

AFTER THE PAIN - materials

Logline

Bound by a promise they made 10 years earlier, two lifelong friends travel from Brazil to Sweden in search of the Northern Lights, where grief, memory, and the difficult work of survival reshape their bond and their sense of the future.

Synopsis

After the Pain follows a 29-year-old trans man and his 31-year-old best friend, two lifelong friends who travel from Brazil to Sweden to fulfill a promise they made years earlier: If he fought his depression and committed himself to building a better life, then in ten years they would travel together in search of the Northern Lights. The promise is rooted in a childhood memory, when a scientific documentary about the aurora borealis first lodged itself in their imagination.

Now, the trip finally happens. In Stockholm, what begins as a long-awaited journey slowly turns into a reckoning. As they move through hotel rooms, churches, bars, museums, and unfamiliar streets, old tensions resurface. He is still learning how to live with the scars of survival. She carries the grief of her mother's death, the memory of almost losing him, and the joy and uncertainty of finally becoming a mother herself.

Their journey north unfolds through small ruptures and revelations: nights of drinking and confession, memories of childhood faith, and the discovery that life has already begun to change in ways neither of them can control. As they leave the city behind and drive north toward a remote village where they hope to witness the Northern Lights, the journey becomes more than the fulfillment of an old promise. On the road, they begin to rediscover their friendship — and with it, the fragile fuel to keep living, imagining, and dreaming beyond survival.

Artist Statement / Creative Approach

After the Pain is a very personal film for me. It comes from my own experience of survival, and from a friendship that carried me through some of the hardest moments of my life. More than anything, I'm interested in what comes after a crisis. Not trauma as spectacle, but the fragile, stubborn, sometimes even beautiful work of staying alive. For me, this is a film about friendship as care — something that can hold, protect, irritate, witness, and save.

The film follows two lifelong friends who travel from Brazil to Sweden to fulfill a promise they made years earlier: if he kept fighting his depression and committed himself to building a better life, then in ten years they would go together in search of the Northern Lights. What begins as the fulfillment of that promise slowly becomes something deeper — a journey through memory, grief, displacement, tenderness, and hope. I'm drawn to this story because it allows the film to move between pain and humor, distance and intimacy, silence and affection. I want the friendship at its center to feel lived-in and true — not idealized, but specific, contradictory, and marked by time. The kind of bond that can hold both exhaustion and love, irritation and devotion.

As an autistic trans filmmaker, these parts of who I am shape not only what I want to talk about, but how I make films. I'm very attentive to sensory experience: the weight of sound, the tension between noise and silence, repetition, overstimulation, texture, rhythm, and the emotional atmosphere of a place. I'm also deeply attentive to the body — as something lived, negotiated, remembered, and seen. That affects how I write gestures, discomfort, vulnerability, and presence. In *After the Pain*, I want the audience to feel the characters' relationship to the world through atmosphere, duration, and physical detail, not only through dialogue or plot.

Formally, I see the film as intimate, observational, and tactile. I'm drawn to long takes, quiet frames, ambient sound, and natural light. I want the camera to stay close enough to catch small emotional shifts, but never in a way that turns pain into performance. I want the film to have room for pauses, hesitation, awkwardness, and for the things that remain unsaid. Its language should come from bodies, weather, silence, small gestures, and the unstable relationship between memory and the present.

Shooting on 16mm is essential to the project. The grain, softness, and instability of film feel very close to the emotional world of the story. I'm not interested in an image that feels too clean or sealed off. I want something more fragile, more porous, more alive. For me, 16mm brings both tenderness and imperfection. It also deepens the film's relationship to memory, because this is a story shaped not only by what is happening now, but by what still lingers and keeps returning.

I'm also interested in using projection, sonic contrast, and spatial tension to express interior states without explaining them too much. Sweden matters not only as a location, but as a feeling. In this film, displacement is both geographic and emotional. The characters are far from home, but they are also trying to find their way back into their own histories, their own bodies, and their own futures. I want the form of the film to reflect that instability: warmth interrupted by estrangement, beauty interrupted by discomfort, laughter interrupted by memory.

At its heart, *After the Pain* is a love letter — to a friend, to survival, and to the difficult possibility of hope. I want to make a film that honors the people who stay beside us in our worst moments, and that understands survival not as triumph, but as something ongoing. This is the most personal and vulnerable project I've made so far, and also the clearest expression of my voice as a filmmaker. With this film, I want to make something that does not look away from pain, but still asks what tenderness, connection, and future might be possible after it.

CV / Resume

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Nicolau de Oliveira Araújo is a Brazilian writer-director whose work explores queer, sensory-driven cinema through analog practices. Currently in post-production on his 16mm short film *Ingrown* and developing his debut feature *After the Pain*, also conceived for 16mm, his films have screened internationally for over a decade. His latest short, *Shedding (Descamar)*, screened in 15 countries and received 17 awards, including Best Screenplay at the 57th Brasília Film Festival and an Honorable Mention at the Academy Award-qualifying Athens International Film + Video Festival. His debut short won Best Latin American Short Film at the Marbella Film Festival, and *Hidden Walls* screened in 12 countries.

Alongside his filmmaking practice, Nicolau works across teaching, research, publishing, accessibility, and audiovisual preservation. He is a partner at *relatar_se* and teaches film and audiovisual studies at the Federal Institute of Brasília (IFB), a public federal education institution in Brazil. As a trans autistic filmmaker, his work is deeply shaped by questions of care, perception, memory, and the experience of moving through the world in a vulnerable body.

His professional experience also includes executive production, editorial work, and cultural accessibility for films, books, courses, and live events. He has worked as an accessibility producer on multiple Brazilian audiovisual projects and served as an accessibility consultant for the United Nations–Habitat Safer Cities Project. He is the author of two books, *Som de Água Corrente* and *Anatomia da Aatoria*, and also develops projects in film preservation.

He holds a degree in Social Communication, graduate training in Film Directing and Audiovisual Production, and conducts doctoral research in Cinema at NOVA University Lisbon focused on the economics of analog film production in Brazil.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

All works written and directed by Nicolau de Oliveira Araújo.

DESCAMAR (SHEDDING)

2024 | Short Film | Writer-Director

Selected Festivals: Janela Internacional de Cinema do Recife (Brazil); Oberá en Cortos – Festival Internacional de Cine por la Identidad y la Diversidad Cultural (Argentina); Festival Internacional de Cine de Derechos Humanos – FICDH (Argentina); ilCORTO.it Festa Internazionale di Roma (Italy); Les Mains Gauches (France); Vochocinema Festival del Telol (Mexico); Bmore Horror Fest (USA).

Awards / Nominations: Honorable Mention, Athens International Film + Video Festival, USA, 2024; Best Film (*Mejor Película*), XV Muestra Audiovisual Cortos de la Polis Joven, Costa Rica, 2024; Honorable Mention, Delhi Shorts International Film Festival, India, 2024; Honorable Mention, Los Angeles Short Film Award, USA, 2024; Best Performance (*Meilleure Interprétation*), Les Regards de l'ICART Festival, France, 2026.

PAREDES CLANDESTINAS (HIDDEN WALLS)

2019 | Short Film | Writer-Director

Selected Festivals: Transnational Queer Underground (Berlin / Estonia / Czech Republic / Bulgaria / Montenegro, 2019); Cayenne Film Festival, New York (USA); Audience Awards LGBTQ Film Festival (USA); Cefalù Film Festival (Italy); First Filmmaker Film Festival (United Kingdom); Les Mains Gauches – Queer Feminist Short Movies (France); DIGO Festival (Brazil); Festival Guarnicê de Cinema (Brazil).

Awards / Nominations: Best Art Direction (Melhor Direção de Arte), Festival do Paranoá, Brazil, 2019; Best Original Score (Melhor Trilha Sonora), Festival do Paranoá, Brazil, 2019.

COMO LARGAR DE PALHAÇADA (DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH)

2016 | Short Film | Writer-Director

Selected Festivals: Mostra Mulheres Gritam Ação – Instituto Moreira Salles (Brazil, 2017); International Children's Film Festival Bangladesh; Festival Canoa Quebrada (Brazil, 2016); Curta Brasília – International Short Film Festival (Brazil); Mostra das Minas Candangas (Brazil, 2016).

Awards / Nominations: Latino Award for Best Short Film (Premio Latino al Mejor Cortometraje), Premios Latino / Marbella Film Festival, Spain, 2017.