

visions
du reel
industry
2019

MEDIA LIBRARY

OFFICIAL
SELECTION
FESTIVAL del POPOLI
2019



OFFICIAL SELECTION 2019

SUNCINE

FICMA | Environmental Film Festival



WINNER
Close-Up
Edinburgh
Docufest
2019



OFFICIAL SELECTION
Ecozine Film
Festival
Zaragoza
2020



OFFICIAL SELECTION
Prague Film
Awards
2020



MADE IN/WITH LUXEMBOURG



CUENTOS
DEL

RIO

RIVER
TALES

A
FILM
BY
JULIE
SCHROELL



BEL
DOCS
2020
IDFF



SEFF
SARAJEVO ECOFILM FESTIVAL
2020



festover
Association Choice
2020



14ª
MUESTRA
CINE+VIDEO
INDÍGENA
2020



32nd
Galway Film Fleadh
PERIPHERAL VISIONS
AWARD



www.julieschroell.com/cuentosdelrio

YEAR	2019
GENRE	Feature Documentary
ORIGINAL TITLE	Cuentos del Río
ENGLISH TITLE	River Tales
FRENCH TITLE	Raconte-moi le fleuve
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE	Spanish
SUBTITLES	English / French
DURATION	82 minutes
COLOR / N&B	Color
SHOOTING FORMAT	HDV
SCREENING FORMAT	DCP / Pro Res 442 HQ
SOUND	Stéreo / 5.1

TRAILER



<https://vimeo.com/254635446>



<https://vimeo.com/254636158>



SYNOPSIS

While a Chinese businessman wants to take control of the inter-oceanic route in Nicaragua, actor and teacher Yemn creates a play with the local kids to reflect on their history, their identity and the country's future.

The mythic San Juan river located between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in Nicaragua, symbolises 500 years of colonisation and exploitation of resources and has seen over 70 canal projects fail. Now, a Chinese businessman is attempting to control **the interoceanic route that Columbus had desperately been looking for** when he reached the West Indies, thus creating both discontent and hopes for a better life amongst the Nicaraguans.

Actor and teacher Yemn returns to his native village El Castillo and turns the fortress ruins overlooking the San Juan river into a stage for the local youth theatre group, **a sanctuary for open discussion and critical thinking**. While their families struggle with poverty and obligation to migrate to wealthy neighbour Costa Rica in order to make ends meet, the kids rehearse and write a play about their river's history.

They improvise and embody the numerous travellers who tried to control the river; pirates meet Spanish conquerors, American engineers fight against Indigenous chiefs.

Between reality and fiction, the kids reflect upon essential questions: **What is their true identity? What can they learn from History?** And at a time where freedom of speech has been repressed and a people's revolt starts brewing, where is their country going to?



FESTIVALS & Awards

2019

Visions du Réel Media Library NYON

Close Up Dokufest **Winner best environmental documentary** EDINBURGH

International Documentary Film Festival dei Popoli FIRENZE

FICMA / SUNCINE Environmental Film Festival BARCELONA

2020

Prague Film Awards PRAGUE

Luxembourg City Film Festival (Films made in/with Luxembourg)

Ecozine Film Festival ZARAGOZA

SEFF Smaragdgni Eco film festival CROATIA

Galway Film Fleadh **Peripheral Visions Award** IRELAND

Muestra de cine y video indigena CHILE

BELDOCS BELGRADE

Terra di Tutti Film Festival BOLOGNA

Festival de Cine Verde de Barichara COLOMBIA



HISTORY of the project, CONTEXT and director's INTENTIONS

Rio San Juan, Nicaragua

In 1524, the conquistador Hernán Cortés sends a letter to the Holy Emperor Charles V of Spain:

„In Nicarao's lands there is a long river connecting the great lake to the Atlantic Sea. This must be the aquatic route that Columbus was desperately looking for when he reached the West Indies. The one who will possess this passage between the two oceans will be the new world master.“

Since that moment multiple expeditions have been sent to search for the Rio San Juan, which is located in present-day Nicaragua on the Costa Rican border, in Central America.

Since Cortés, the different world powers have fought to control the river and extract its natural resources. Many have fantasised of transforming the river into an interoceanic canal.

72 projects have emerged and failed.

In 2014, a Chinese businessman received a concession to build a canal in Nicaragua, a multi-billion dollar rival to the Panama Canal.

All these projects have come together with promises of economical development for Nicaragua, one of the poorest countries of the Americas.

An interoceanic canal in Nicaragua, a mega-infrastructure project with the promise for economical development

I was introduced to the Chinese canal project in Nicaragua in 2014 when I visited a friend living in the so-called “canal zone”, a two kilometers wide corridor following the proposed canal route. At the time of my visit, people said that everyone who lived in that zone would be displaced.

I decided to travel along the canal route to know more about the project, the people and their hopes and fears related to the canal. One part of the population was looking forward to its implementation and saw in it a source of economic development. However, many others were afraid, afraid of losing their homes, afraid of the environmental consequences, such as the destruction of lake Nicaragua.

After having met these fears, I was taken aback by the official propaganda around the canal project. According to government-funded video clips, it was to become the “biggest infrastructure project of all times”.

The foundations for a documentary film were laid. But as I went deeper into the research, things changed during the months that followed. The Chinese canal project disappeared from the news. The canal turned out to be an old myth: more than 72 projects have been planned in the last 500 years. Even though the project designers have changed over the centuries, the political scenarios look alike : a foreign nation negotiates contracts with the Nicaraguan government which is willing to sell off pieces of its sovereign territory. Although past canal projects have failed, the contracts opened the doors to foreign investors to use the resources and the land.

Art becomes a tool to make children engage in their history and understand how it shapes their present life

My background as a historian with a passion and curiosity for international history and geopolitics made me want to dig deeper. I went through a huge amount of written archive about the canal history and realised that the canal-that-was-not has infiltrated the national imaginary and consciousness. On the other side, the local

population, often lacking in education, doesn't know much about their own history. I did a longer field trip on the San Juan River, the original canal route, and followed the footsteps of pirate Horace Nelson, conquistador Alonso Calero, writer Mark Twain and ship magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt.

When I first stranded in the village of El Castillo and entered the fortress' library, I knew that this was the place where the film would develop. I stayed in the village for a long time, El Castillo became a new home for me. It was important for me to make a film which would have an impact on the local population and give them the chance to learn something about their own history. I met Yemn and the local youth theatre group and we decided to create a play together; a play about the history of the river and the canal.

Over a year I immersed myself into the lives of the children to film their realities which seemed so far from the promises of development linked to the canal projects. Bringing culture and history to these people was an important aspect in the filmmaking process.

The importance of access to arts and culture in a dictatorship

In a country where freedom of speech has become suppressed, Yemn has created a sanctuary for open discussion and critical thinking. And this freedom has its price.

In April 2018, shortly after the shooting of this film, Nicaragua plunged into a crisis with the eruption of a nationwide revolt against President Daniel Ortega. Amongst the conflict's origins was the people's discontent with the Chinese interoceanic canal project.

A major part of the population, hardly repressed by Daniel Ortega's government, continues to mobilise until now. Hundreds of people have been killed so far.

Our film's theatre teacher and his wife have had to leave the country after receiving death threats.









BIOGRAPHY

Julie Schroell

Julie Schroell is a filmmaker and audiovisual artist living in Berlin. Born in Luxembourg, she holds a double master's degree in Contemporary History, and Film Studies and Screenwriting from the Université Libre de Bruxelles. From an early age she has shown a strong desire to understand and capture the interaction between geopolitical circumstances, cultural contexts, and individuals' histories, perceptions and identity negotiations.

She started her career by directing a series of commissioned films, such as *The Farmer's Blues* (2011), in which she set out to portray the remaining farmers of her home country and discover how they cope with, and adapt to, the rapidly changing socio-political climate. The film was selected at numerous festivals around the world. Passionate about the documentary genre, Julie has since directed and produced several documentaries for major broadcasters, including RTL Luxembourg, France Télévisions, RTBF and Al Jazeera.

Cuentos del Río ('River Tales') is her first independent feature-length documentary. The intimate approach and the inclusion of the protagonists' in the making of the film are important characteristics of Julie's work.

Julie also seeks to widen her artistic horizon within filmmaking by exploring various genres and techniques. Her projects range from fiction filmmaking (*Mister Rocket and his magnetic friends*, 2015) to interdisciplinary approaches integrating theatre, science, installation and film.

FILMOGRAPHY

Julie Schroell

A SELECTION

- 2019 Director and producer of the feature documentary **Cuentos del Río (River Tales)** 90' LUXEMBOURG PROD. CALACH FILMS
- 2018 Video artist for **Sinatra in Agony** Musical theatre for Performer, Countertenor and Ensemble (DIR. OSCAR BIANCHI)
PROD. GARE DU NORD (CH), JARDINS MUSICAUX (CH), LAC LUGANO (CH)
- 2016 Director of the transmedia project and documentary **Génération Quoi? Europe** LUXEMBOURG, FRANCE, BELGIUM, PROD. A_BAHN, YAMIZ, UPIAN, FRANCE
TÉLÉVISIONS, RTBF, S4C
- 2016 Director and producer of the documentary **Parcours du coeur battant**
37' LUXEMBOURG PROD. PLANNING FAMILIAL LUXEMBOURG, LOUFOK PRODUCTIONS
- 2015 Director of the documentary **Këmmer dech em däin Dreck**
26' LUXEMBOURG PROD. CALACH FILMS, KOLLEKTIF 13, RTL LUXEMBOURG
- 2015 Director of the fiction short film **Mister Rocket (and his magnetic friends)**
18' LUXEMBOURG PROD. SAMSA FILM
FESTIVALS: SELECTION *BAMBERGER KURZFILMTAGE* GERMANY 2016

- 2015 Video artist for the installation **Organism response**
(DIR. DAVID OLBRICH) PROD. NEUE NATIONALGALERIE, SAMMLUNG SCHARF-
GERSTENBERG, BERLIN
- 2014 Producer of the documentary **Return to Morocco**
52' (DIR. CHARLOTTE BRUNEAU), PROD. AL JAZEERA, LOUFOK PRODUCTIONS
- 2011 Director of the documentary **De Bauereblues (The Farmer's Blues)**
72' LUXEMBOURG PROD. CNA, SAMSA FILM
FESTIVALS:
SELECTION *LIFE SCIENCES FILM FESTIVAL* PRAG, CZECH REPUBLIC 2012
SELECTION *EKOTOP FILM FESTIVAL* BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA 2012
WINNER *FUTURE FILM FESTIVAL* HUNGARY 2013
SELECTION «OUT OF COMPETITION» *ECOFALANTE FILM FESTIVAL*
SAO PAULO, BRAZIL 2014
SELECTION *LES RENCONTRES DOCUMENTAIRES DE L'IRTS DE LORRAINE* FRANCE 2014
SELECTION *THE VILLAGE DOC FESTIVAL* ITALY 2013



BIOGRAPHY

Calach Films

Calach Films is a production company based in Luxembourg. The company was created end of 2012. It is managed by Jesus Gonzalez who has almost 20 years of experience in international co-productions and who has been production manager, line producer or producer on about 50 films (animation, short movies, documentaries and feature films).

CREDITS

DIRECTOR & SCRIPTWRITER	Julie Schroell
PRODUCERS	Jesus Gonzalez Julie Schroell
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Frank Pineda
PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER	Francois Martig
LINE PRODUCER NICARAGUA	Florence Jaugey (Camila Films)
DRAMA TEACHER	Yemn Jordan Taisigue Lopez
FILM EDITOR	Damian Plandolit
MUSIC SOUNDTRACK	Pascal Karier, Aaron Ahrends (Say Yes Dog)
SOUND EDITING	Capucine Courau
SOUND RE-RECORDING MIXER	Michel Schillings
COLOR CORRECTION	Raoul Nadalet

CONTACT

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