is perhaps the most terrifying consequence of all.

Can you tell us how the film tackles the subject of male violence and toxic masculinity, and what kind of a different perspective you wanted to bring to these themes in the film?

Male violence permeates every corner of my film; it's not an

exception but a daily reality for all my characters. It manifests in interpersonal relationships, in the way society instructs men to suppress emotion, in how they're expected to perform their sexuality. This violence is woven into the fabric of culture itself, and I wanted to expose that—to satirise it in a way and show how toxic masculinity distorts the lives of everyone it touches, including men.

At the same time, I wanted to satirize masculinity—its absurd foundations, its reliance on hollow ideals. There's a particular scene where Osvaldo, who plays Muñeco, is with a sex worker. He loses his erection and becomes increasingly desperate to recover it. His anxiety intensifies as he battles with the pressure to "perform," all hinging on an arbitrary, fragile standard of what it means to be a man.

What strikes me as both tragic and absurd is how much the male ego hinges on the virility and perceived power of the penis. That scene is meant to ridicule this fixation—how comically inflated and yet painfully real it is. So much of masculine identity is reduced to a single organ, a single function.

As I said, the film both mocks and interrogates masculinity. And I know that dual approach will make some viewers deeply uncomfortable.

The film depicts real dangers surrounding homosexuality in this world of truckers, yet also depicts it as very widespread. Since legalised marriage in 2022 do you think Mexico has evolved its stance on LGBTQ+ issues overall?

I always say that it's important to tell stories about diversity. In Mexico, we don't see much diversity on screen—or at least not as much as I think is necessary. Of course, things have changed, things have evolved. In most parts of the country, same-sex marriage is now legal. But even so, there's still a lot of homophobia and transphobia.

I always say that even though there have been some victories, some battles won, nothing is written in stone. Things can easily go backwards—or even get worse. There are no real guarantees. That's why I believe it's vital to show diversity on screen, and to explore the many different sides of it.

Not just the version of diversity that shows hegemonic bodies, or only represents beautiful people from privileged social classes. I wanted to show another kind of homosexuality—the kind that exists in garages, in roadside restaurants, in truck stops. The kind that often goes unseen.

The film surprises us with different turns of genre. Can you tell us what made you want to play with mixing a road movie, a love story with the thriller such a way?

While writing this film, I wasn't thinking about a specific genre or a particular tone because I knew I was looking for the project's own voice, which would be a mix of many different tones and genres. I allowed myself the freedom to go anywhere the story wanted to take me, to follow where the characters led. I think this is the first time I wrote without having specific rules—I didn't make an outline, I didn't know beforehand where the story was going. I just kept writing and discovered the story as I went along. It was a fun process for me to try different ways of approaching creative writing.

Can you tell us how you cast the film?

Casting has always been one of my favorite parts of the filmmaking process.

From the very beginning, I knew I wanted to work with Eduardo Giralte as my casting director. He's spent many years working as a fixer in Mexico, and he has a remarkable eye—not only for

compelling faces but for distinctive personalities as well. Given the tone and essence of the film I was trying to capture, I knew I would mostly be working with non-actors.

Casting the role of Veneno was particularly challenging. The character required a very specific set of traits that were not easy to find. We focused our search in the outskirts of Ciudad Juárez, a border city in northern Mexico, where many communities are deeply affected by violence. We were looking for a young man who was openly gay in a context where, due to violence and insecurity, many men are not able to express their sexuality openly. It was a long and delicate casting process that took about five months.

Initially, I wanted to cast a real truck driver for the role of Muñeco. But I quickly realized that their unpredictable schedules made it nearly impossible—they rarely know what they'll be doing in the coming days or weeks. During this search, we did find two incredibly promising non-actors for the role. Unfortunately, both fell through for different reasons: one was incarcerated, and the other, struggling with a crystal meth addiction, disappeared.

At that point, it became clear to me that I needed a professional actor—someone who could ground the fictional world of the film and serve as a creative anchor and ally to the rest of the

cast, especially the non-actors. That's when Osvaldo came into the picture. I had met him years ago in Sonora, and for some reason, he kept resurfacing in my mind—I think it was my intuition calling. Interestingly, Eduardo also had him in mind. We brought him in, and it became clear that he was the perfect choice for Muñeco.

I arranged one final callback with Osvaldo and Víctor, who plays Veneno, because I wanted to see their chemistry. Watching them together changed everything. Their dynamic brought a new dimension to the characters, and from that moment, I was confident in their casting.

Before shooting began, we worked together for a month and a half. It was crucial for me that they become a true team—relying on each other, building trust, being open with one another and with me. This preparatory period was guided by Patricia Ortiz, who has collaborated with me on past projects. The goal of this workshop wasn't just to give Víctor a foundation in acting, but to foster a deep, genuine relationship between the two leads. I believe this connection is visible in the film; it gives the story a fluidity and emotional depth that could only come from real human connection.

Patricia also worked with the rest of the cast. It was important that everyone understood how we would work, what to expect

on set, and how the rhythm of a film shoot flows. Those early days in the workshops, even before we began filming, were incredibly joyful.

The casting process itself was a beautiful experience. We took the time to really engage with each person who came in—each individual who had the trust and courage to be vulnerable in front of our camera. I asked Eduardo to have each potential actor tell us their life story. I've always felt it's essential to understand who is standing in front of the camera—what their inner world is like, what life experiences have shaped them. These elements not only become their tools for performance, but also help me understand how I connect with them on a human level.

Ultimately, I believe that the foundation of any successful working relationship is a genuine, human connection. And that belief guided every step of the casting process.

Anything interesting or relevant about the specific locations? What is this stretch of road or how did you settle on the right locations to shoot the film?

Securing our locations was one of the most challenging aspects

of the production.

We were filming in spaces that are actively lived in—places with their own rhythms, people, and realities beyond our shooting schedule—so we had to constantly adapt to the life and dynamics of each specific location. Every single place came with its own set of difficulties.

But without a doubt, the cachimbas were the most complicated. These are roadside truck stops where, in many cases, drugs are sold—particularly in the ones we were interested in filming. Not all cachimbas are the same, but the ones that had the atmosphere we were looking for were controlled by criminal groups. So we had to ask for permission to be there, since these are places where drug activity happens 24/7.

Initially, we had two main cachimba locations lined up. But after some time, we were threatened and told we could no longer film there—it was bad for business, according to the people who control those spaces. This happened just two weeks before we were scheduled to shoot in those locations. That weekend, after a full day of work, we had to travel to another part of Chihuahua, the state where we were filming, to scout new locations. For safety reasons, we had to make that change immediately.

This type of situation happened repeatedly throughout the shoot. There were several occasions when a location that had been previously secured suddenly became unsafe overnight, and we had to pivot quickly—improvising, adjusting, finding alternative places on the spot.

There were moments when we knew we were filming in risky environments. But above all, the security of the crew and cast was our top priority. Any time we sensed a real threat, we made the decision to relocate. That flexibility and responsiveness became an essential part of our process.



THE CAST



VÍCTOR MIGUEL

Veneno

Originally from Ciudad Juárez and 23 years old, Víctor Miguel Prieto works as an electromechanical technician. His path into acting began unexpectedly when he accompanied his partner to a casting call in Ciudad Juárez. Though he only intended to offer support, he ended up being selected himself, after passing several rounds of auditions and callbacks. Throughout the process, he received acting training and discovered a talent he didn't know he had. Almost by accident, he became an actor.

OSVALDO SÁNCHEZ

El Muñeco

Born in Mexicali, Baja California, he grew up in Hermosillo, Sonora, where he studied design and acting. He has appeared in over 100 theatre productions and 25 films, including **Pedro Páramo** directed by Rodrigo Prieto, **Correr para vivir** by Gerardo Dorantes, and **En el camino** by David Pablos, among others.





ANIMAL DE LUZ FILMS

PRODUCER

Animal de Luz Films, founded by acclaimed producer **Inna Payán**, is one of Mexico's leading production companies for commercial and auteur cinema.

Its award-winning titles include **La Jaula de Oro** (81 international awards, including Un Certain Talent at Cannes 2013), **La Libertad del Diablo** (Amnesty International Film Prize, Berlinale 2017), and **Los Lobos** (Generation KPlus Grand Prix, Berlinale 2020).



DIEGO LUNA

PRODUCER

Diego Luna is an actor, director and producer for theater, film and television. He gained international recognition in 2001 with the film **Y tu mamá también**, directed by Oscar winner Alfonso Cuarón. Since then, he has participated in more than 30 films produced in Mexico, Spain, the United States, England and Germany, with directors such as David Trueba, Steven Spielberg, Harmony Korine, Gus van Sant and Woody Allen. In 2007 he directed his first feature film, the documentary **J.C. Chávez**; and he has since directed the features **Abel** (2010), **César Chávez** (2014) and **Mr. Pig** (2016). In 2016 he had a breakthrough in the English speaking market with his role in **Star Wars: Rogue One**, and in 2018 he starred in the Netflix series, **Narcos: México**, for which he was nominated for the Critic Choice Awards. In 2022, he starred in and produced the Disney+ series, **Andor**, for which he was nominated for the Golden Globes and the Critics Choice Awards in the category of best actor in a television series. In 2024, he joined the cast of **Kiss of the Spider Woman**, directed by Bill Condon. That same year, Diego starred alongside Gael Garcia Bernal in Hulu's new T.V series, **La Máquina**, for which he was nominated to a Golden Globe in the category of best supporting actor. In 2025, Diego directed and is currently editing his fifth feature, **Ceniza en la boca**, an adaptation of the acclaimed novel of the same name by Brenda Navarro.

In addition to his acting career, Diego is committed to causes that promote a social impact. Such is the case of **Ambulante**, a traveling documentary film festival that fosters cultural exchange, created in 2005 together with Gael García Bernal, Pablo Cruz and Elena Fortes; and El Día Después, an NGO based in Mexico City that works as a bridge between longtime organizations and citizens willing to contribute to bringing about change in the country.

In 2018, together with his partner Gael García Bernal, Diego launched **La Corriente del Golfo**, a company dedicated to the production of film, theater, television and social projects.



CREATIVE TEAM

Ximena Amann, AMC, is a renowned Mexican cinematographer and a graduate of **ENAC-UNAM**. Her work is characterized by a naturalistic and poetic visual style, with a special focus on light and the emotional texture of each story. She has shot feature films such as **Los días más oscuros de nosotras** and **Sujo**, the latter premiering and winning awards at **Sundance 2024** and later selected as Mexico's official entry for the **Oscars** and **Goya** Awards. Ximena is a member of the Apertura collective and the Mexican Society of Cinematographers (**AMC**).



COPRODUCERS



LA CORRIENTE DEL GOLFO

Production company founded in Mexico in 2018 by Diego Luna and Gael García Bernal, focused on film, series, and podcasts. Its film projects include **Cassandra**, which had its world premiere at the **Sundance Film Festival**; **Tesis sobre una domesticación** (2024), winner of Best Film in the Outlook Competition at the **Chicago International Film Festival**; and **Estado de silencio** (2024), winner of Best Documentary at both the **Santiago International Film Festival (SANFIC)** and the **Red Sea Film Festival**.



PRODUCCIONES AÑO BISIESTO

Año Bisiesto is a production company founded as a platform committed to cinema. Its name became internationally recognized with the release of **Año Bisiesto** (2010), the debut feature by director Michael Rowe.



THE MAESTROS CINE

We work with the spirit of an independent studio dedicated to telling stories across different formats—films, series, podcasts, video games, and more. We develop ideas that break the mold and connect with audiences in unexpected ways. We champion original, bold, and character-driven projects.

TECHNICAL SHEET

Original title	En el camino
International Title	ON THE ROAD
Country of Production	Mexico
Year of Production	2025
Duration	93 minutes
Format	DCP
Aspect Ratio	1.85:1
Language	Spanish
Subtitles	English – Italian
Director	David Pablos
Screenplay	David Pablos
Producers	Inna Payán, Luis Salinas, Diego Luna and Enrique Nava
Cinematography	Ximena Amann
Sound	Miguel Mata
Sound Design	Olivier Laurent, Laurent Chassaigne
Production Design	Belén Estrada
Editing	Jonathan Pellicer, Paulina del Paso
Original Score	Andrea Balency-Béarn
Production Companies	Animal de Luz Films, Producciones Año Bisiesto
Coproduction	La Corriente del Golfo, The Maestros Cine, EFD, Terminal Films.
International Sales	M-Appeal

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