



I Ñ Á R R I T U

SILVER SCREENS, THE SMALL SCREEN,
ALWAYS SPEAKING HIS MIND.

"How is it possible that 85 people in the world have more wealth than three billion people in the world?" asked Alejandro G. Iñárritu. "That disparity and the conflicts caused by the 99 percent trying to become part of the one percent are very interesting to me."

The two-time Oscar-winning director was speaking to Natalie Roterman of the *LA Times* about a new project, and a new medium, he was undertaking. The Mexican filmmaker was jumping to the small screen for a TV series about wealth distribution called *The One Percent*, reportedly picked up by the Starz network.

It's not surprising that Iñárritu would be drawn to the premise of conflict in his work, just as he is in life. "My brain works much better when I am confronted by [another person]," he once told *Fast Company*.

Friend, colleague, and fellow countryman, Emmanuel "Chivo" Lubezki, the Oscar-winning cinematographer of *Gravity*, *Birdman*, and *The Revenant*, described his longtime buddy as "a real pain in the ass."

BY CHRISTINA BOHNSTENGEL



Shooting *The Revenant* on location near Calgary in Alberta, Canada.

He is bold and boisterous, stubborn and passionate. He has been called ridiculously specific, and often expresses opinions emphatically, publicly, and with profanity.

Take his September 2016 op-ed for *El Pais*, a leading Spanish-language newspaper. He penned a scathing critique of Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto's decision to invite then-presidential candidate Donald Trump to meet in Mexico City.

Not a newcomer to the op-ed format, he has been known to use the platform to vent about more than just politics. During his open battle with Guillermo Arriaga, co-writer of *Amores Perros* (2000), *21 Grams* (2003), and *Babel* (2006), Iñárritu not only banned his principal collaborator from sets and from attending the Cannes Film Festival premiere of *Babel* because of disputes about spotlight attention, but five days before the 2007 Academy Awards, he spearheaded publishing a searing group letter to his former friend in the Mexican magazine *Chilango*, calling out Arriaga for an "unjustified obsession with claiming the sole authorship of a film."

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DiCaprio and Iñárritu both took home the Academy Award for their work on *The Revenant*.

The pair reportedly resolved the tension years later, but that is not an indicator that Iñárritu has toned anything down. He uses awards stages to speak his mind on issues of the day—for example, urging Mexicans to “find and build the government that we deserve,” when he accepted the Oscar for *Birdman*. He re-emphasized his stand two days later, saying “the level of dissatisfaction, of injustice, of corruption, of impunity have reached intolerable levels,” speaking about his native land mired in a decade-long drug war. In 2016, when accepting the Oscar for Best Director once again, this time for *The Revenant* (he is only the third director in history to win it back to back), he addressed the diversity issues that have been plaguing the Academy as of late. “There is a line in the film that says, ‘They don’t listen to you when they see the color of your skin,’” he said. “So what a great opportunity to our generation to really liberate ourselves from all prejudice and, you know, this way of thinking and make sure for once and forever that the color of skin becomes as irrelevant as the length of our hair.”

It was during the filming of his award-winning *The Revenant* that the *Hollywood Reporter* published the supposed exposé “How Leonardo DiCaprio’s *The Revenant* Shoot Became ‘A Living Hell.’”

“It’s undeniable,” Iñárritu later told Tara Brady of the *Irish Times*. “The shoot was extremely difficult and challenging.... Yes, it would have been easier to say, ‘let’s use a green screen and let’s have warm coffee and let’s have a good time on set.’ That would have killed the film. We might have been comfortable personally. But what’s the point in taking that road?”

His filmmaking methods are notoriously difficult. *Amores Perros* took three years and 36 drafts to write before a single frame was shot; five *Babel* crew members were sent to the hospital during a brutally hot day in Mexico’s Sonoran Desert; and when he barricaded the *Birdman* team inside Broadway’s St. James Theatre for the appearance of a film shot in one take, whispers that auteur had gone mad began to swirl. But as the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out, “After the world saw the finished product...suddenly the lunatic was a genius—the film earned best picture and best director Oscars.”



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With *The Revenant*, Iñárritu was adamant that the film be shot sequentially—an unheard of strategy in Hollywood. And because he demanded using natural light, shooting could only take place for about 90 minutes each day, which dragged filming out for about nine months. Sub-zero conditions—at one point, negative 13 degrees—in remote parts of Canada contributed to the angst. Actor Tom Hardy even made t-shirts for the cast depicting him choking Iñárritu.

“I’m not a genius or something like that,” he says. “It’s true that I may be a little challenging to work with. I’m just somebody whose vision is clear and I work my ass off to realize it,” he explained in the *Irish Times*. “I will drive myself and others to make that vision happen. I consider myself a little crazy and irresponsible for doing that. But that’s how I work. I don’t think it’s genius. I suffer from a disease that is chronic dissatisfaction.” He laughs, “And I think you have to be a little crazy to make films, no?” ■

Michael Keaton and Edward Norton in *Birdman*.



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