



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

# STOP THE POUNGING HEART

A FILM BY  
ROBERTO MINERVINI





# ROBERTO MINERVINI

## INTERVIEW

**This is the third film you have shot in Texas. Are *The Passage*, *Low Tide*, and now *Stop the Pounding Heart* related in any way?**

**Roberto Minervini:** These three films are the basis for a Texas trilogy, and they are interconnected through characters, themes, and aesthetics. The first film, *The Passage* is a road trip movie, an exploration of Texas through the eyes of a terminally ill woman. On her quest to find a Mexican healer, she stays at the home of a goat farming family of fourteen, and this is the same family portrayed in *Stop the Pounding Heart*. Colby, the bull rider also from *Stop the Pounding Heart*, makes an appearance in *Low Tide*, which is the story of a neglected boy and the world he creates to survive. This second film perhaps constitutes a narrower portrayal of solitude, although the same themes carry through all the films of the trilogy. My focus tends towards primordial human emotions like loneliness, fear and hope. I think *Stop the Pounding Heart* is the culminating work of the three, being perhaps the most faithful to its characters, in a Zavattini-esque way.

**In *Stop the Pounding Heart*, you interweave the stories of Sara, the young woman from the family of goat farmers, and Colby, the bull rider. Their realities appear to be very far apart. What was your intention in bringing them together?**

**Roberto Minervini:** The first and most apparent

reason would be an adolescent attraction that kindles between the two, possibly even by virtue of how far apart their realities are. The interest that they have in one another comes almost from a place of curiosity more than mutual understanding. Colby is a mirror for Sara, an opportunity for her to reflect on her path and her choices, an opening for her to question all that she holds sacred. I also see a strong metaphorical parallel between the two. Sara struggles to walk a straight path of God, and Colby struggles to keep his posture straight on the bull. This is a matter of life or death for both of them.

**The film touches on many broad themes, including religion, faith, and family and social values. What do you feel the film is about and does it send a specific message?**

**Roberto Minervini:** This film touches on so many topics that are relevant to today's America that it is almost difficult to mention just a few. Of course, religion and faith are very prominent in the film, as they are in the South in general. In many ways, this experience of God, of going back to stricter interpretations of religious ideology, is very endemic to the US. Perhaps insular communities feel the need to hold on tightly to their traditions and values because there is the risk of identities being dissolved. Guns are also a big part of the culture of the South, with deeply held convictions that date back to the nation's founding. The role of women

in family and society is also brought up in the film repeatedly. These are all complicated and controversial issues, and with this film I chose to depict realities that are open to interpretation, rather than further my own personal ideology.

**The film is considered to be a documentary but it is not presented traditionally. How would you characterize the film, and how are you able to get these realistic performances from nonprofessional actors?**

**Roberto Minervini:** I work exclusively with real life people and their true environments, so there are no actors involved in the traditional sense. At the same time, the underlying arc of the story is my own so you could say that the hand of the director is present. My involvement with these communities is a deeply intimate experience, and it required a lot of mutual trust. They were willing to open up their lives up to me, and me for properly portraying their lives to the public. In addition to the relationships that are cultivated over time, I also credit my shooting style with allowing people to feel comfortable in front of the camera. My production consists of a five person crew, no artificial lighting, and one take for each shot. One could say that this

film follows in the traditions of Rossellini and Bresson, the latter of whom once said that more than realism, he was interested in truth. That comment has always stayed with me.

**You are an Italian filmmaker who shoots in the United States. What is it about Texas that compels you to tell stories?**

**Roberto Minervini:** I find Texas to be a unique place, full of character. The people are fiercely independent and extremely proud, and the culture and traditions of the South are staunch and firmly rooted. As a foreign observer, I am drawn to this distinct culture of guns, cowboys, and disparate spiritual communities. Even though Texas is a vast state with large metropolitan areas, its core is composed of a myriad of small towns, almost irrelevant from a topographical standpoint, but very rich from an anthropological one. I had the chance to visit a lot of these small towns during road trips. And America all of a sudden became these little towns that you see all along the main highways. And it can become such an intimate, special place full of traditions and peculiar things that I had never seen in the broad picture of America in my mind.



# STOP THE POUNDING HEART

DIRECTED BY  
ROBERTO MINERVINI

USA - BELGIUM - ITALY / 100' / HD / ENGLISH / 2013

## SYNOPSIS

Sara is a young girl raised in a family of goat farmers. Her parents homeschool their twelve children, rigorously following the precepts of the Bible. Like her sisters, Sara is taught to be a devout woman, subservient to men while keeping her emotional and physical purity intact until marriage. When Sara meets Colby, a young amateur bull rider, she is thrown into crisis, questioning the only way of life she has ever known. In a stunning portrayal of contemporary America and the insular communities that dot its landscape, *Stop the Pounding Heart* is an exploration of adolescence, family and social values, gender roles, and religion in the rural American South.



## CAST & CREW

SARA  
SARA CARLSON  
COLBY  
COLBY TRICHELL

CINEMATOGRAPHY  
DIEGO ROMERO SUAREZ-LLANOS

EDITING  
MARIE-HÉLÈNE DOZO

SOUND EDITING  
INGRID SIMON

SOUND MIXING  
THOMAS GAUDER

PRODUCED BY  
DENISE LEE, LUIGINA SMERILLI, JOAO LEITE

A US - BELGIUM - ITALY COPRODUCTION  
WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE HOUSTON FILM COMMISSION

## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Roberto Minervini is an Italian born, US-based film director, writer and lecturer. He holds a Master in Media Studies from the New School University, New York, and is pursuing a PhD in Cinema History at the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid, Spain. He lives and works between Italy and the United States.

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