

Jason Wood on *Our Time*

There are few more original and uncompromising auteurs working today than Carlos Reygadas. The director of *Japan* (*Japón*, 2002), *Battle in Heaven* (*Batalla en el cielo*, 2005), *Silent Light* (*Stellet Licht*, 2007) and the infinitely enigmatic *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), Reygadas is unique among Mexican contemporaries such as del Toro, Iñárritu and Cuarón, and possesses an artistic aesthetic and sensibility all of his very own. He is a filmmaker for whom sound is as important as image. For Reygadas, cinema is all about tone and texture.

Like his previous work, *Our Time* (*Nuestro tiempo*, 2018) is a hypnotic and provocative meditation on issues of the physical, spiritual and existential variety. Reygadas has always enjoyed making his audience uncomfortable, forcing them to engage with his work in a manner that is perhaps alien to more mainstream cinema. It's a commitment, if accepted, that pays rich dividends.

Featuring the director and his wife Natalia López (an editor who has worked with Reygadas, Amat Escalante and Lisandro Alonso) in the lead roles, the film follows Juan and Esther as they live on their remote but idyllic cattle ranch with their children. The couple has until now enjoyed an open relationship, but when Esther falls in love with an American horse trainer, she stops sharing details of her affair with her husband. The pain of not being in control leads Juan to question the conjugal arrangement and his own limitations, and slowly but surely, he begins to unravel, losing himself in a maelstrom of punishing recriminations and jealous emotions.

Produced by Jaime Romandía (Reygadas' long-term collaborator) and gorgeously and sensuously shot by Diego García (who also acted as the cinematographer on Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendour*), the film initially ruminates on life at the ranch (punctuated by excursions to Mexico City) and the joy of a rural existence unburdened by convention. The lives of the children (played by the real-life progeny of Reygadas and López) seem especially carefree and idyllic as they frolic and play among nature. Clouds begin to gather, however, and *Our Time* seamlessly segues into an incredibly courageous and bracingly raw portrait of a marriage in crisis, that is unafraid to blur the lines between fact and fiction. Initially evocative of Atom Egoyan's *Calendar* (1993),

the stakes here are arguably higher as the viewer is invited to ruminate on how much we are seeing is torn from reality.

An elemental and endlessly fascinating work that contrasts the brutality of nature with the propensity for violence triggered by human emotions, *Our Time* reminds us that film and filming is an act of voyeurism. It will leave you shaken and stirred.

Jason Wood is a writer and curator.