

Problemista is a 2023 American surrealist comedy film written, directed, and co-produced by Julio Torres in his feature directorial debut. It stars Tilda Swinton, Torres, RZA, Greta Lee, Catalina Saavedra, James Scully, and Isabella Rossellini. The film follows a struggling aspiring toy designer from El Salvador who starts working for an erratic art-world outcast in New York City, hoping to stay in the country and realize his dream before his work visa expires.

It had its world premiere at South by Southwest on March 14, 2023, and was released in the United States on March 1, 2024, by A24.

Plot

During Alejandro's childhood in El Salvador, he and his mother create various imaginative creations, with him being his mother's finest. His mother recounts a recurring dream of him venturing into a mysterious cave with a monster inside, symbolizing his arrival to the unknown.

As an adult, Alejandro resides in Bushwick, and struggles to achieve his dream to be a toy maker at Hasbro. He applies to the Hasbro intern program with ideas like a Barbie with crossed fingers or Cabbage Patch Kids with smartphones, but faces an automated rejection email. Left with few options, Alejandro works as a minder at FreezeCorp, a company which cryogenically freezes people in order to reawaken them in the future, despite not yet having the technology to do so. Alejandro is tasked with overseeing the cryogenically frozen artist Bobby, who painted large portraits of eggs. Alejandro accidentally briefly unplugs Bobby's machine and is fired; as a result, he faces deportation if he cannot find a sponsor for his work visa within 30 days.

Alejandro encounters Bobby's eccentric and demanding art critic wife, Elizabeth, who is struggling to pay for Bobby's care. She is inspired to exhibit Bobby's work and hires Alejandro as a freelance assistant, promising sponsorship upon completion. Alejandro is tasked with collecting thirteen of Bobby's egg paintings while navigating Elizabeth's volatile temper. However, due to

<i>Problemista</i>	
	
Theatrical release poster	
Directed by	<u>Julio Torres</u>
Written by	<u>Julio Torres</u>
Produced by	<u>Julio Torres</u> <div><u>Dave McCary</u></div> <div><u>Ali Herting</u></div> <div><u>Emma Stone</u></div>
Starring	<u>Tilda Swinton</u>
	<u>Julio Torres</u>
	<u>RZA</u>
	<u>Greta Lee</u>
	<u>Catalina Saavedra</u>
	<u>James Scully</u>
Cinematography	<u>Fredrik Wenzel</u>
Edited by	<u>Sara Shaw</u>
	<u>Jacob Schulsinger</u>
Music by	<u>Robert Ouyang Rusli</u>

immigration bureaucracy, he cannot collect payment without a sponsor. In order to cover the extreme visa fees, he turns to Craigslist, taking sketchy jobs for cash.

Elizabeth introduces another assistant, the privileged Bingham, jeopardizing Alejandro's position. Bobby's final egg painting is possessed by Dahlia, a former student artist of Bobby. Elizabeth, jealous of Dalia's relationship with Bobby, wrote a scathing review of Dalia's work, hurting her career. Alejandro writes a heartfelt apology on Elizabeth's behalf, leading to Dalia's tearful acceptance and release of the painting. As Alejandro grows more desperate, he rents out his room and has an encounter with a cleaning boy fetishist. He also discovers that Hasbro has taken one of his design ideas for profit.

Production company	<u>Fruit Tree</u>
Distributed by	<u>A24</u>
Release dates	March 14, 2023 (<u>SXSW</u>) March 1, 2024 (United States)
Running time	98 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$12 million ^[2]
Box office	\$2.5 million ^{[3][4]}

Alejandro secures a solo show for Bobby at a Roosevelt Island gallery, which Elizabeth initially derides for being too small. However, Alejandro stands up to her, making her face how she and Alejandro understand each other's ambition and devotion to art. She agrees to the exhibition. Though they are disappointed to learn they are only afforded a single wall, Elizabeth decides to sell all of Bobby's paintings to the gallery. Alejandro calls his mother to inform her of their success, but Elizabeth interrupts with a shocking voice message. She has decided to freeze herself to remain with Bobby in the future, forgetting about the sponsorship in the process. Her message urges Alejandro to stand up for himself and to pursue his dream job at Hasbro.

Empowered by Elizabeth's message, Alejandro goes to Hasbro and confronts an executive with evidence of his stolen design. He secures a job within the company along with a sponsorship, and goes on to become a renowned toy maker. Centuries later, Elizabeth and Bobby are reawakened by FreezeCorp. Elizabeth reunites with a now-elderly Alejandro, who also chose cryogenic preservation, their bond transcending time.

Cast

- Julio Torres as Alejandro, an immigrant toy maker
- Tilda Swinton as Elizabeth, an artist and Alejandro's employer
- RZA as Bobby, Elizabeth's late husband
- Isabella Rossellini as the narrator
- Catalina Saavedra as Dolores, Alejandro's mother
- James Scully as Bingham, Elizabeth's secondary assistant
- Laith Nakli as Khalil, an immigration officer
- Spike Einbinder as Spray, Alejandro's roommate
- Greta Lee as Dalia, Bobby's apprentice
- Larry Owens as Craigslist, a personification of the website
- Kelly McCormack as Sharon, a FreezeCorp representative
- Greta Titelman as Celeste, Elizabeth's former employee
- Martine Gutierrez as gallerist
- Megan Stalter as Lili
- Charlene Incarnate as MC, an art studio organizer

- Theo Maltz as Travis, who rents Alejandro's room

Production

In July 2021, it was announced that [Tilda Swinton](#) would star in the film and [Julio Torres](#) would costar in and direct it, from a screenplay he wrote, with [A24](#) set to finance and distribute.^[5] In November 2021, [RZA](#), [Isabella Rossellini](#), [Greta Lee](#), [Spike Einbinder](#), [Laith Nakil](#), [Larry Owens](#), [James Scully](#), and [Greta Titelman](#) joined the cast. [Emma Stone](#) serves as a producer under her [Fruit Tree](#) banner.^[6]

[Principal photography](#) began in November 2021 in New York City.^[7]

Release

The film had its world premiere at [South by Southwest](#) on March 13, 2023.^[8] It was scheduled to be released in the United States on August 4, 2023,^[9] before it was delayed due to the [2023 SAG-AFTRA strike](#).^[10] It was eventually rescheduled to be released on March 1, 2024.^[11]

Reception

On the [review aggregator](#) website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), 88% of 113 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.6/10. The website's consensus reads: "With *Problemista*, Julio Torres' utterly unique sensibilities prove a perfectly cracked lens through which to find the surreal humor in bleak aspects of the human experience."^[12] [Metacritic](#), which uses a [weighted average](#), assigned the film a score of 71 out of 100, based on 27 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[13]

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External links

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