

## **Aquarius [18]** 2016 | Brazil/France | 146min

UK release date	<b>24<sup>th</sup> March 2017</b>
Director	<b>Kleber Mendonça Filho</b>
Screenplay	<b>Kleber Mendonça Filho</b>
Cinematography	<b>Pedro Sotero, Fabricio Tadeu</b>
Cast	<b>Humberto Carrão</b> (Diego); <b>Zoraide Coletto</b> (Ladjane); <b>Irândhir Santos</b> (Roberval); <b>Pedro Queiroz</b> (Tomas); <b>Bárbara Colen</b> (young Clara)

If you thought Sonia Braga had the role of a lifetime in Héctor Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, wait until you get a load of Dona Clara. The heroine of this tremendous second film from Brazil's Kleber Mendonça Filho fits a lifetime, and more, into one role.

Clara is the last-resident-standing of a picturesquely crumbling low-rise beachside block – the *Aquarius* of the title – in the coastal city of Recife. And much as a local property developer might hope otherwise, she's going nowhere. The company wants to buy her out, bulldoze the place and throw up a skyscraper in its stead, but the 65-year-old swats away their ploys with the kind of leonine hauteur we mortals could only hope to rehearse post hoc in the bathroom mirror.

She's a breast cancer and chemotherapy survivor. She's also a retired music critic, and the walls of her apartment are lined with books and records – a lifetime's work and pleasure shored up around her like an extra layer of wolf-proof bricks.

Close up, Mendonça's film is about Clara's ongoing war of wills with the developers – and particularly the owner's son Diego (Humberto Carrão), newly returned from business college in America with a slippery smile and an industrial-strength brass neck. (Any similarities to Brazil's own interminable real-life corruption scandals are, you'd assume, entirely intentional.) But take a few steps back and it becomes a broad-canvas celebration of neighbourhood life – like Mendonça's 2012 debut, *Neighbouring Sounds*, it's endlessly fascinated by the interlocking tick of its characters' lives.

Clara may be the motor that keeps the film's intricate story turning, but every last cogwheel proves to be indispensable, from Clara's long-serving housekeeper Ladjane (Zoraide Coletto) to her grown-up children and favourite nephew Tomas

(Pedro Queiroz) and the lifeguard (Irاندhir Santos) who watches her with a mix of protectiveness and reverence.

One night, the developers try to crush her spirits with wild sex and loud music: in a punch-the-air-wonderful reversal, she ends up comprehensively outdoing them on both counts.

More? Step back further still and things get metaphysical. Clara's home isn't just where her heart is: her home and heart aren't easily divisible, and her memories are tucked away in her belongings just as tangibly as the old newspaper clipping she pulls from a faded LP sleeve. Forget Faulkner's doom-laden maxim about the past never being dead, or even past. In Aquarius, that's cause for celebration.

Mendonça's filmmaking has an effortless visual and narrative flow that makes it ideal for capturing the everyday magic that memory can work. Dreams feel realer than reality – Clara's night-time imaginings are cut with a rhythm that sets your skin prickling – while the virtuoso ending slams truth and metaphor together with the force of a motorway pile-up.

Madly overlooked by last year's Cannes jury, and denied an Oscar run by Brazil's politically charged selection board, Aquarius hasn't had it easy. But perhaps that's oddly apt. It's a film that turns a struggle into pure pleasure.

**After: Robbie Collin, The Telegraph, March 2017**

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**Coming Soon....**

**Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 7.30pm: Elle (18)**

**Monday 9th October 2.30pm: The Sense of an Ending (15)**

**7.30pm: The Salesman (12)**

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