

# Reaching for the Moon (Flores Raras): Berlin Review | Hollywood Reporter

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Reaching For The Moon Still - H 2013

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

*An exotic love story becomes an empowering portrait of two highly gifted women who defy social convention* □

# The passionate romance between poet Elizabeth Bishop and Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares springs to life.

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The life of American Poet Laureate **Elizabeth Bishop** furnishes surprisingly vivid emotional material in *Reaching for the Moon*, which concentrates on her happy-sad love story with Brazilian architect **Lota de Macedo Soares**, the designer of Flamengo Park in Rio de Janeiro. A love triangle which also involved Lota's other American lover Mary Morse is described against the eye-candy of wealthy, carefree, tropical Brazil in the 1950s. Apart from the film's straight-shot appeal for poetry lovers and gay audiences, its dual portrait of two highly gifted, self-realized women could make the leap to wider art house audiences, thanks to saucy, full-bodied performances by leads **Gloria Pires** and **Miranda Otto**.

Director **Bruno Barreto** (*Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*) has spent enough time in Hollywood (*View from the Top*, etc.) to understand the importance of character and drama within what is basically a romance. Another plus for international audiences is that almost all of the narrative is in English, with a few picturesque touches of Portuguese.

The screenplay by **Carolina Kotscho** and **Matthew Chapman** takes its cue from **Carmen L. de Oliveira's** *Rare and Commonplaces Flowers*, a Brazilian bestseller that recounts how Bishop made her way to Brazil in 1951 during a period of creativity stagnation, partly on the advice of her friend and mentor Robert Lowell (**Treat Williams** in a warm cameo.) She's invited by a friend from Vassar, Mary Morse (**Tracy Middendorff**), to stay on Lota's stunning Samambaia estate outside Rio, designed by **Oscar Niemeyer** and the landscapist **Roberto Burle Marx**. Though initially the straight-laced Elizabeth is repulsed by her hostess's directness, and Lota is put off by her priggishness, their mutual attraction is strong and it doesn't take long before the two fall in love.

Mary is devastated, but Lota insists she stay on and offers to "buy her a baby" from a poor country woman to raise together. The arrangement is not perfect, given the hostility between Elizabeth and Mary; first one woman and then the other comes to the forefront of Lota's attention and bed, until Elizabeth moves back to

New York in 1967. In the intervening years she has written poetry, won the Pulitzer Prize (“Elizabeth, there’s a telegram for you!”) and become a fall-down drunk. Mary has raised a sweet little girl. And Lota has thrown herself into building Flamengo Park, through her connection with the charming but dangerously right-wing politician Carlos Lacerda (**Marcello Airoldi**) – both are supporters in the military coup d’etat that brings down the Brazilian democracy.

A tragic (and true) coda, echoed in, and perhaps inspiring, Bishop’s oft-quoted poem *One Art* (“The art of losing isn’t hard to master”), gives powerful closure to a larger-than-life relationship.

It would be hard to find two more contrasting actresses than Otto and Pires, but Barreto plays off their differences in culture and personality. Perhaps best known as a super-star of Rede Globo telenovelas, **Gloria Pires** (in her first English language role) holds back nothing in an enjoyably dynamic portrait of the ill-fated architect who wants it all, and for a while really has it. The more interiorized performance of **Miranda Otto**, who lent her delicate beauty to Eowyn in *War of the Worlds*, is a constant surprise as she broadens her cultural horizons and spreads her artistic wings, pulled back to earth time and again by her alcohol dependence, yet courageously surviving.

The soundtrack includes a catchy music mix that ranges from Chopin to Tom Jobim and Ella Fitzgerald. Cinematographer Mauro Pinheiro Jr. has a feeling for wide open spaces and makes the lushness of Samambaia look like a Brazilian Camelot.

*Venue: Berlin Film Festival (Panorama Special)*

*Production companies: LC Barreto, Films do Equador in association with Imagem Filmes, Globo Filmes, TeleCine Productions, RioFilme, Globosat, Teleimage*

*Cast: Miranda Otto, Gloria Pires, Tracy Middendorf, Treat Williams*

*Director: Bruno Barreto*

*Screenwriters: Carolina Kotscho, Matthew Chapman, inspired by a book by Carmen L. de Oliveira*

*Producers: Lucy Barreto, Paula Barreto*

*Co-producers: Penny Wolf, Romulo Marinho Jr*

*Director of photography: Mauro Pinheiro Jr.*

*Production designer: Jose Joaquim Salles*

*Costumes: Marcelo Pies*

*Editor: Leticia Giffoni*

*Music: Marcelo Zarvos*

*Sales Agent: The Film Consultancy*

*116 minutes*