

## Document Citation

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**OBSTACLES OVERCOME:** *Mauricio Gonçalves in the title role woos Maria Ceica in "Aleijadinho: Passion, Glory and Torment."*

## **ALEIJADINHO: PASSION, GLORY AND TORMENT**

**(O ALEIJADINHO: PAIXAO,  
GLORIA E SUPLICO)**

**(BRAZIL)**

A Vila Rica Cinematografica production. Produced by Geraldo Santos Pereira, Marcelo Lafite, Jayme del Cueto. Executive producer, Paulo Leite Soares.

Directed by Geraldo Santos Pereira. Screenplay, Geraldo and Renato Santos Pereira. Camera (color), Claudio Portioli; editor, Vera Freire; music, Edino Krieger; art director, Paulo Henrique Pessoa; set designer, Marco Antonio Rocha; sound (Dolby Digital), Alaersio Coelho. **Reviewed at African Diaspora Film Festival, New York, Nov. 29, 2002. Running time: 100 MIN.**

With: Mauricio Gonçalves, Maria Ceica, Antonio Naddeo, Wilma Henriques, Carlos Vereza, Ruth de Souza, Edwin Luisi. (Portuguese dialogue)

By **RONNIE SCHEIB**

**A**mbitious biopic of 18th century black Brazilian sculptor-architect Antonio Francisco Lisboa (aka Aleijadinho) aspires to portray the artist as a martyr and mirror his times, while denouncing slavery and giving a history of Brazil's wealthy Minas Gerais region. Since the region's

wealth supported the artist, who was the son of a slave, elements interrelate promisingly. But costumer lacks structure and stylistic rigor, and in the end does not do justice to the artist or his works. Ethnic and art hooks may garner educational play.

Writer/director brothers Renato and Geraldo Santos Pereira tell Aleijadinho's story through the investigation of a professor living several decades later. But the "Citizen Kane"-like format doesn't offer differing views of Aleijadinho. Instead, the professor genially visits with the artist's now-aged daughter-in-law who offers up chunks of biography. Filmmakers strive for the intellectual distance Rossellini brought to historical biopics, but result is closer to Jay Ward's "Mr. Peabody" cartoons, minus the irony.

The Santos Pereiras desperately attempt to connect Aleijadinho (Mauricio Gonçalves) to social issues of his time: They put him in a scene with mistreated slaves (he cries in the corner of the frame as they're whipped) and have him overhear would-be revolutionaries talking.

Aleijadinho's early career gets the usual biopic treatment as he seeks his style, his place in the world. But film's forward projection stops abruptly when he contracts a mysterious debilitating disease, possibly syphilis or leprosy, that eats away at his extremities (his sobriquet "O Aleijadinho" means the cripple).

Although pic shows the driven artist working unceasingly for years to come — many of his greatest figures carved with hammer and chisel strapped to the stumps of his hands — his personality is swallowed up by the double demons of art and affliction.

Failing to make either the artist's creative drive or his works resonate, (pic's pedestrian depictions of his art rely heavily on the prof's voiceover for validation), the filmmakers are left to deal with his affliction. Film lovingly details Aleijadinho's constant severe pain, his disfigurement and the excruciating difficulty of climbing scaffolding on dysfunctional feet and legs. Aleijadinho's mental suffering caused by his beautiful wife's (Maria Ceica) infidelity and desertion, and his final bed-bound two years are also detailed.

But, while Julie Taymor's "Frida" glories in the transmogrification of pain into glowing canvases, Aleijadinho's extraordinary sculpted figures function almost as props to his center-staged destiny and were better served by recent exhibitions in Oxford and New York.

Tech credits do little to give form or substance to the subject, with lensing leaning more toward travelogue than transcendence.