



## Brazil on Film

# Barren Lives

### **Barren Lives** *Vidas secas*

*Director:* Nelson Pereira dos Santos

*Production Company:*

Producoes Cinematograficas L.C. Barreto

*Producers:* Luiz Carlos Barreto, Herbert Richers, Danilo Trelles

*Screenplay:* Nelson Pereira dos Santos

*Based on the novel by:* Graciliano Ramos

*Directors of Photography:* Luiz Carlos Barreto, José Rosa

*Editor:* Rafael Justo

*Music:* Leonardo Alencar

*Sound:* Geraldo José

*Technical Adviser:* Waldemar Lima

*Cast:*

Atila Iorio (*Fabiano, the father*)

Maria Ribeiro (*Vitoria, the mother*)

Orlando Macedo (*Amarelo, the soldier*)

Jofre Soares (*the farmer*)

Gilvan, Genivaldo (*boys*)

Baleia (*the dog*)

Gilvar Lima

Oscar de Souza

José Leite

Nabor Costa

Vanuterio Maia

Maria Rosa

Orlando Chagas

Ignacio Costa

Manuel Ordonio

Antonio Soarez

Brazil 1963

100 mins

Digital 4K

The screening on Wed 10 Jun will be introduced by Dr Tiago de Luca, University of Warwick

## Brazil on Film

### **The Year My Parents Went on Vacation**

O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias

Mon 1 Jun 18:10; Mon 15 Jun 20:30

### **Limit** Limite

Mon 1 Jun 20:40; Fri 12 Jun 18:10 (+ pre-recorded

intro by film critic Rafa Sales Ross)

### **Saint Bernard** São Bernardo

Tue 2 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by season co-curator

Adriana Rouanet); Sat 6 Jun 20:40

### **Barren Lives** *Vidas secas*

Tue 2 Jun 20:45; Wed 10 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by

Dr Tiago de Luca, University of Warwick)

### **My Foreign Land** Minha terra estrangeira

Wed 3 Jun 20:45; Tue 16 Jun 20:50

### **The Men I Had** Os homens que eu tive

Thu 4 Jun 18:20; Sat 27 Jun 12:30

### **The Invisible Life Of Eurídice Gusmão**

A vida invisível de Eurídice Gusmão

Thu 4 Jun 20:20; Sun 28 Jun 18:00

### **Same Old West** Oeste outra vez

Fri 5 Jun 20:45; Thu 25 Jun 20:55

### **Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands**

Dona Flor e seus dois maridos

Sat 6 Jun 12:00; Thu 18 Jun 20:25 (+ intro by Natali

Juste Simmons, London Latino Film Festival)

## Walter Salles on 'Barren Lives'

'This film singlehandedly founds and justifies a Nation. Brazil has, at last, been discovered. It is a masterpiece.' These were the words of the writer Otto Lara Resende upon leaving one of the first screenings of *Barren Lives* in 1963.

I had the same feeling when I watched *Barren Lives* for the first time. It felt like an unveiling, exposing the deepest essence of our country. I was seized by the characters; by the harsh, minimalist narrative, at once cruel and transcendent. I found myself transported to the badlands of the Brazilian *sertão*, into the heart of a family forced to keep moving to escape starvation, in search of the bare essentials: water.

The concise, stripped-down prose of Graciliano Ramos finds its most faithful translation in the equally concise narrative of Nelson Pereira dos Santos's film. Here, actors and non-actors become one. On-location filming, no soundtrack, precise, unadorned shots: Nelson eschewed any element that would aestheticise the action. The crew was also lean: fewer than 20 people. In *Barren Lives*, he embraced the Italian neorealist production model, but went a step further, expressing it in an utterly Brazilian way.

Nelson and his cinematographer Luiz Carlos Barreto gave a name to what became known as 'the Brazilian light': a natural light, metered to trace the faces of the film's characters, not the physical landscape surrounding them. This was no longer filtered light propped up by reflectors. The unrelenting sun of the *sertão* overexposes the frame, blinding the characters and our own perception as viewers. In *Barren Lives*, form and content walk hand in hand.

Brazilian culture offers layered reflections of a vast and complex country in a trance, with traits that are simultaneously continental and regional. This culture tends to be better known for its exuberance than for its capacity to say so much with so little. *Barren Lives* blazed a path toward a broader understanding of Brazilian identity. To this day, it still reverberates, and inspires new generations of Brazilian filmmakers and cinephiles.

In 1963, the critic Alex Viany wrote that '*Vidas secas* is the best Brazilian film ever made.'

I venture to say the same in 2026.

*Sight and Sound*, June 2026

## Nelson Pereira dos Santos

A master who outlived the majority of his disciples, Nelson Pereira dos Santos represents the beginning and arguably the end of modernity in Brazilian cinema. Leading 1960s auteur Glauber Rocha wrote that dos Santos's debut feature *Rio, 40 Degrees* (*Rio 40 graus*, 1955) was the 'fertilization point' of Cinema Novo, the movement that radicalised national filmmaking and would incorporate dos Santos himself with the slightly younger generation. His career spans six decades, a milestone in a country which has never produced a stable industrial filmmaking model.

### The Nature of Invisible Things

A natureza das coisas invisíveis  
Sat 6 Jun 15:10; Mon 29 Jun 18:20

### White House Kasa branca

Sat 6 Jun 17:50 (+ Q&A with director Luciano Vidigal); Mon 22 Jun 20:40

### Lúcio Flávio, o Passageiro da Agonia

Sun 7 Jun 14:50; Sat 20 Jun 18:00

### The Day I Met You O dia em que te conheci

Sun 7 Jun 18:30; Wed 17 Jun 21:00

### Pixote

Mon 8 Jun 20:30; Sun 21 Jun 14:40 (+ intro by director Bárbara Paz)

### Kiss of the Spider Woman

O beijo da mulher aranha  
Wed 10 Jun 20:35; Sat 20 Jun 14:15

### Cinema, Aspirins and Vultures

Cinema, aspirinas e urubus  
Thu 11 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by season co-curator Adriana Rouanet); Mon 22 Jun 18:20

### Carlota Joaquina, Princess of Brazil

Carlota Joaquina, Princesa do Brasil  
Thu 11 Jun 21:00; Fri 26 Jun 21:00

### Babenco: Tell Me When I Die Babenco: alguém tem que ouvir o coração e dizer parou

Sat 13 Jun 12:50; Sun 21 Jun 18:15 (+ Q&A with director Bárbara Paz)

### The Woman of Everyone A mulher de todos

Sat 13 Jun 20:45; Thu 18 Jun 18:00 (+ intro by Natalia Christofoletti Barrenha, Cinema Mentiré)

### Cyclone

Sun 14 Jun 18:20; Mon 29 Jun 20:40

### The Second Mother Que horas ela volta?

Tue 16 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by Cine Brazil);  
Sat 27 Jun 20:40

### Alien Nights Noites alienígenas

Fri 19 Jun 20:55; Sun 28 Jun 15:30

### Iracema: Uma Transa Amazônica

Sat 20 Jun 20:40; Thu 25 Jun 18:05 (+ discussion presented by People's Palace Projects)

### The Father and the Shaman O pai e o pajé

Sat 27 Jun 15:15; Tue 30 Jun 18:10 (+ intro)

Presented as part of the UK/Brazil Season of Culture 2025-26 and supported by Instituto Guimarães Rosa

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Dos Santos emerged from privilege and as a young man was involved with the Brazilian radical left. His discovery of Italian neorealism proved a lasting influence on his work – and, remarkably, he was perhaps the last filmmaker working prolifically at the start of the 21st century to claim such a direct lineage.

An assistant on the mainstream Brazilian song and dance *chanchadas*, dos Santos was also drawn to newsreel filmmaking starting in the late 40s. The confluence of the two genres led him to the docu-realistic *Rio, 40 Degrees*. Breaking from classical representation, the film and its subsequent spiritual sequel *Rio zona norte* (1957) – which tipped heavily to the commercial *chanchada* form – set the tone for films dealing with poor and marginal communities in Brazil.

Dos Santos's next phase, departing from neorealism and plunging into a counter-cinema style, was one of unrivalled ambition: adapting some of the most challenging Brazilian literary works of the 19th and early 20th century to the screen. The result of this period is still staggering: the austere migrant tale *Barren Lives* (*Vidas secas*, 1962), based on the novel by Graciliano Ramos; *The Alienist* (*Azyllo muito louco*, 1970), a transformation of Machado de Assis's political allegory into a veiled commentary about Brazil's then-military regime; *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (*Como era gostoso meu francês*, 1971), which takes as its primary source the foundational Anthropophagic Manifesto by cultural cannibalist Oswald de Andrade; and *Memories of Prison* (*Memórias do cárcere*, 1984), which returned dos Santos to Ramos, this time tackling the author's prison years as a communist dissident in 30s Brazil (an experience that sharply resonated at the tail-end of Brazil's second-wave dictatorship).

Dos Santos' work encompasses much of the last 250 years of Brazilian history, in all of its forms. In the revival period of Brazilian film following a lengthy drought, the country's most exported contemporary directors (Walter Salles, Fernando Meirelles) seemed to have fully absorbed dos Santos's example. And for the first time in his storied career, the director began to operate in a minor key, as a TV documentarian covering subjects as varied as the musician Tom Jobim, the Portuguese language and, most presciently, political corruption.

Gabe Klinger, *Sight and Sound*, March 2019

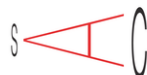
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