



## Critical Review



By

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**Marinho D, Accioly C, Lavor E, Camelo R. As Miçangas [curta-metragem]. Brasil: Moveo Filmes / Cardume Curtas / Casa Maçã / Apoteótica Cinematográfica / Stellios Produções; 2023.**

### Health, Care, and Abortion: Health Practices in the Film *As Miçangas*

Cinema has the ability to remind us that public health is not always associated with hospitals, medical appointments, or diagnostic tests. In Brazil, pain and illness are often alleviated and treated far from official medicine—or even from what would be considered medical common sense. In some cases, this occurs through superstitious or cultural practices; in others, because the necessary treatment, however urgent, is neither accessible nor legally recognized.

The 2023 short film *As Miçangas*, co-directed by Rafaela Camelo and Emanuel Lavor, explores this alternative notion of health, even if not in immediately evident ways. The award-winning work by the Brasília-based directors follows two sisters on their way to a remote countryside property. They arrive, open the gate, bathe in a pond, and carry their backpacks into the house. Everything seems ordinary. After setting up a mattress in the living room, one of them takes two pills hidden inside a small bag of beads, while the other makes sure her sister is hydrated, fed, and as comfortable as possible.

Meanwhile, in an old house surrounded only by nature, an intruding snake slithers unnoticed—a creature that evokes repulsion and moves as silently as the sisters themselves, who speak little yet communicate inten-

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sely and constantly through silence. The sister who has taken the medication suffers, though we do not yet know why, and in a moment of relief, she finally sees the snake—but does not feel fear. Contrary to what one might expect, the young woman holds the snake in her bare hands and gently returns it to nature, as if understanding that, for women, survival sometimes depends on befriending that which has the power to haunt us.

At the heart of the narrative lies an abortion. This may not be immediately apparent, as not everyone knows that “miçangas” (“beads”) is a colloquial code name for misoprostol—a medication widely used in both legal and clandestine abortions. The drug is referred to in this way because, as the film suggests, it is often concealed among beads and jewelry when obtained illegally.

Yet *As Miçangas* is not merely a film about the act—or perhaps more precisely, the ritual—of abortion. There is no blood, no explicit pain; it is not visceral in that sense. It is a film about care, about something that may appear, to some, as individual, illegal, or selfish, but which, in practice, can also be a gesture of affection, protection, and sisterhood. And, quite often, it is precisely that.

Beyond the film’s unhurried pacing—which allows us to immerse ourselves in the story and forget that we are being guided—this is a work that conveys great delicacy and a constant sense of communion with nature. It is no coincidence that the film opens with an embrace: a movement that seems tentative at first, searching for comfort, before falling naturally into place. We, the audience, recognize an embrace. Perhaps the feeling of care and safety that such a gesture provides is precisely what patients seek when they turn to a doctor. The shots of the landscape, the trees, and even the snake serve as reminders that abortion has always existed—that it is as ancestral as the nature that surrounds us. What is modern is the way we treat it today in Brazil: through taboo, misinformation, the draconian illegality of most cases, and the doctors who refuse to perform even legally sanctioned procedures.

In less than twenty minutes, the sonic and visual experience of *As Miçangas* evokes something truly ancestral—something that predates hospitals, protocols, and even the formalization of the medical profession: care. Medicine was born from the need to care for others. To be a doctor is not merely to don a lab coat and prescribe treatments; it is to exercise humanity—it demands being fully human.

When the renowned American anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked which moment in human evolution she considered the beginning of civilization, people expected her to mention the control of fire, the creation of the alphabet, or the invention of the wheel. Yet, she answered: “A human femur that had been broken and then healed.” Mead explained that, in the animal kingdom, a broken femur usually means death, as the individual can no longer flee predators, hunt, or protect itself. A broken and healed femur is evidence that someone cared for another’s survival. In this sense, the beads in Rafaela Camelo and Emanuel Labor’s *As Miçangas* are Mead’s femur: a material and symbolic link that preserves and conveys affection, memory, and care. Care remains the true marker of our humanity.

And if this is easy to forget nowadays, *As Miçangas* is an audiovisual achievement that, in addition to its technical merits, reminds us—sensitively and powerfully—of the importance of care.