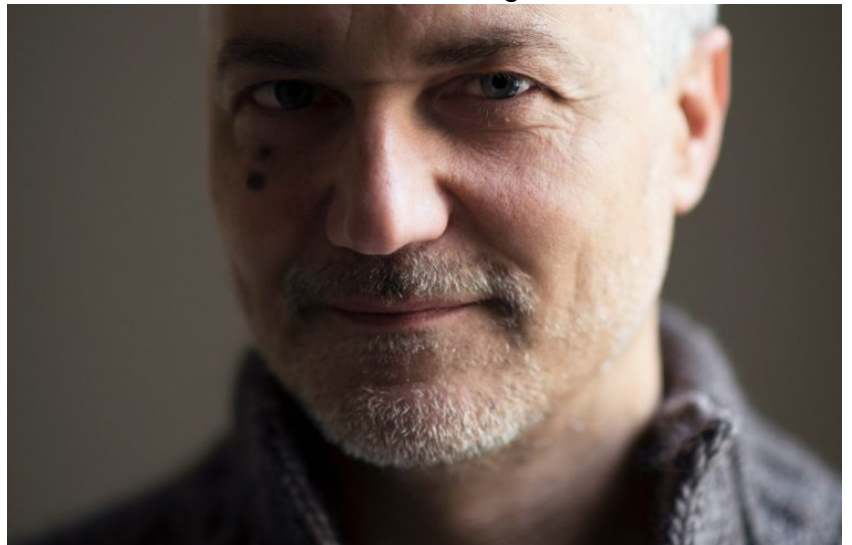

Padre Pio, screenwriter Maurizio Braucci: “We narrate the inner torment of a man who was deeply aware of the horrors of his time”

The directorial gaze of Abel Ferrara is both forthright and poetic. From the outset of his career, he accustomed us to powerful cinematic evocations, venturing into the realms of religion and mystery. Notable examples of his filmography include “Bad Lieutenant” (1992), “Mary” (2005) and “Pasolini” (2014). Following its screening in the 'Giornate degli Autori' section of the 79th Venice Film Festival, Ferrara's tribute to the saint of Pietrelcina, 'Padre Pio', was released in theatres on 18 July. The film explores the circumstances surrounding the friar's arrival in San Giovanni Rotondo in 1920, a period when the least privileged workers in southern Italy staged a widespread rebellion in defence of their rights. The film features a compelling performance by American actor Shia LaBeouf and was co-written by the director together with **Maurizio Braucci**, a distinguished writer and screenwriter whose filmography exemplifies a profound ethical sensibility and dedication to social and civil causes. His film 'La Paranza dei bambini' (2019) was awarded at the Berlin Film Festival. 'Gomorra' (2008), 'Anime nere' (2015) and 'Martin Eden' (2020) won him the David di Donatello Awards. In 2024, he was awarded the Silver Ribbon for 'Palazzina Laf', Michele Riondino's stunning directorial debut. SIR interviewed him about the film 'Padre Pio'.



[The film is the result of a lengthy data-gathering process. The scriptwriting phase began over a decade ago. We started with the locations, such as Pietrelcina and San Giovanni Rotondo, and the environments that the friar used to frequent. This involved consulting with the community of friars and scholars \(historians\). In particular, we consulted Sergio Luzzatto's book 'Padre Pio' and Antonio Tedesco's two-volume account of the 1920 massacre. This culminated in the production of a documentary, entitled *Searching for Padre Pio*, from which the film script was derived. The screenplay was completed in 2014; yet, the production encountered numerous impediments. The lengthy process was partly due to the unconventional nature of Fr Pius' story. Furthermore, the question of a 'dispute' between historians arose, which originated with an article in 'L'Avanti' in 1968. This article attributed 'responsibility' to Padre Pio, implying that he was almost complicit in the massacres of socialists. The accusation was, in fact, baseless. It had already been investigated by Catholic historians, who had documented the evidence and disproved the allegations. Our research involved a comprehensive examination of historical, sociological, anthropological, and religious aspects, which led to the rebuttal of the claim regarding Padre Pio's alleged 'complicity'. **Why the analogy between the friar's inner torment and social hardships?** This has been our main perspective from the moment the idea took shape. Padre Pio had taken part in these protests out of compassion, without taking a political stance. We told how soldiers hired by the landowners, the same militia that later joined the fascist regime, killed the poor peasants who had been elected to the Town Hall. We proposed this human story, emphasising the righteous and the victims: the socialists. Ours is the story of the inner torment of a man who was emotionally touched by the horrors and the](#)

[violence of his time.](#)



[Abel Ferrara is a maestro of cinema and he has shown this with his many cinematic masterpieces. It has been said that a director often makes the same film from a poetic point of view. Abel Ferrara's interest in the spiritual realm, his 'heretical' or non-condescending approach, has been a constant feature of his filmography: "Bad Lieutenant", "The Addiction", "The Funeral", etc. The emphasis is always on a spiritual aspect. "Padre Pio" is no different: it's a film in which he deepens the spiritual aspect of his work. Abel Ferrara has been living in Italy for a few years now. As an Italian-American, he has focused on his cultural roots. Together we shot the film 'Pasolini', in which we delved into the roots of our national culture: Pier Paolo Pasolini is a figure filled with sacredness, which led us to examine also his contradictions and to identify our own stance, our own vision. For these reasons, the film 'Padre Pio' follows the poetics of Abel Ferrara, who explores not only the character but also the historical context. What can the spiritual sphere do before a massacre? This is a question that we, as believers, ask ourselves even today in relation to what is happening in Ukraine or in Palestine. We want a just world, but the world is not just. How can we understand it and try to change it? Here we have the answer of a man, Padre Pio, who is almost a seer, who sees that blood is in fact none other the blood shed by brothers, culminating in the massacres of the Second World War. The wounds of today are the possible wounds of tomorrow. **Your scripts reflect a strong narrative approach to ethical issues, violated rights and lost lives. How important was this approach for you when you were working on Padre Pio?** First of all, this is a figure that belongs to Italian culture, worldwide. Many love him, others 'hate' him. This makes one wonder when faced with such conflicting feelings, ranging from absolute devotion to total rejection. Padre Pio' was also an inconvenient film to make. Films must serve to draw attention to contradictions, so that the viewer becomes aware of them and gains a broader understanding of the world. Films should not only serve to make us smile or forget. They should also serve to make us think. When we contemplate the idea of complexity, life can be lived with greater wisdom, with real compassion, which is not, as Ivan Illich put it, "love of the world.". This is too abstract a concept. I should love those around me, and they will contribute to making the world a better place. We need to experience the world as adults, because we are still a very childish humanity. **It was also an exceptional year for another of your productions, 'Palazzina Laf' directed by Michele Riondino.** This is a film to be discovered little by little. A film that stands on its own two feet and captures the audience's attention. 'Palazzina Laf' is based on a true story, the first case of mobbing in Italy. It shows us how we can get used to being bullied, exploited and manipulated, constantly adapting to the point where we can no longer fight](#)

back. It tells us that we need to become more aware of the dynamics of oppression. This film warns us against getting used to evil instead of facing it and confronting it, that we must fight against it. **Are you working on any new projects?** I am currently adapting a book that is very close to my heart, both as a Neapolitan and as a writer: 'La fontana rotta' (The Broken Fountain) by the Italian-American anthropologist Thomas Belmonte. He arrived in Naples in 1975 to report on the culture of poverty, but became so involved that he was no longer able to maintain the necessary distance. It will be my debut as a director. I am very passionate about this story. That's the secret of writing: you shouldn't look too far away, but you shouldn't gaze too far into the world either, otherwise you will lose the ability to effectively recount it. ?

Sergio Perugini