

Pere Vilà Barceló – *When a River Becomes the Sea*

Catalan filmmaker **Pere Vilà Barceló** discusses his haunting drama ***When a River Becomes the Sea***, which screened in the **Crystal Globe Competition** at the **59th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2025**. Shot around Girona, the film explores the aftermath of sexual assault through the eyes of a young woman, Gaia, portrayed by Claud Hernández. Pere speaks about his autodidact filmmaking path, interviewing more than 100 women as part of his research, and his bold cinematic choices — including a seven-minute blackout sequence.

Keywords: Pere Vilà Barceló interview, *When a River Becomes the Sea*, Catalan cinema, Karlovy Vary 2025, gender-based violence in film, Girona filmmaker.

Introduction: I'm Brian, and this is Stream Close Up. Today, we continue our coverage of the Crystal Globe Competition at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. Our guest this episode is Catalan filmmaker Pere Vilà Barceló.

He joins us to talk about his latest film, *When A River Becomes The Sea*. The film tells the story of a young woman named Gaia and how she processes the trauma of sexual assault with the help of her archaeology professor and her father. In *When A River Becomes The Sea*, Pere uses a very light touch, never depicting the assault or the trial, which often becomes a secondary trauma.

He also takes some very daring cinematic risks. Among them, a moving six plus minute scene set in total darkness. It's a thoughtful examination of healing shot in and around Girona.

Let's get right to it. In for his stream close up, Pere Vila y Barceló. Hit it, José.

Brian: Yeah, I think we should give it a go. First, is it Pere?

Pere: It's like Peter

Brian: It's not like Peter at all. It's like Per.

Pere: In Spanish, it's Pedro, or Pedro Almodóvar. In Catalan, it's Pere.

Brian: Pere, Pere Vila Barcello, Barcello? Barcello,

Pere: Pere Vila Barcello.

Brian: Okay, I will mess it up, I'm sorry. I'm famous for getting the names wrong. I apologize in advance.

Pere: Barcello is good, okay, it sounds Italian. It's funny.

Brian: And you're in Girona right now as we speak?

Pere: Yes, now I am in Girona.

Brian: Very nice. As I said, I guess I sent you some questions ahead of time. I didn't have a chance to look at any of your earlier work, but I'd really like to start by hearing a little bit about your background, sort of how you became a filmmaker.

I know you are a writer as well. When did it start? Were you a kid with a camera telling stories?

Were you someone who went to film school? Were you doing commercials? What's your background?

Pere: Maybe when I was in high school, I started writing scripts. But my first idea was to be a screenwriter only. But then I shot a short film.

It was a short as a G-Wood, Tonari Moretti, because I like a lot his cinema. And I felt that I wanted to tell stories through images.

Brian: When you did that, were you studying? Was it doing it yourself, or what was the context of that first short film?

Pere: No, yeah, I did it for myself. About what I studied, I just studied with a screenwriter and director who called Joaquín Jordà, he was a Catalan filmmaker. But then, all my career is just, I do it everything, I do it, I did everything for myself.

I'm not in a school or for a university, it was always, the word is maybe, I don't know in English, autodidact is...

Brian: Autodidact, yeah, self-taught, organic, yeah.

Pere: Yes, yes, it's like this. And about that short film, it was just for, as I said, for my admiration for Nani Moretti's cinema. And that was the beginning.

Brian: And who did you show that for? How was that received? Like, what was the audience for that short film?

Pere: Well, it was... Yes, it was very different, different from now, maybe. I remember, for example, that I didn't send that short to festivals, for example.

I just did that short film for me.

Brian: Did you not know about the whole sort of festival circuit thing, or you just weren't thinking about it, or why didn't you send it out?

Pere: Yes, this, you said this, I, now I remember, there was no moment, the thing, I must send this short film to a festival. I never, it's funny, but I never think, oh, well, maybe this festival, never. It was just for me, and it was just one thing I tried to do with the short.

I sent it to the cinema, and the film is the cinema of Nani Moretti in Rome. And, well, I don't see, I don't, I don't receive any answer, of course. But in my imagination, I was, yes, I think maybe Nani Moretti write me something, or I will be a very good friend for Nani Moretti.

But no, it doesn't happen, never.

Brian: Maybe you, maybe you find something in a next work inspired by your short.

Pere: Yeah. But yes. And, and next, next year for, for that short film, me and my wife went to Rome and we went to his cinema.

But in that moment, he was shooting one of his films. So it's an, it's an impossible meeting, I think. Maybe it's better.

I don't know.

Brian: You don't meet your heroes, they say sometimes. I think this is fascinating because it talks about sort of the two different lanes of film. You're, you say you're an autodidact, you've learned it yourself.

You've learned filmmaking and storytelling, not marketing and film festivals and all of that nonsense. It's that sort of speaks to the fact that there are two different lanes that you're involved with there. So that's your first film.

You do it sort of out of homage to a director that you love. What follows? What's the next work?

And what's the audience for that?

Pere: The next thing is important because.

My first feature film depends in part for this short film. I remember you said that for my first feature film that it was a tough battle because, for example, I remember one question you write me. You said, you are a famous Catalan.

But honestly, I wouldn't say I'm a famous film director here in Catalonia and in Spain. Actually, I think our cinema isn't valued enough, and I think it's more appreciated internationally. I just, for

my first to tell film and for the next short film, the responsibility I feel is to make films in my language and to tell social issues that are close to me and at the same time, universal.

The second, the second short film, it was about my grandmother and about Alzheimer. With that short film, I won a prize from the Elza Peretti Foundation, and it wasn't much money, but I decided to fight to make a feature film. That's why I said it was a tough battle.

But, well, that first feature film is called Railroad Crossing. It was screened at the Rotterdam Film Festival, the BFI in New York, and many other festivals. So I think the effort was worth it.

But it was very difficult here, because this is very important. It's to make films in Catalonia and in Catalan language is very difficult, and it's more difficult to make films in a Spanish language.

It's an additional difficult to try to make mid-films in Catalan language.

Brian: And you still decide to do that because that's your voice, or because you think it's important that there are Catalan stories to be told? As you said, there's also a universal nature, at least to *When The River Becomes The Sea*.

Pere: Yes, both. As you said, *When The River Becomes The Sea* is something absolutely universal. It happens around the world.

But I don't know, I'm Catalan. I feel my emotions in Catalan. I think all the things in Catalan language, I don't know.

Brian: You're dreaming in Catalan, not English. So I get it. That's your space.

Pere: From that, I remember where I dream. I was in Catalan.

Brian: So you said, you know, the two criteria, that one of the criteria is, you know, you want to tell stories that, you know, deal with social issues. That's always a tricky place for art in my mind. Oftentimes, stories that have a sort of a social message as the lead motif come off a little bit preachy, but I don't get that at all from your film.

We'll get into, I guess, *When The River Becomes A Sea in a Minute*. I have a million questions. I took so many notes.

I thought it was lovely and really beautifully done. But before we get there, I talked to a bunch of directors who are in the Karlovy Vary Crystal Globe Competition this year. And it's very interesting that depending on where they come from, the sort of conditions for filmmaking are very, very different.

I talked to some people who have stipends to go away for a year to work on their projects, others who have to scrape everything together themselves and do it by their bootstraps. Is there

sort of any support for film and the arts in Catalan culture? There has to be someone behind it who wants to protect it.

Pere: Yes. But at the end, I think it's not only about the Catalan language, for example, it's something about first, of course, about the subject. And also, I must say, that here, maybe it's our culture.

It's the way how we are. Maybe there are other places that maybe social issues are interesting to talk about. But no, because I think that talking about these social subjects, I think always there's a lot of struggles to make cinema.

For example, in my film, the funding has been mainly private and from local institutions, because it is not only difficult to make films in Catalonia, as I said, but also because the social issues the film deals with. And for example, now I remember that film, I don't remember the name, but maybe all the films of, for example, Samira Magmauvaz. And we can think, no, it's because she's from Iran.

But then we can remember, for example, Ken Loach. And for example, with the first films of Ken Lodge, it was not easy for him to make cinema. I remember some interviews in Ken Lodge, for example, talking about the festivals and talking about when he was selected in Cannes.

And just the same day when he was taking the plane, he received a phone call of the Cannes Festival, who said, no, now you are not selected. Why? What's the reason?

I think it's not a cinematic reason. It's because the subjects, it's because it's very easy, it's very difficult for human people to think about some things and to put themselves, ourselves, in front of the mirror. I think this is the reason.

Brian: You definitely made me think. You forced me to have a conversation with myself. And I'm going to watch your film again with my wife and have a conversation with her about this, because I think I want to hear a woman's point of view.

Before we get too deep into the latest film, can I ask a little bit about your festival experience? You know, does you say that your films maybe resonate more outside of Spain than they do locally? Is it the festivals that take them there?

I mean, is that the mechanism? Is that how the world finds your work?

Pere: Well, yes, I think for this kind of films, it's very important to be in a festival. Just like being selected to the festival, or maybe awards make people talk about the film. Actually, having an award, any kind of award, is very important in general.

In general, the film industry and the festival world, the festival world, are quite ruthless. Maybe this is the word. So if you don't win any award, it doesn't feel like the film stops existing the next day.

You understand?

Brian: No one's talking about it. It's not out there in the ether.

Pere: Yeah, that's the importance of festivals. Even if many people don't know it, the film is being seen by thousands of people all over the world. That's very important.

For example, festivals have recognized my filmography more, especially festivals that take more risks. Rotterdam, for example, with my first film, and festivals especially to program films with these sense, these subjects. There's not a lot of festivals for like, for example, in this case, like Karlovy Vary.

I think they are special in this point of view.

Brian: I think they've curated an amazing slate here. I've been so impressed. It's been such a wide range of storytelling, but then there's some kind of overlapping storytelling.

And that's what kind of leads to my next question. Did you go to Karlovy Vary yourself? Were you there?

Pere: Yeah, yes.

Brian: And so what was your experience like? Did you get to see any other films? That's my first question.

Pere: No, no, no.

Brian: Because I mean, have you have you heard of any of the other films in the competition?

Pere: Yes, I heard about some films and I heard about the film you said in the... I heard about, but it was really impossible for me to see other films. It's a shame because in various years, I really enjoyed going to festivals just to watch films.

It was very important for me to learn more things about cinema and how to explain some kind of movies or understand some kind of stories. But when you have a film selected, it's very difficult. Actually, I think it's impossible.

Brian: Yeah, it's a recurring theme that we hear and I'm kind of saddened by it. I thought spontaneously about The Choir Master because of the subject matter. There's another film in the competition that comes to mind called The Visitor by Vytautas Katkus.

And that's very much in the style of storytelling that you do. Sort of a slower cinema, not dialogue driven. That also makes me think of your work a little bit.

And I thought it would be great for you guys to be able to find each other and see each other's work. I mean, I imagine, like your trip to Italy, that that's what's going on at the film festivals. All you guys are having coffee and beer and sharing the secrets of filmmaking and talking about each other's films.

But I guess it doesn't get to that.

For example, I remember with my first film in Rotterdam, it was easier to talk with other people.

I don't know, it was 20 years ago. So I must say that maybe it has changed a lot. Also, the way that the festivals...

Pere: Well...

Brian: You said ruthless before. Do you feel like you're competing against other filmmakers, or is that more of the business side in general that you're talking about?

Pere: That the business, the business. It's about the business side. It's about the film industry.

The Q&A, no, it wasn't the Q&A, it was the meet and greet. And I remember after the meet and greet, a woman come to me, and she started to speaking, and she said that, thank you, thank you for the emotions of the film, thank you, Piscille, for the story. And I was listening what she was saying to me, and suddenly I realized that something was happening, something was different in that moment.

And the reason was finally, when she said to me that she lived in the past, well, it was just 30 years old, but in the past she lived the same experiences that I talk about in my film.

Brian: I think they're probably too common, as you said earlier, a very universal theme.

Pere: Yes, I was very surprised about that, because before the festival, I tried to find through the internet what was happened about the gender-based violence in the Czech Republic. And I didn't find anything. So I know that it's absolutely impossible that gender-based violence didn't happen.

Brian: It doesn't exist. No one's talking about it. It can't happen.

It doesn't exist. It's that simple, right?

No.

Pere: Yes, but then I don't remember her name right now, for example, but I remember her face.

This is the most important. And I must say that, for me, is more important, this woman than the award, for example.

Brian: I was gonna save that question. What do you want to get from people who see the film? But obviously that's an amazing response right there.

Can we just go back one step so that people listening have a little bit more context. When you presented *When A River Becomes A Sea* at Karlovy Vary, what did you say about it? Just to give people an idea of the film that we're talking about now.

Pere: Yes. I just wanted to emphasize the importance that behind all the images in the film, there were the voices of more than 100 women I interviewed during the film's research process.

Brian: Can I interrupt? Because I'm very fascinated to sort of understand how this all came about. When did the story come to you and how developed was it?

Was it a script? Was it a short story? Was it just an idea?

When did you get on board?

Pere: Well, it was born out of an educational project in a high school, and while teaching film classes to 17 years old, I proposed shooting a short film about gender-based violence.

The next day, some girls came to talk to me and told me that a friend of Dave's from the school had been raped a few months earlier. That was eight years ago, and that's when this long process to make the film began until now. It's all about this film began that day.

And it was in a high school. It was because sometimes I go to high schools to make some classes, or sometimes the word in Catalan is taller o taller, it's workshops. It's in that case, from the beginning, from the first day, I wanted to say that this year we will talk about gender-based violence.

This will be what we will be shooting at the end of the course of the year.

I felt the need to explain gender-based violence among young people.

This girl I'm talking about, she was 14 years old. And she was in the high school.

I remember every day, I went to high school for the classes, and she was there every day. I don't know, it was, for me, that's why I started interviewing many other women, and it has been a long

process, and it has changed my perspective as a director, and for me, the most important thing as a person. Yes,

Brian: you talked about how this has resonated with a woman. I hope that this would resonate with men, and particularly young men as well, for them to think a little bit about the behavior that needs to change out there. Can I ask you about Claud Hernández, your leading lady, Gaia?

Where did you find her? I'm not aware of her earlier work. What were you looking for when you cast her?

Pere: Yes, it took me almost two years to find her. Even well-known young actresses in my country turned down the project. Some even minded that the subject matter and the project seemed too harsh.

Brian: I have to ask, had they seen the script? Did they know how carefully you were going to handle the subject?

Pere: Yes. Yeah. It was a treatment, because I must say that it doesn't exist a script of this film.

Brian: That doesn't surprise me at all, given the style of storytelling we have here.

Pere: Yes. And it's, for example, there's no exist a script, because thinking about, for example, the father character, and Alex Bendermuhl is a great actor. He knows perfectly the way I like to work.

I just sent him the scenes where he appeared. I think it was very important for me and for his character. It was necessary that he didn't know what happened with his daughter, with the main character, with Gaia, when the father wasn't with her.

So that's maybe one of the reasons he didn't know the whole script, only the parts where he was.

Brian: It's interesting because it matches her character. She definitely tries to compartmentalize things and keep him out. She's very strong.

She doesn't want him in the courtroom. She wants, you weren't there. I don't want you to hear this.

So that matches to the story very nicely to sort of actually shoot it that way.

Pere: Yes.

Brian: Can I ask how old is Claude? Or how old was she when you shot this?

Pere: Claude is, now is 23. But well, when she started with the film, she's 18.

Brian: She does an amazing job and covers so much ground emotionally. It's quite the performance. You talked about the research that you did talking to all these women.

I think it's important to point out you bring up the father. It's not just her story. You're really nice about sort of talking about what I guess I call the collateral damage of all this.

You know, the father's in pain too. And in a weird way, she's helping him and helping her teacher and then helping other victims eventually. And sort of that role reversal is very interesting.

The father-daughter stuff is really beautiful. There's a couple of pivotal scenes where Gaia starts to sort of tell her story. And the first one is with the professor.

They're on an archaeological dig. And, you know, there's a little delay. She's waiting for her professor.

And then there's like a hint of darkness in the cave. And then she starts to tell her story a little bit. Later on, there's a pivotal scene where there's a blackout, an extended blackout, a very daring scene, by the way.

Congratulations. Where she is sitting with her father and in the darkness tells her story. What's the significance of that?

What were you thinking when you wrote that? I mean, obviously there's a plan there with all of that.

Pere: Not showing is very important throughout the entire film. The rape is not shown, the rapist is not shown, the trial is not shown, and sometimes, as in the father's phone conversation or the conversation Gaia has with the rapist's mother, some important words like rape are left off screen. Leaving the scene in darkness creates more intimacy, as we focus on the sound of the words.

But it also brings us closer to the intimacy of the moment she is describing. That was important. A moment when she was alone.

Darkness, in many of these cases, makes me feel solitude. That's how I felt during some conversations with women who told me what they had lived through. This is the word for me.

That's why the blackout is the solitude.

Brian: I was blown away by that scene. I had to go back and actually time it. It's amazing how long you sustain it.

The dialogue is tremendous because the father started walking me through the darkness. You know, he's my voice almost for a minute setting it. Can I ask you, how did you shoot it?

Were they sitting across from a table reading their lines or were they on the set and you turned the lights on? How did you get that all together?

Pere: No, I don't know. I shoot the scene. In fact, I remember now, for example, the photographer, they asked me, well, if you want, it doesn't matter if I film what happened.

But no, because then, for me, I must think, I remember in the moment, I was thinking about, I was thinking in Claude, and I was thinking about Alex, and I was thinking in which way they can feel exactly the feelings for the character, because yes, it's fiction, yes, they are representing another person, but I want the both things. I remember some conversations with Alex. In the scene, I want the father, but I also want Alex.

I want to feel Alex inside all the scenes. And Alex is a kind of actor that understands perfectly this way to work. And that's why that scene, it's in the way you are hearing all the words, you are hearing what happened when, for example, he goes to the...

It started in the kitchen. Then we went to the living room. And in a moment, he went to the window, and he said, there's no moon, there's no...

I also wanted to show that all the light of the world was off in that moment. It's maybe it's something... I don't know, it's real, but in that moment, it happens something that it's not real.

It's the way she can say a very important words for the father. But about your question, everything happens in the scene. As you said, for me, it would be absolutely possible to imagine to shot that scene in a different place.

The actors and the actor sitting and reading. No, for me, it's impossible to imagine to shoot this kind of scene in that way. I need to feel everything when I'm shooting.

I know it's all fiction, but I need to feel real emotions when I'm shooting. That's why we should shoot this scene in this way.

Brian: It's one of the most amazing seven minutes of cinema I've ever seen, I just have to say. There are very few directors who would dare to do that, to go into the darkness like that, but it serves the film, it serves the story, it creates that intimacy that you're talking about. I thought a little bit about the confessional spontaneously, you know, gives her a chance to talk sort of anonymously, but it's nice to hear then that they actually acted it out, because I felt it, I felt everything, especially from the father's side on that scene, I really thought that was beautifully done.

As you say, you left a lot out, you left the assault out, and I can imagine, I mean, having talked to Andrei Pravazhnik about the Choir Master, it's just, it's a very sensitive subject in general to try to touch, but I mean, did you leave it out deliberately to leave ambiguity so that there would be some doubt?

Pere: Yes. Yeah. These are decisions strongly related to not showing certain moments.

For example, many women told me that of the whole process, the whole process they went through, it wasn't moments like the rape or going to file a report that affects them the most. It's a very long process where every minute of the day becomes a struggle to move forward. The trial is always a revictimization.

The trial is called inhuman, yet it's what appears in the press. I had the opportunity to attend many trials in my city, and it was very, very violent. The person who suffered the most was the woman, the victim.

I didn't want to show that. I wanted to show what happens before and what happens after. And the same thing, for example, for the moment of the rape, a scene that I think has been shown in so many films, a world that has become normalized, a world we see every day in the press.

I wanted to show it in a different way. That is perhaps the same reason why I don't show the rapist or the psychologist, because it is the father who largely assumes the role of listening, of being there, of care, of being involved in a character who is both father and mother at the same time, who represents a different kind of masculinity. It's not about living these aspects in an ambiguous way, as you said in your email.

It's about feeling emotions. You know, she was raped. You know, there's a rapist.

You know, there's a trial. So I'm asking this to me. What more do you need to know about those aspects?

This is a question for me.

Brian: And that's the question for society every time. He said, she said, how do we take these words when they're told to us? It's very interesting what you say.

You know, it's not the assault itself. It's not the trial. It's the getting through the day to day that's hard.

When the rapist's mother comes to face Gaia, she sort of represents women of a different time, who haven't fought the fight to get where women are today. And she's also circling the wagons around her family sort of instinctively. And when Gaia says, you know, that hurts more than anything else, that really got me.

Like, yeah, it's the perception, the day to day perception that she's dealing with. Her friend's not standing up for her. All of that stuff seems to really be killing her more than the assault.

And she does a great job portraying those emotions. You do a great job presenting them. I got to say again, so many things that you left out.

You say the therapist that you left out as well. I was kind of surprised by that because of the healing nature. But I guess there's also the reliving nature of things.

Can I ask a little bit about the professor's role here as a character? She's sort of the catalyst who gives Gaia words for what happened to her. You know, she is trying to figure it out.

And I don't think, you know, she has, she's emotionally, she emotionally knows she has been assaulted, but she doesn't have the words for it yet. And you have the professor sort of help lead her there. What was your thinking?

What is she representing there?

Pere: Maybe the most important thing about the professor is, well, it's not the first one. I must say that maybe the teacher, yes, is a friend who has been through the same scene and who plays the role of friend and confident. The role of confident is important at the beginning, at the beginning, in the cave.

That was very important. She is the person who opens Gaia's eyes, Gaia's conscious.

It's very important in that moment. But why? Why she can be confident?

Why she can be a friend? Or how, in general, how you can be a friend of a young woman of 20 years old who has been raped for his boyfriend? It's not possible.

Brian: No, even for the father, it's not possible. And he does the greatest job.

Pere: You could, but it's just for me, there's just only a way it is possible. I was interested in talking about the empathy between these two characters. In my interview process, I have seen that many women who have survived gender violence help other women who are going through the same thing.

In the cave, we don't know that the professor has lived something similar.

Brian: In a way, your father could never, yeah.

Yes, you said the father, but for example, because this is a part very important. Women survivors of gender-based violence helping other women. This exists.

Pere: In Spain, there is the Ana Vella Foundation of survivor women, and they do exactly that, help other women. I thought that the context of the cave, the context of that dolmen, I don't know if it's the same word in English, dolmen, yeah? It's the context where I felt that the professor can say that something like, maybe, I'm like you.

I understand you because I'm like you. Yes, and I remember when all the conversations with all those women, and every time I felt that I was looking at her face, and the emotions, the empathy, the way she was talking about her feelings, it was another level. It's very difficult to talk about this.

It was, at the same time, the teacher, for example, allows me to introduce the topic of archaeology from a gender perspective. This is an important theme of the film, beyond being a metaphor for the character. Yes, it's a woman, it's a character, but she's also something more.

Since what she explains to the class is based on Western archaeological studies. So she's maybe a metaphoric character, and it's important because finally, I think I'm thinking right now, and now I'm thinking new things. I'm feeling new things about the character right now, when I'm talking with you.

Maybe the most important for this character is how easy it was to find a woman who was a victim who lived in gender-based violence. And then that woman put in contact to me with another woman who was a friend of her. So all these, it's very strange.

All these women are connected. It's unbelievable. I was talking with a woman, and finally she said to me, well, if you want to talk with a friend of mine, she, in the past, she lived something.

That's why it was very necessary, a character like the teacher. Well, here it's Gaia, yes. We know the story of Gaia.

She's just a friend. No, she's not just a friend. She's somebody who feels something to be...

I don't know. It's like a network of women who have suffered the same thing. And you realize the dimension that gender violence has.

It's very hard.

Brian: There are two things you brought up there that resonated with me. One, sort of her talking about archaeology in the context of feminism that gives broader context to sort of the evolving relationship between men and women and sort of surfacing this violence and making things change. And the other one was the community aspect.

Pere: I like the way you talked about that. Because if Gaia doesn't find this professor and can't put words to what happened to her, her path is so different. I mean, she's still suffering, but her path is so different.

And so it was just very, very interesting the way the professor introduced direction to the whole story for me. I thought it was lovely.

I think this is the meaning. This is the reason of the teacher character. We want to know or not.

It's just like that. I, for example, I remember a policeman who, in my city, he's the one who received the first one, a woman who went to the police station to talk to the police, to say that something happened. So one day, he said to me that maybe the worst thing, and me too, the worst thing, he heard talking with all of these women was that is the moment when a woman said that if I knew before, all has been happened to me five, six, seven years, maybe now I said nothing.

I prefer to be in silence. I prefer.

This is the worst thing I ever heard.

If I had known what would have happened to me right now, I wouldn't have reported it.

As you say, it's, yes, maybe, maybe, I don't, I think it's, I don't think it's possible, but maybe, if she, if she, if a woman decided to be in silence, or decided to close her eyes and think that this is normal, or nothing, nothing happens.

Brian: Diego's mother, a whole generation, seems to fall into that category.

Pere: Yeah, yes, yes. For example, in a psychological point of view is, for example, what happened between my mother and my father. And my mother has been normalized her life.

Well, it's her decision. I think it doesn't, it doesn't break the rule. Yes, I think it's important to report, but neither the judicial nor polite system is prepared to treat this process with empathy.

How did you, how were you raised?

Yeah, I think, maybe I think that the educational system, you said, this is very important. This is, maybe it's the most important thing, the educational system. This is fails.

It's, now I remember that the scene with Gaia, between Gaia and her father, and she said to him, what kind of education?

Brian: How were you raised? How were you raised?

Pere: This is very important, because I remember a young girl in the beginning of the documentation process of the film. A young girl said to me that she was raped in a little town where she lives. And after that moment, she went home without knowing she has been raped.

And the rapist went home without the conscious. He was a rapist. And what, how it's possible to, and for me, it's very, and that's why in the film, that's why there's a teacher in the film also, and that's why in some dialogues appears the word education.

I must say that education is one of the main goals of this film. It is a portrait of the process of overcoming not only the trauma of rape, but also the social judgment of her friends and the rapist mother. Society must change through education.

This is the most important. For example, in Karlovy Vary, when the film finished the next day, for example, it was very hard. A father and a mother came to us to talk about their son, and what happened with their son, it was exactly the same what was in the film.

Why? Well, it's all about the education, it's all about the respect, it's all about, this is not in, now I'm thinking with my daughter, she's 11 years old, and in the school, of course, mathematics, all the typical things, but there's no, there's no, I mean that values are not taught in a school, so...

No training on how to interact with each other.

Yes. So young people is growing up...

Brian: They're supposed to magically occur somehow.

Pere: All these things, it's... For me, it's absolutely horrible, because these are the things that what really can change us to be, I don't know, good people. I don't know if it's good people, it's people...

Brian: A better society.

Pere: Yes, but it's impossible to change all the society. I know that, but maybe if we can change some people when they are nine years old, ten years old, maybe these people when they arrive to 20 years old, maybe they change another people. I don't know if nothing is changing.

Every day in the press, I can read something about gender-based violence and all the things that surrounds it. It's every day, every day.

Brian: I think society does change. It's just painfully slowly. And I think the fact that we're reading about them, even though they're sad, terrible stories, it shows the fact that we're going to start talking about this at least.

And that's the beginning of change. When you made the film, you had, you know, you care about the issue. Did you see that when you were done, you were going to be taking on this role, that you would be a magnet for people who have had these experiences, that you would have to take some kind of role as a spokesperson in this space?

Pere: I don't know. It's, actually, there's a lot of, we shoot a lot. The first cut, it was about 10 hours.

Brian: Hang on, did that include the courtroom scene and therapists and the hint of Diego?

Pere: Yeah, for example, and a lot of other things that was, should maybe in a documentary way. Now, we are working with all these parts and working with all the documentary parts that we shoot with, between the actress, the actress and a real woman, for example. That's why right now, I'm preparing some documentaries about some of the women who have been witnesses.

Yes, I need to do maybe an educational project through the cinema. Yes, if I go to a high school, I will say that yes, this is, we will talk about cinema, we will talk about, I don't know, some things like that, but we talk about gender-based violence through the cinema. We will use the cinematic art to create a dialogue between the art and young people.

Brian: I think before we go any further, I think it's important to say again that, you know, even though there is a message here in this film and an important political topic, that this is art, this film. This is beautifully made. This is slow storytelling with amazing imagery.

And, you know, you have your sort of analogy of archaeology and, you know, unearthing the story that parallels hers. It's just beautifully done. I don't want people to get the idea that this is just the political treatise that we're talking about.

Sorry to interrupt.

Pere: No, no, no, no, but for me cinema can't just be aesthetics. We live in a society that demands responsibility from cinema, is what I think. A return to society, establishing a dialogue.

Cinematic art must take on the responsibility of getting involved. Entertainment films are another thing, but cinema as an art form interests me when it honestly seeks to engage in dialogue or sometimes to make the audience uncomfortable. So for me, the most important word here is dialogue.

The art, and in this case, the art of cinema, for me, it means dialogue. If there's no dialogue, for me, I'm not interested about it. It's just something aesthetic.

And that's all. That's all. Yes, it's interesting.

You can see something beautiful or something that is interesting, just in an aesthetic way. But I need something more inside this art. And this something more means dialogue.

The dialogue that, for example, my movie can create, can feel to other people.

Brian: Where is the film now in its life cycle? Has it been seen in Spanish cinemas? Has a public audience been able to see it yet?

Pere: No, not yet. Not yet. Just maybe we showed the film maybe in a Spanish festival this autumn.

Brian: Which one would that be? Just out of curiosity?

Pere: No, no, we have no absolutely confirmation right now. So I can say what festival will be. Now I remember, for example, very few people have seen the film here in my city or here in Spain.

Just now, we are starting to talk with, especially with the festival, who is interested in the film. But now, for example, I remember maybe the most important screening in this process, what happens in my city. And it was the psychologist's viewing of the film.

And I remember it was maybe the most important day, the most important screening for me. And at the end of the screening, she said that, well, it's what I have been working with all these 10 years ago, all these emotions are in the movie. And in some moments of the film, I need to close my eyes because it was too hard for me.

I understand that, well, we have been working in the film about eight years. So finally, I understand that in some ways. Yes, I think it's...

No, now I'm thinking that in Spain, for example, I think that there's no other film that shows these kind of emotions in a film, but also, well, I... We have made, I think, we have made an honest film that is true to reality. I know it's not an easy film.

I know that it's three hours. I know that people, some people... There's a lot of films.

A lot of the race, it's about three hours, four hours. And for me, it's too much. But here...

Brian: I can't imagine what you would cut in this story. I don't, I just don't know what you would leave out at this point.

Pere: No, I can't imagine what I would like to introduce again in the film. But I know that maybe a four-hour film maybe would be too much also for Karlovy Vary. It was the real emotions I felt during all this process.

Because I remember conversations with women about five, six, seven hours. How can I concentrate all of these emotions? For example, in an hour and a half, in two hours.

Why two hours? Because when the films went to the cinemas, it's not important for me. Now it's a lot of ways to see a film.

And I know that many people can understand these types of movies, but the movie has its rhythm, and the scenes in it are the ones that have to be there.

Brian: I mean, I can't imagine you made this is not for everyone. This is not for everyone. This is for a specific audience.

But I hope it finds distribution, because it certainly will lead to dialogue. You know, I think that you'll be able to achieve your goal if people see the film. You say you're working perhaps on some documentary material related to this.

Are there any new stories in the works?

Pere: Yes, three minutes walking from here where I am now. Two years ago, a young woman was murdered for his boyfriend. And now I'm making a documentary.

Actually, it's the first time, and the only one that I'm talking about, a woman who is not there. I'm talking about her to her mother. And maybe I think that at the end of this year, or maybe at the beginning of the next year, it will be the trial.

Now, I'm shooting this, and it's all about all these documentaries. I'm working at the same time right now in seven different documentaries. Well, and for me, it's necessary because in some of the documentaries, I have a lot of material shooting through the research of the film, that I'm shooting right now alone with my camera, with no money, but for me, it's absolutely necessary.

I feel the responsibility to do something. And yes, someday, the most important thing for me about these documentaries is to go to a high school and try to make something with young people. And also, it's not about documentaries, about the film, it's because a lot of these, all these women said to me that, if you need something more, call me.

So if we make something in a high school, I know that at the end of the workshop, these women can go to a high school, can go to that class. She will be in front of the young people, because this is another thing, is yes, is the cinema, is a documentary, is a screening, and finally, is the reality. And here, there's a woman, you can look at the eyes.

She is here. So there's some questions you want to ask her. This is the most, for me right now, this is the most important thing to do through the film, When The River Becomes A Sea, through these documentaries, and finally to make an educational project in high school.

Brian: I think this is a perfect way to wrap it up, since we started with the genesis of When The River Becomes A Sea, talking about working in the classroom, and now we finished up in the classroom. Pere, is there anything else you'd like to say?

Pere: No, no, I think you made good questions. I think that you feel all the things, all the emotions in the...

Brian: Yeah, why did you do that to me? Why did you make me feel all those feelings?

Pere: Because it's necessary. It's exactly what happened to me all these years, and it's necessary to change our way to look at some things, our way to look at the world or the world that's around us. Maybe it's more where we can start to change our way to look.

So, if you like... No, I don't like this word. If you feel that the film has been interesting for you, that's for me the most important thing.

Brian: You know, it's hard to use words like beautiful and like when you talk about the subject matter. It really is. It's a little difficult.

But it was...

I do... I'm totally impressed with your filmmaking. It is three hours, but again, I don't know what you'd leave out.

There's even more to tell as we've discussed. I enjoy your technique. I really enjoy your technique of focusing on your subject and letting the background be whatever it is.

There's a beautiful scene on the basketball court when you're close up on Gaia and the basketball and then you dissolve to the father. I just love... I loved sort of the subtle things that were happening throughout the film the whole time.

I just want to say thank you for sharing it with me.

Pere: Thank you.

Brian: That man has an amazing passion to impact change via cinema. That's always a delicate line to balance, but Pere does it with grace and ease. I would recommend that you check out When A River Becomes The Sea if you want to talk about these delicate issues with anyone in your life.

It was really a pleasure to meet him. Thanks again for listening to Stream Close Up.

From Stream Close Up: Pere Vilà Barceló - When The River Becomes A Sea - Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Sep 8, 2025
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