

Press Release

Gael García Bernal discussed his life as an actor, working with directors and his international film career in 3rd Qumra Master Class

Moderated by Richard Pēna, the session showed clips from García Bernal's previous films including Amores Perros and Y Tu Mamá También.

Doha, Qatar – 9 March, 2015: Mexican actor/director/producer Gael García Bernal surprised audiences at the third Qumra Master Class on Monday saying he really didn't want to become an actor, in a session in which he talked about his acting life, his experiences working with different directors and the international nature of his film career.

As one of the Qumra Masters, Gael Garcia Bernal will also be mentoring four filmmakers whose projects are participating in an intensive development programme including Ali Hammoud's feature documentary **Asphalt** (Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Saudia Arabia, Qatar), Reem Saleh's documentary **What Comes Around** about one of the poorest neighborhoods in Cairo (Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar), **Salaam Plenty**, Yasmine Kassari's documentary about the movements of Afghan diaspora (Morocco, Australia, Belgium, Qatar) and Anoucha Suwichakornpong's feature about the complexity of life in **By The Time It Gets Dark** (Thailand, France, Qatar).

Garcia Bernal began acting at an early age in the theatre in Mexico and also at age 10 or 11 acted in a telenovella. "It is exactly what the clichés say – they are made with a lot of haste and they look really bad, they are not worried about what the finished product looks like. But it was interesting and I was fortunate in a way because I realised how bad things can go so I learnt from an early age what not to do."

He went on to study acting at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London and said of his experience: "They deconstructed me. I came in thinking I knew it all, I had a lot of prejudices, thought I knew better and there was nothing I was going to be taught. I was really wrong, like most of us are."

Talking of the films he was interested in growing up, Garcia Bernal referenced the work of Wim Wenders, Akira Kurosawa, Theo Angelopoulos, Rainer Werner Fassbender and Werner Herzog as all directors he was exposed to when he cut school and went to the cinema.

"It was prior to the internet. You would walk in to a cinema not really knowing what you were going to see and it was really incredible, your own discovery, it was accidental, it opened up this whole world to me."

Speaking about the state of Mexican cinema when he was a teenager starting his career, Garcia Bernal said unlike in the 1960s and 70s Mexican cinema was at its lowest point in modern day history:

“There were hardly any films made and directors like Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo del Toro were still at film school. There wasn’t much happening so your only expectation when doing a Mexican film was that it might be seen in a little forum and that was it. Mexican films weren’t getting released in big cinemas.”

That all changed with the first script Garcia Bernal ever read - **Amores Perros**, which became his first film and he says came about by Iñárritu, at the time a famous radio DJ in Mexico, seeing Garcia Bernal in a play and asking him to audition.

“He called me up and I said ‘I want to do it’ – he said read the script first, take your time. I’d said no to three other films so it was destiny. It’s important to learn how to say no early on. If I hadn’t said no **Amores Perros** wouldn’t’ve been my first film and it was important that it was my first film.”

Faking a ‘tropical illness to miss a week of school’ to complete filming, Garcia Bernal described the innocence with which the film was made. “We didn’t really know what we were doing, the camera came very close and at times was out of focus, but it was groundbreaking in many ways.”

Garcia Bernal says he asked for a VHS copy of the film at the end to show his family. “I never got the VHS copy because the film was seen all over the world and had a worldwide release. That was very strange for a non-English language film to get that kind of release then. It almost certainly changed Mexican cinema, it put a spotlight on a new Continent and also a new landmark in world cinema.”

With **Y Tu Mamá También**, Garcia Bernal said they worked for three months and in way Cuaron and the DP on the film showed him how the filmmaking process worked.

“It was such an amazing, loving experience – it’s very rare to do a film about love. This is the only character that I think – I wonder what he’s doing now. He is the character I think I most resemble in terms of social upbringing.”

When working with directors, Garcia Bernal said there were “no strict rules in what to do and what not to do.” However he stressed the need for directors to use verbs that are ‘actable’ – to describe the action of a character and who a character wants to be which creates movement and dramatic tension.

He joked about the differences of making films in different countries: “In Italy, they don’t know when to shut up, in Mexico you get the best crew, In Sweden, you only work for 8 hours a day

including lunch so the shoots goes on for weeks, In England they say cut for lunch and you go – oh no!”

When asked about his decision to stay in Mexico rather than move to the US when he became successful, he said: “My decision was easy. I realised I didn’t have to live in the US to work there. And what film could I get offered from Hollywood that beats **Motorcycle Diaries**?”

He described his own move into producing and directing as a natural progression and said he wants to direct a film next year in Mexico City.

Asked about how you deal with prejudice and address stereotypes in movies, Garcia Bernal said: I don’t see myself as having to try and break down stereotypes. . There is no such thing as a typical Mexican. The best way to break a taboo is to not recognise it so I ignore it.”

Garcia Bernal said he is also passionate about Ambulante, the documentary festival in Mexico which he sponsors with **Y Tu Mamá También** star and close friend Diego Luna. The festival travels documentaries between 16-18 cities in Mexico a two to three month period. “It’s the best thing we’ve ever done,” he said. “It’s a fascinating and incredible project. The most helpful thing about it is that documentaries have a real social function, it eliminates the single discourse and opens up discussion. Our motto is to discover, to share, to transform. It has become a fulcrum of social change in Mexico and I think it’s one of the most original festivals in the world.”

-ENDS-

About Qumra:

Qumra is an initiative that seeks to provide mentorship, nurturing and hands-on development for filmmakers from Qatar and around the world, alongside a series of screenings for Doha audiences featuring films by international masters and recipients of support from the Institute.

** The Arabic term ‘qumra’ is popularly said to be the origin of the word ‘camera’, and to have been used by the scientist, astronomer and mathematician Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham, 965-c.1040 CE), whose work in optics laid out the principles of the camera obscura.*

About Doha Film Institute:

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute’s platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar’s 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Doha Film Institute

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