

Cynthia Close, invitada de *Cine entre Culturas* en la pasada edición que tuvo lugar en noviembre del 2012, escribe sobre el festival DocsDF y la retrospectiva a John Marshall.

For all theatergoers who love documentaries and have feared the impending death of the cinema experience, I offer hope. It came to me in the form of Festival Internacional de Cine Documental de la Ciudad de Mexico (DOCSDF), which took place November 8-18 in several venues across Mexico City. Most US-based doc industry news seems to be overwhelmingly focused north of the border and, historically, on our UK and European counterparts, while often ignoring our neighbors to the south. Mexico City is a vast, sprawling metropolis of over 22 million people, steeped in cultural traditions and hungry for new cultural, social and political experiences that often can only be found through documentary film. It seemed apparent to me that the people of Mexico City embraced the festival with a level of enthusiasm—dare I say fervor—that I had not felt at any international festival in a long, long time.

A relatively new fest on the doc scene, this seventh annual iteration featured 334 screenings selected from over 1,380 submissions, as well as special curated events, over a ten-day period. What I found to be most impressive was the level of audience engagement and the ability of the organizers to create an inclusive program that vast numbers of people from all walks of life felt was accessible to them. The opening night film, *El Alcalde* (The Mayor), was a perfect selection to set the tone that this brave festival was going to challenge the status quo. Directed by Emiliano Altuna, Carlos F. Rossini and Diego Enrique Osorno, the film profiles Mauricio Fernández, the polemical mayor of San Pedro Garza García, the wealthiest and one of the safest municipalities in Latin America. He uses whatever means he deems effective in cleaning out the drug cartels, and his methods open up discussion about how Mexico can address policies used to combat organized crime and drug legislation. The screening was free and open to the public, which reinforced the fact that this event was intended to impact as many viewers as possible.

Another film project, *¿Por qué la pobreza?* (Why Poverty?), a series of 13 shorts from South Africa, Haiti, Brazil, Uruguay, Kenya, Germany, Columbia, Bolivia, Spain and Venezuela, explored the conditions surrounding the ongoing problem of poverty that seems to be entrenched in many parts of the world today. All the films were made in 2012, so we had the opportunity to reflect on an up-to-date overview of this important global problem.

Besides the rich variety of international screenings at venues across the city, the fest has launched the DOCSDF Video Library and Doctober, both of which are designed to reach

audiences in many Mexican states, well beyond the city itself. Offered specifically for filmmakers, and a first time in Mexico, was the Latin Side of the Doc and, from November 10-17, the 5th annual DocsForum, a mini film school of master classes and conferences featuring such guests as Mika Kaurismäki, Jean-Pierre Gorin, Michael Glawogger, and representatives from Observatorio, Escuela de Cine Documental, Movies that Matter, the Sundance Institute and Polish Docs.

For those filmmakers and others who were guests of the festival, there were wonderful parties, fabulous food, and the amazing history and architecture of the city to explore. As I meandered through the many fountain-festooned parks and public plazas on my free time, it was hard to ignore the ever-present reminders of the ancient cultures upon which this city was built, as well as the many museums designed to preserve them. The National Museum of Anthropology was a most impressive structure, and so vast, it would have taken me days to see it all. Given the masses of people lining up at the entrance, it was clear many Mexicans share an interest in exploring their own cultural history and the rich heritage left by Mayan, Aztec and Inca people, among many other indigenous populations.

I was lucky to have played a small role in helping to organize one of the festival's special screenings—a retrospective of ethnographic filmmaker John Marshall. It was sponsored by Cine entre Culturas (Cinema Among Cultures), the only organization in Mexico dedicated to the study and promotion of global ethnographic cinema. Prior beneficiaries of their focus have been Robert Gardner, Jorge Preloran, Kim Longinotto and Vincent Carelli. Curated and organized primarily by Antonio Ziri6n and his colleagues at Ethnoscopio (a nonprofit educational organization) in conjunction with Documentary Educational Resources and DOCSDF, this major tribute included a separate, beautifully produced catalogue featuring essays on Marshall's oeuvre by Ziri6n and Valeria Vega; Pau Montagud, curator/director of DOCS DF; archivist Karma Foley, formerly of the Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archive; Patsy Asch, ethnographic filmmaker and educator; John Bishop, filmmaker and Marshall colleague; and John P. Homiak of the Anthropology Department at the Smithsonian Institution.

Published commentary and analysis of Marshall's major contribution to film and culture (his body of work was declared a "Memory of the World" by UNESCO in 2009) is extremely rare, even in English, and, until this publication, was virtually non-existent in Spanish. The festival and Ethnoscopio took on the challenge of subtitling in Spanish all the films in this major retrospective. Considering how difficult a task accurate and authoritative translation can be, they did a masterful job, both aesthetically and linguistically.

Given all of this, the most exciting moment of all was the initial screening, which was also the

inaugural program for the long-awaited opening of the magnificent new Cineteca Nacional, an architectural monument to the belief in government-supported access to cinema and culture. I literally cried when I saw the long lines for what would be sold-out screenings of all the Marshall programs, including the six-hour marathon of his final film, *A Kalahari Family*, scheduled in the smaller, downtown, La Casa Del Cine. The fact that some dedicated moviegoers were willing to sit in the aisles of the packed theater for six hours and watch this masterwork was thrilling. How I wish Marshall could have been there to address the audience after each episode. While he died in 2005, his legacy will now be accessible to Spanish-speaking film aficionados, researchers, students and an informed public for years to come, thanks to all the wonderful work of the staff of DOCSDF and our friends at Ethnoscopio.

Cynthia Close is the former president of Documentary Educational Resources and currently resides in Burlington, Vermont, where she serves on the advisory board of the Vermont International Film Festival.