



JANUS FILMS



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
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CANNES PREMIERE



# MAGELLAN

*Directed by Lav Diaz*



## NEW YORK PRESS

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Film Info: Portugal, Spain, France, Philippines, Taiwan | 2025 | 160 minutes | Color | Portuguese, Spanish, Tagalog, and French with English subtitles | 1.37:1

## SYNOPSIS

At the dawn of the modern era, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan (Gael García Bernal) navigated a fleet of ships to Southeast Asia, attempting the first voyage across the vast Pacific Ocean. On reaching the Malay Archipelago, the crew pushed to the brink of madness in the harshness of the high seas and overwhelming natural beauty of the islands, Magellan's obsession leads to a rebellion and reckoning with the consequences of power. A vast, globe-spanning epic from Filipino filmmaker Lav Diaz (NORTE, THE END OF HISTORY), MAGELLAN presents the colonization of the Philippines as a primal, shocking encounter with the unknown and a radical retelling of European narratives of discovery and exploration.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENTS

### The Project beginnings

"I've always dreamed of making a film about Magellan. I'm a Filipino, and when Magellan arrived at our shores it was the first "encounter" with the West... and that started a new era for us. When I met Joaquin Sapinho, he came with a proposal to make a film. He sent me books, but Magellan being Portuguese, fate had already decided what we were going to do - my old dream. Then he brought Albert Serra to the project, who I knew already, and everything was settled. We had Portugal and Spain to tell the story. Later my friend Paul Soriano joined in, and we had the Philippines too. I was ready to start this journey... Gael came on board shortly afterwards."

### Reverse shot of Magellan

"It has come full circle: the idea that I wanted to work on the Magellan saga, with our Filipino perspective. My theme is Filipino History. On our side the main characters of this story are Humabon, the king, and Lapu-lapu, the chief that killed Magellan. Lapu-lapu is the great hero of our history. But I believe Lapu-lapu was nothing more than Humabon's creation. After reading a lot of the books and connecting the dots, a good investigator will find this character very questionable. The facts don't add up. I think the film will be revisionist, in a sense.

I believe it's interesting to fight the established cliches. Our biggest problem in the Philippines is myth-making. You can say that it started when we created this thing, Lapu-lapu. Nobody ever saw him, he probably never existed. It was a myth from the very beginning. Now, we have demagogues because of myth-making. We had Marcos Senior, the dictator. Very recently we had Duterte. They became leaders because of myth-making. So, it's a model for organizing society. It's very difficult to live in the real world with this myth-making, because we are always being fooled."

### Magellan as a model

"Magellan has always been the paradigm to all explorers, to anybody who wants to go beyond, like astronauts. Magellan is always on their mind - the Magellan saga, the Magellan journey. But Magellan is also a model, a paradigm to anybody who seeks to find different possibilities. Like in cinema, where we think that we can still push the medium somewhere, so does Magellan look at the world and declare "we'll find something nowhere". It's the romantic dream of another way to have a paradise on earth, to discover it. Magellan knew that he couldn't be king. But he could find a place somewhere where he could fulfil his dreams, his ambitions. Magellan was so ahead of his time, just like Vasco de Gama and all the other explorers, because they knew that there was something more somewhere out there. Cinema for me is like that. We can still push it somewhere. I think if you keep pushing cinema, then you'll find something new, you'll find something more relevant. It's like a vision.

Or something about fear, where we must destroy every wall of fear so that we can find new frontiers. We'll still find some islands of gold somewhere."

### **Beatriz, the wife**

"There was also Beatriz, Magellan's wife. She was just a footnote, three lines, four lines, that's the most you can read about her. So, it gives us this impetus to really create something around her, connecting her deeply with Magellan. Beatriz is very important for the way Magellan thought about exploring the world, because she's within him, his heart, his soul. I think Beatriz is the soul of Magellan. Beatriz, and the children, of course. I think he had that dream of having a family, after the expedition. So, it was like a promise, a dream, of bringing his own family to the Islands of Gold someday. I think it was in his mind. No matter how pompous he became towards the end, I think the simplest and the purest dream of Magellan is to have that family united one day, to be whole again. It's this mystery of people that change places, that on one side they want to be in another society, in another world, but they also want to bring their own world to that society. The idea of home as a family unit. So, I think Magellan had that in his mind, despite his great ambition and vision, as conqueror and explorer. I think his purest dream was to be home one day, to have a kind of homecoming in another place. The film will have a nine-hour version, in which all this story of Beatriz will be revealed."

### **Conversion**

"On the other hand, there is this idea of encounter, of contact, and its lasting effects. Today 80% of the Philippines is still Catholic, and in fact, the biggest religious icon in the Philippines is the Santo Niño, which came with Magellan. We celebrate the Santo Niño in so many places in our country, so the impact is still felt today. The whole conversion started with the Santo Niño. The scene in my film where the son of Humabon was cured was a reenactment of a real event. It really happened. It's from Pigafetta's diary. The conversion really started when the Queen of Cebu, the wife of Humabon, started preaching that it was real, that the Santo Niño could really cure people. That's the real reason why the conversion of the entire island of Cebu was made in just four days. Why was it so fast? The Filipinos were already very religious and spiritual then, we had the 'anitos', of course. We believe that everything that exists in the world has a spirit: we have the god of the trees, the god of the river, the god of the seas... That's why, when Magellan ordered the destruction of the 'anitos', Humabon changed his mind. He started plotting the destruction of Magellan. But what we feel now is that this was the original religion of the Philippines. Christianity gave a kind of unity to this spirituality, which is why we embrace Catholicism so much. It is also related to the way we deal with spirits or gods. We believe that there's healing from the supernatural. Suffering and sacrifice are very much connected to it. So, when Magellan started converting the Filipinos, it was very quick."

## **Cinema of one-take, one-frame and non-actors / actors**

“I want to film history. So it’s very important for me to film the people. That’s why I like to mix professional actors and non-actors. I have worked with some of the most important actors in the Philippines. A professional actor can really work around what’s happening. They have the tools, the technique, they know how to use space, how to use everything around them. But a non-actor can be very, very awkward and this creates something. For me, the nervousness, the very primal reaction of a non-actor to a professional actor is very interesting. I like that tension; I think it is needed for the film to work. It’s like theatre where you can’t go back from what you did. As I do just one take, I raise the tension even further. It will come – something will come out of this tension.

I want to see reality happen. I want to see something happen without my manipulation. The way we do it in conventional movie-making where we can easily correct things by doing a lot of shots – I want to subvert that, the so-called easiness of doing things repeatedly until it is just right. To subvert what’s been done in a way where I want to see one unified thing. Just being the observer, just being the witness in a way. Everything happens without manipulation. It’s still manipulation, of course. You’re still reenacting everything, you’re still dramatizing something, but in one take, one frame, it will be harder for the actors. And the tension that’s being created like that is good. It’s like an event. Every shot is an event.”

### **Gael**

“Gael is on another level. He is a great actor who is used to working across all mediums: theatre, television and cinema. What was amazing is that he also adapted to my method. At some point he just went with the flow. I feel that the film became more spiritual than I had originally thought. Gael was really in touch with Magellan, with the character of someone who knows his mortality. The film became much more spiritual in the last act because at the end Magellan finds a deeper understanding of life. He knows that he can’t go back to Europe and he can’t go anywhere else. They were 60 Europeans against 1500 Filipinos. He knew he couldn’t win. But he just went with it, and he accepted his fate. In a way, it was the same with Gael. He himself wasn’t dying, but he accepted that he was dying. Gael entered the realm of the soul. That’s the power of cinema. It’s like we just show things; we’re just witnesses to what’s happening. Gael really became Magellan.”

## CAST

Fernão de Magalhães	Gael García Bernal
Beatriz Barbosa de Magalhães	Ângela Azevedo
Enrique Amado	Arjay Babon
Raja Humabon	Ronnie Lazaro
Juana	Hazel Orencio
Francisco Serrão	Tomás Alves
Raja Kulambo	Bong Cabrera
Padre Pero de la Reina	Baptiste Pintaux
Serving girl	Chloe Maayan
Bispo Juan de Fonseca	Brontis Jodorowsky

## Crew

Director and Screenwriter	Lav Diaz
DOP	Artur Tort, Lav Diaz
Production Designer	Lav Diaz
Art Director	Isabel Garcia, Allen Alzola
Editors	Artur Tort, Lav Diaz
Costume Design	Célia Fernandes, Kim Perez
Sound	Emmanuel Bonnat, Cecil Buban
VFX	Arnaud Chelet
Production	Rosa Filmes (Joaquim Sapinho, Marta Alves) Andergraun Films (Albert Serra, Montse Triola) Black Cap Pictures (Paul Soriano, Mark Viktor) Lib Films (Joaquim Sapinho, Albert Serra)
Co-production	El Viaje Films, Volos Films, Ten17P, Ultramarina Filmes
World Sales	Luxbox