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THE MAN WHO SAW TOO MUCH

Description

The AFI DOCS Interview: THE MAN WHO SAW TOO MUCH Director Trisha Ziff

For more than five decades, photojournalist Enrique Metinides risked his life to photograph tragedy â?? and the human emotion that accompanies it â?? in Mexico City. From crime scenes shot in black and white to explosions captured in full color, Metinidesâ?? hauntingly beautiful pictures reveal the drama of disaster in a single frame as captured in THE MAN WHO SAW TOO MUCH.

AFI spoke to director Trisha Ziff ahead of the filmâ??s AFI DOCS premiere. Also, check out the trailer below.

What led you to documentary filmmaking?

I come from a world of photography. My first film was based on an exhibition I curated about the famous photo of Che Guevara. It was a show about one single image and all its incarnations and hybrids. I saw the doc HELVETICA and I thought if you could make a film about a font, you could make a feature doc about a single image, a 60th of a second. I was fortunate enough to encounter amazing people to work with.

Coming from curation, I loved the world of documentary. Itâ??s a different way of storytelling and the collectivity of filmmaking was a huge attraction. I grew up in England and spent my formative years watching Channel 4 docs and working with wonderful documentary filmmakers there. So to make my own film, with the support of Netflix, was a huge challenge and an amazing opportunity. I still curate and love the different ways of working with walls and with the moving image.

What inspired you to tell the story of Enrique Metinides?

I live in Mexico City and at every traffic light, we are confronted with tabloid images of the violence that took place the night before; we can never escape it. The frequency of the images assaulting us daily also makes them, ironically, feel mundane; they paralyze us. This is a film about a photographer who spent his life taking those images. I wanted to explore why we want to look at the image as much as he wants to take the photograph â?? the layers of looking, the voyeurism, the seduction. For me, it was about diving into a very dark world, understanding the sensationalism and meeting the photographers who do this work today. The film grew out of a seven-year relationship with my protagonist Enrique Metinides, three major exhibitions and a book.

How did you find your subject?

We had been working together for five years before we began to work on the film. I seem to have got into this pattern of a book, then an exhibition, followed by a film. Itâ??s the third project with this model. I like it because each medium impacts and enriches the other . I was invited to curate a show of Enriqueâ??s work at a big photo festival in Arles in the south of France; out of that grew our book, and later came the film. But my films grow from my curatorial work .

What was a particular obstacle you faced while making the film?

I think all of us might say funding! Despite the changes in how people see documentaries today and their popularity, it is still hard to make a film, and even harder to make a doc with a cultural theme. People tend to want Latin American films to address themes of victimhood and poverty, films that fit into a stereotype of sorts. So making a film about photography and a world of photography â?? which has the complexity of not being considered of cultural value â?? falls between two stools. The real challenge, however, was to find the contemporary photographers willing to work with me and to have us go out at night with them, documenting what they do. It took time to win their confidence but being at a crime scene with a cadaver is not something I will soon forget.

What do you want audiences to take away from your film?

My main concern in showing this film in the U.S. is: does this film, which addresses the depiction of violence in photography in Mexico, somehow contribute to a Trump-like stereotype of Mexico? Obviously that idea could not be further from my intention. But what I hope in the most modest of ways is that the audience leaves the cinema thinking about their own fragility â?? that they should check their seat belts are fastened! Understanding your own fragility is also about living each moment to the fullest. So I guess I want the audience to leave the theater recognizing how fragile it all is. Itâ??s a theme that goes beyond the Mexican content; it applies to all of us.

Why is Washington, DC, a valuable location to screen your film?

DC has an extraordinary mix of people. It is a Mecca for people from all over the world. It also has a significant Mexican and Latin American population today. Itâ??s a city with a strong photographic tradition thanks to the Corcoran and a museum dedicated to media, which is also a dominant theme in my film.

I think DC is an important Mecca for documentary; it is a city embroiled with sensationalism, with gossip, with drama about news. The news in my film may be different, but the culture of sensationalism is a different version of the same.

What documentary films or documentarians have been the most influential to you?

I have two favorite documentary filmmakers: AgnÃ¨s Varda and Patricio Guzman. They both take documentary filmmaking to a lyrical place and yet through their storytelling, we confront important issues and narratives. They are so different but they both understand the media of cinema, which has always inspired me. I work and make films in Mexico and today the strength of young women documentary filmmakers is especially inspiring. Maya Goded, Viviana Garcia Besne, Maria JosÃ© Cuevas and Tatiana Hueso all challenge the boundaries of documentary. They are an amazing energy in Mexican contemporary filmmaking.

THE MAN WHO SAW TOO MUCH plays AFI DOCS on Thursday, June 23, at 9:00 p.m., and Friday, June 24, at 2:00 p.m. Buy tickets here.

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