

A Poet

(Un Poeta)

A film by Simón Mesa Soto



120 mins/ Colombia/Germany/Sweden 2025 / In Spanish

Cannes Film Festival 2025 Un Certain Regard – Prix du Jury

Opening date Autumn 2026

FOR ALL UK PRESS ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Sue Porter/Lizzie Frith – Porter Frith Ltd

Tel. 07940 584066/07825 603705 porterfrith@hotmail.com

FOR ALL OTHER ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT

Robert Beeson – robert@newwavefilms.co.uk

Dena Blakeman – dena@newwavefilms.co.uk

info@newwavefilms.co.uk





SYNOPSIS

Óscar Restrepo's obsession with poetry has brought him no glory. Unemployed and self-destructive, he has succumbed to the cliché of the tortured poet.

After getting a teaching job, he meets Yurlady, a teenage girl with a poetical talent from a marginal family. To help her cultivate her gifts may bring him some redemption. But dragging her into the world of poets may not be the way.

BBFC cert tbc

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CAST

Ubeimar Rios
Rebeca Andrade
Guillermo Cardona
Allison Correa
Margarita Soto
Humberto Restrepo

Óscar
Yurlady
Efraín
Daniela
Teresita
Alonso

CREW

Written & directed by
Cinematography
Art director
Editor
Sound
Original Music
Producers

Production

Co-Producers

Co-production

With the support of

Simón Mesa Soto
Juan Sarmiento G., ADFC, BVK
Camila Agudelo
Ricardo Saravia
Eloisa Arcila, Ted Krotkiewski
Matti Bye, Trio Ramberget
Juan Sarmiento G.,
Manuel Ruiz Montealegre,
Simón Mesa Soto
Ocúltimo,
Medio de Contención Producciones
Katharina Bergfeld, David Herdies,
Michael Krotkiewski, Heino Deckert,
Kristina Börjeson
Majade Fiction,
ZDF Das kleine Fernsehspiel, ARTE,
Memento Film, Film i Väst
Cine Crea Colombia
Swedish Film Institute
Comisión Fílmica de Medellín

Colombia / Germany / Sweden 120 mins
Super 16mm / 4K - Ratio 1:66 – 5.1

SIMÓN MESA SOTO

Simón Mesa Soto is a Colombian director, screenwriter and producer. He studied Audiovisual Communication at the University of Antioquia and later pursued a Master's degree at the London Film School. His thesis film, *Leidi*, won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival 2014. With his next short film, *Mother*, he was again selected in the Official Competition of the Cannes Film Festival 2016.

Both short films were widely screened at festivals around the world. *Amparo*, his first feature film, premiered at the Cannes Critics' Week 2021, where it won the Louis Roederer Foundation Rising Star Award for the its lead actress. The film has toured more than fifty film festivals around the world and has won awards in Havana, Chicago, Lima and Punta del Este, among other festivals. *Amparo* was the big winner of the Colombian Film Academy's Macondo Awards 2022, winning seven awards including Best Director and Best Film. *A Poet* is his second feature film.



FILMOGRAPHY

2025 - **A POET** – Cannes Un Certain Regard

2021 - **AMPARO** - Cannes Critics' Week

2016 - **MOTHER** - Short film Competition Cannes Film Festival 2016

2014 - **LEIDI** - Cannes Film Festival 2014 - Short Film Palme d'Or

INTERVIEW

With Simón Mesa Soto

Where does this story of a failed old poet come from? What did you want to explore?

It's the most personal project I've ever made. It began with an intimate question: what if I failed at art? Making films in Colombia is incredibly difficult, and after my first feature, I seriously considered giving up. I pictured myself at fifty, making a living as a teacher — which, in fact, is still how I pay the bills — and surviving on idealized memories of a past life in art. I also wanted to explore art from the inside: what it means to create, the limitations it imposes, the compromises it demands. The film grew out of a kind of exhaustion with the machinery of art, and from a longing to make something free, unshaped, with a spirit that felt almost punk. It was a way of reconnecting with what cinema once meant to me. Rather than portray myself as a filmmaker, I chose the figure of a poet, because being a poet is, if anything, even more utopian.

The film asks what art is and what it's for. And it explores these questions through poetry, the least industrial form of art there is.

Art is often seen as something noble, but it's also an industry, even when it is independent. In cinema, for instance, there's a market that dictates what audiences expect to see: certain patterns repeat, especially in Latin American cinema. As an artist, you must decide whether to cater to this external demand or question what truly drives you. I wanted to return to something more pure: a raw, visceral form of art that's less mechanical. That's when poetry emerged. It wasn't a strategic choice, but an intuitive one. In my city, Medellín, I have met many poets who don't fit the idealized mould. They're streetwise, punk, very real, and I found them more fascinating than the filmmaker figure. Poetry has an anachronistic quality — it feels as though it still exists in the past, and

that aspect resonated with me for this story. For instance, poetry readings seem almost timeless, removed from the idea of art as something utilitarian or marketable. Within that realm, there are contradictions and a very specific kind of humour that I wanted to explore through dark comedy.



The bond between Óscar and Yurlady is central to the film. What did you hope to explore through their teacher-student relationship? Is there a form of mutual salvation in it?

Yes, absolutely. Through that relationship, I wanted to explore several dilemmas I encounter in making art, especially in a place like Colombia, where social inequalities are so pronounced. Art, and cinema in particular, often operates within a logic where the creator, from a more privileged position, transforms the “other,” the less privileged character, into raw material for their work. This raises an uncomfortable question: how do you represent that “other” without stripping them of their true essence? The relationship between Óscar and Yurlady helped me address that, because she’s neither an idealized figure nor a great literary prodigy; she simply writes because she enjoys it, because she needs to. On the other hand, he’s worn out, disillusioned. In their encounter, I believe they illuminate each other: she embodies a purer, freer form of art, less contaminated by the market or the need for validation. And that forces him to confront what he’s lost. So yes, there’s a kind of mutual salvation, but not in a romantic sense, more as a chance to reconnect with what’s truly essential.

A Poet moves between comedy and drama, parody and tragedy, in a very delicate balance. How did you manage to mix those tones?

I didn't have a clear formula, to be honest. I relied a lot on intuition. Even while writing, I was already envisioning small gags and subtle comedic moments, trusting they would work once filmed. But that's something you never really know until the film meets the audience, so I'm still waiting to see. With this second film, I primarily wanted to enjoy the process. With the first one, I was extremely stressed, full of anxiety. This time, I aimed to make the experience enjoyable, even liberating — like a personal exorcism.

Comedy helped with that: it allowed me to play, to laugh at myself, at what it means to be an artist. And at the same time, to use comedy as a means of addressing serious topics. Hopefully, that mix works, because for me, it was essential not to create a rigid film, but one that could move freely across different registers.

Your film might evoke New York Jewish comedy — with the clarinet leitmotif in the soundtrack — or a certain kind of Argentine humour. Do you recognize those influences?

Yes, absolutely. In fact, it was really difficult to finance the film because of that. A Colombian comedy about poets didn't fit the stereotypes the market expects from a film made in my country. People told us it felt like an Argentine comedy or a Woody Allen film, and of course, when that kind of movie comes from Argentina, it makes sense and sells. But when it comes from Colombia, no one knows what to do with it. There are clear nods to the comedies you mentioned: the clarinet is an obvious parody, an absurd homage to that world of New York poets, so intellectual and sophisticated, but it's placed in a completely different context, embodied by a guy from Medellín, nostalgic, a little pathetic, pretending to be Bukowski. That dissonance felt both funny and powerful to me, playing with the contrast between what the character thinks he is and what he truly is. That tension is very much present in the film's overall tone.

How did you find Ubeimar Ríos and what made you trust him with the lead role?

He's the uncle of a friend, and one day my friend told me, "Look, this is your poet," and sent me his profile. Ubeimar is a schoolteacher who lives in a town outside Medellín, writes columns for local newspapers, has an interest in

poetry and music, and organizes cultural events. He has a unique way of speaking and moving that I found fascinating. Initially, I didn't cast him because I was set on working with professional actors. In previous projects, I had worked with non-professionals, and this time I wanted to try something different. But Ubeimar stuck with me, and I called him back.

He was recovering from surgery, so we went to the finca where he lives to do a casting, and it was obvious: there was an immediate, intuitive connection with the character. What happened next was beautiful: Óscar, in the script, was a less likable character, but Ubeimar brought a humanity to him that wasn't written. During the shoot, everyone grew fond of him. That changed everything. His presence softened the character, and despite his flaws, he became more endearing.



And Rebeca Andrade, who plays Yurlady? Why did you choose her?

The process with Rebeca was lengthy, especially in understanding the character. We held auditions at schools and high schools across Medellín for a long time. We saw many girls, but we finally found her in a public school. From there, we began an intensive preparation process with both actors, along with a coach and a team that worked with them for two months. It was a very constructive process — we went over each scene, one by one. Ubeimar had to temporarily leave his teaching job to fully commit to this acting training. It was

a huge transformation. That's when I realized that, in the end, it's not about finding actors or non-actors, it's about finding the right person for the character.

Where did you shoot the film? Is there also a social portrait, a view of class and its tensions in the film?

Yes, absolutely. We shot in Medellín, which is where I live and where I've made all my films. And from the start I wanted to highlight the difference in social classes. Óscar comes from a middle-class background, while Yurlady comes from a lower one. That tension is very common in Medellín, a city with very marked social contrasts. I wanted to address that conflict through comedy. There's a reflection on art and its social dilemmas, on how art confronts, or doesn't confront, those tensions. In Latin America, art tends to be very political, very social, and I wanted to play with that: with the expectation that a Colombian film must address certain themes, in a certain way.



Why was it important to shoot on 16mm?

I was looking for an aesthetic that evoked the past, because these poets are somewhat from another era. On the other hand, the film talks about certain dilemmas of middle-aged men, that time between youth and adulthood when

you already start to feel outdated. I'm 39 and I'm in that place too, between two generations. I sometimes find myself rejecting the new, and other times the old. It made sense for everything to have a slightly outdated texture. Shooting on 16mm helped give the film's world a kind of '80s look, gritty, rough, a bit like John Cassavetes. We didn't want a clean, shiny, digital image. We wanted something uglier, more imperfect, adding another aesthetic and emotional layer to the film. And, of course, it was a personal pleasure: shooting on 16mm is a very special experience for any filmmaker.

It's also a story of reconciliation between a father and a daughter. Were you interested in showing that through a surrogate figure, this "false daughter" embodied by Yurlady?

The father is usually a distant figure, and the artist even more so. There's this very strong cliché: the Bukowski-type artist is always a bad father, disastrous, egocentric. You know, all those clichés of manhood and artistry. And while I didn't want to completely deny them, I was interested in showing something else: fragility. For me, this was the least interesting character to build a story around, because he's not someone who draws attention. But maybe that's what attracted me most: trying to find some beauty in that man, however small. It was also a kind of exorcism: I wanted to portray my own flaws, doubts, and contradictions.



The film was completed in early 2025 and is already selected at Cannes. Why such a fast production process?

Yes, it was very rushed. We started shooting on January 14 and wrapped around February 16, planning to take a lot of time for editing... but that didn't happen. We also wanted to break away from today's highly structured filmmaking logic: labs, workshops, residencies. Everything is so regulated. And sometimes the most important thing is just to make the film, even if it's not perfect. After shooting, I locked myself in for a month to edit with Ricardo, the editor. We managed to finish a first cut, although we knew it wasn't completely ready. Then we had to decide: keep editing or send it to Cannes? In the end we submitted it — past the deadline, I have to say — and it was crazy because they had already announced part of the official selection. But they watched it, were interested, and invited us. If they hadn't selected it, we would've kept working on it. And even now, I'm not sure it was the best decision, because we're still racing against the clock, finishing postproduction. But I think that unfinished quality suits the film's aesthetic. In most cases, you can only make a movie every three or four years. I'd like to shoot more often, even if with less. That's why I felt okay letting this one go, even if it wasn't perfect — that's probably what defines it.

