

## Document Citation

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# Indelible Images



## Antonio das Mortes

Selected by Lourdes Portillo

**BRAZIL** 1969, 100 min.

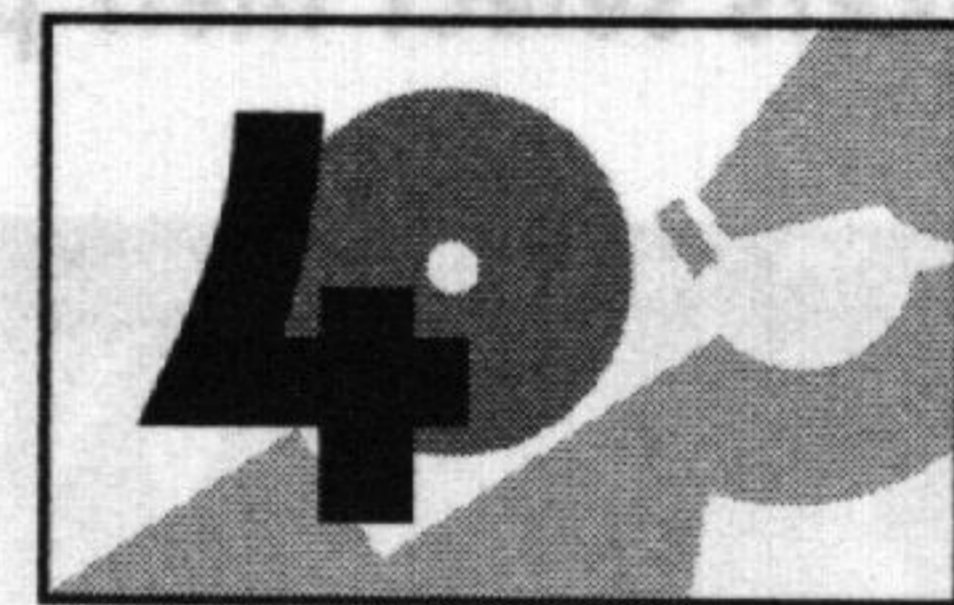
**DIR/SCR** Glauber Rocha

**CAM** Alfonso Beato **ED** Edouardo Escorel **CAST** Mauricio Do Valle, Odete Lara, Othon Bastos, Hugo Carvana, Jofre Soares, Rosa Maria Penna

Glauber Rocha, a leading light among the young directors of the influential 1960s movement Cinema Novo, leapt onto the international stage with his ferocious breakthrough *Black God, White Devil* (see program note on page 87). Like that film, **Antonio das Mortes** also dares to tackle head-on the atrocious history of oppression in Brazil, carrying within its narrative that same revolutionary content and conflict of ideologies, loyalties and personal relationships. The film is set in the arid, poverty-stricken areas of northeast Brazil, where fanatical bandits, the *cangaçeiros*, support the peasants by fighting the local authorities. The government, in turn, hires killers (*jaguncos*) to track down these bandits. Antonio das Mortes, one such assassin, has been ordered by a wealthy landowner to destroy a group of squatters who have settled on some of his property. The squatters are led by a *cangaçeiro* and a young girl with strange, mystical powers who is idolized as a saint. Antonio is disturbed by the greed and corruption displayed by those who had hired him and soon comes to sympathize with the squatters. Finally, when another band of hired killers arrives to assist Antonio, he must choose sides. A beautifully controlled, rhythmic sense of time and movement guides **Antonio das Mortes**. It is like a grand, operatic piece of violence in which myths, symbols and religious dogma churn to make a ritualistic comment on mankind. It is exhilaratingly magnificent.

**Albert Johnson**

**Selected Filmography:** Glauber Rocha (b. Vitoria de Conquista, Brazil, 1938—d. 1981) *The Age of the Earth* (1980), *Cabezas cortadas* (1971), *The Lion Has Seven Heads* (1970), *Land in Anguish* (1967), *Black God, White Devil* (SFIFF 1966)



Shown in  
1969

Among the "new directors" honored at the Festival were Susan Sontag, Haskell Wexler, Robert Benayoun and Gordon Parks. Victor Borge served as master of ceremonies.

"After nearly 30 years, **Antonio das Mortes** still captures my imagination. Its narrative is as complex as anything that Latin



Lourdes Portillo

American literature has come up with. In Rocha's hands, Antonio the hired killer becomes a redeemer in a never ending struggle of good versus evil. His transformations are triggered

by the interventions of an errant saint who inhabits the northeast deserts of Brazil, the mythical *sertão*. What makes the film's visual style so remarkable is that its magic springs from a blend of the realistic and the operatic which, with the simplest of means, breaks down the illusionism of Hollywood completely—and gives us something better. **Antonio das Mortes** may have been made in the '60s, but its power is still alive, undiluted and unimitated, inspiring me with its fantasies of sand and eros and death."

**Lourdes Portillo** is a Chicana filmmaker who has been writing and making films for over 15 years. Most of her work as a filmmaker has been divided between fiction and documentary, always trying to broaden the horizons of Latin American culture as perceived in North America. Her films include *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (1985), *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (1989), *Vida* (1989), *Columbus on Trial* (1992), *The Devil Never Sleeps* (1994) and *Sometimes My Feet Go Numb* (1995).