

DOC NYC Film Festival 2022: Part 1

Mother Lode and *Our Movie (Nuestra Película)*: Two documentaries examine work and politics in South America

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This article is the first in a series devoted to the recent 2022 DOC NYC Film Festival, held November 9-27.

Two things set *Mother Lode* (2021), directed by Matteo Tortone, apart from the other films at DOC NYC. One is its beautiful black-and-white photography, and the other is that it blends reality and fiction.

The docudrama, which had its North American premiere at the festival, follows Jorge (José Luis Nazario Campos) as he leaves his struggling moto-taxi business in Lima, Peru, to find work in the gold mines. Jorge hopes to earn more money to support his wife and baby, who live in a hillside slum. Tortone developed the film's story after having met Nazario, who had worked occasionally in the mines.

Jorge finally arrives in La Rinconada, a rainy, snowy town high in the Andes Mountains. He rents a messy, closet-like room and finds a job in the nearby gold mine. Hoping to improve their chances of survival, Jorge and his coworkers regularly offer soda, cigarettes and coca leaves to an effigy of a miner. Their hours are long and the conditions primitive. After work, the men drink, dance and chase women in the local dive. This seems to be all the town offers them. Jorge's frequent calls to his wife are marred by poor reception and mutual incomprehension. From day to day, little changes, including the lingering sense of menace.

Though *Mother Lode* contains little drama in the traditional sense, it aptly conveys the experience of this layer of workers, especially through long shots of Jorge getting dressed in the morning and of the men walking

through the mine. The black-and-white images, which recall Italian neorealism, highlight the textures in each scene. They also bring out the provisional quality of the environment in which the characters nevertheless make their lives.

Jorge and his coworkers never seem desperate or depressed, nor are they stoic heroes. Like millions of other workers in their position, they simply do what is necessary to survive.

Our Movie (Nuestra Película) (2022), directed by Diana Bustamante, attempts to depict the wave of violence that engulfed Colombia in the late 1980s as children experienced it. Recreating the daily television broadcast of the period, the film begins and ends with the same footage of children singing the country's national anthem. "I am not one of those kids," says a narrator. "But I could be." The body of the film is composed entirely of news footage.

We see the large funeral procession for Carlos Mauro Hoyos, Colombia's general inspector, who was assassinated in 1988. Crowds of protesters, their grief mixed with anger, chant, "Of course, the government killed him!" The mourning is interrupted by gunshots and police repression.

We also see presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán mount a stage to speak in 1989, only to be shot seconds later. As his bodyguards rush him to an armored car, he asks to be taken to a hospital. He later succumbs to his wounds.

Workers, farmers and students are also murdered. Crowds gather near large pools of blood. Wide red trails show where corpses have been dragged. We see

spent bullets and shoes that will never again be worn. Bustamante's use of editing, repetition, slow motion and television interference makes these horrible images even more haunting.

However, there is no contextual information to help us understand this carnage. The economic and political motivations of the victims and murderers are left unexplored. So are the roles of the police and the government in this bloodshed. Not even the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which was carrying out a guerilla war against the government at the time, is mentioned.

The sole allusion to US imperialism's massive, decades-long involvement in Colombia is a fleeting image of President Ronald Reagan. Though rich in disturbing impressions, the film ultimately provides little or no illumination. A valuable film, particularly if it is a documentary, surely provides more than a child's view of the world.

To be continued



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