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Mexico: 10 Bets on Diversity

By John Hopewell



"Mom," Courtesy of Xun Sero

10 films underscoring Mexican cinemas drive into diversity:

"Huesera," (Michelle Garza Cervera)

Valeria is pregnant, but something is wrong with the baby. Shades of "Rosemary's Baby," but "Huesera" goes its own way, as Valeria gradually realizes what for her is really horror.

Genre and LGBTQ, a double winner at Tribeca, taking its coveted New Narrative Director hardware, and picked up by XYZ Films for most world sales. "A terrifying, bone-breaking body horror nightmare," said *Variety*. Produced by Mexico's Napa Films and Machete Films, the latter behind Cannes winners "Leap Year" and "La Jaula de Oro."

"Mom," ("Mamá," Xun Sero)

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Selected for Canada's Hot Docs, Guadalajara Mezcal Award competition, where it won an honorable mention, and now Morelia's doc strand, one of the banner titles of a new Chiapas cinema. A portrait of Sero's mom, yes, but also of a remarkable, resilient woman who defied the conventions of her village, refusing to marry a man who didn't want her, and brought up two children on her own. "The only dependence which women suffer is economic," says Sero. His mother breaks that subjugation.

"Mezquite's Heart," ("El Corazón de Mezquite," Ana Laura Calderón)

A Yoreme, an Indigenous group in arid northern México, Lucia dreams of becoming a harpist like her father. But tradition bars women from playing the harp. Meanwhile her rural community battles debt and corporate takeover of their lands. Playing 70 festivals from its world premiere at São Paulo in October 2020 and still picking up awards, from Russia to Israel, Mexico, the U.S. Scotland and Panama.



Mezquite's Heart
Courtesy of Ana Laura Calderon

"Negra," (Medhin Tewelde)

Another Chiapas standout, in which Tewelde explains what it means to be a Black Mexican woman in Mexico. Pic tells the story of five Afro-descendant women from southern Mexico, exposing racism, resistance and processes of self-acceptance, strategies for transcending stereotypes, and the celebration of their identity, its synopsis runs. A fest fave, playing OCOTE, Chiapas Film Showcase and Barrio Film Festival (Feciba).

"Nudo Mixteco," (Angeles Cruz)

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Set in an Oaxaca's Mixteca region hamlet, the debut of actress-director Cruz intertwining three stories — of María, an ostracized lesbian, Esteban, a violent drunk, and Toña who saves her daughter from sexual assault — in a broad based critique of pervasive machismo. Co-written by Lucia Carrera ("Tamara and the Ladybug," starring Cruz), one of the biggest Indigenous film prize winners of late, taking hardware at the Cleveland, LasPalmas, San Francisco, Moov, St. Paul and Minneapolis fests.



Nudo Mixteco
Courtesy of San Sebastian Film Festival

"Oliver and the Pool," ("Oliverio y la Piscina," Arcadi Palerm-Artis)

Underscoring the breadth of Mexican filmmaking, a coming of age dramedy set in Mexico's white upper middle-class as Oliver's parents announce their divorce. Then his father drops dead at the dinner table. Oliver in reaction sets up camp in a chaise lounge by the swimming pool and refuses to budge. Written by top Mexican scribe Gibrán Portela ("Guerros," "La Jaula de Oro," "The Untamed"), winning film, director and rising star at WorldFest Houston and a Special Jury Prize at the Puerto Rico Festival.

"Robe of Gems," ("Manto de Gemas, Natalia López Gallardo)

One of the biggest of Mexican films from a female director this year, a 2022 Berlin Jury Prize winner from longtime editor Natalia López Gallardo ("Jauja," "Post Tenebras Lux," "Heli"). Three women clash with a drug gang, sparking tragedy and violence in a film which charts — often numbingly — the "spiritual wound" of a "cycle of villainy," as López Gallardo puts it. Sold by Visit Films.

"They Made Us the Night," ("Nos Hicieron Noche," Antonio Hernández)

After 1974's Hurricane Dolores wipes out their village, Charco Redondo, its inhabitants found a new settlement, San Marquitos. Its foundation grows in oral tradition, fuelled by tellers imagination, into part of a common identity. Set in a Black community in Oaxaca, the Guadalajara Fest Fipresci winner is shot with a documentary focus on reality and directorial invention in even the most banal settings. Plus a sensual soundtrack usually reserved for more ambitious fiction.

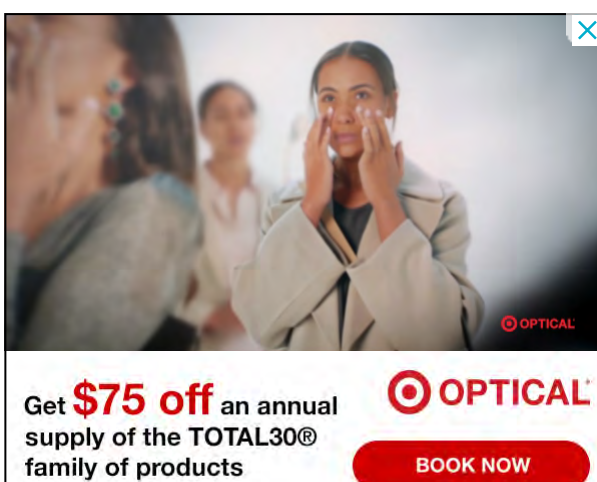
"White Night," ("Pobo 'Tzu," (Tania Ximena, Yollotl Gómez Alvarado, 2022)

In 1982, a volcano buried the Zoque town of Esquipulas Guayabal. 37 years later, urged on by the visions of local poet, the inhabitants of Nuevo Guayabal, a village in Chiapas, attempt to unearth Esquipulas. Screened at the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival, a study of collective faith, praised for its powerful mix of documentary, fiction and belief and across-the-board production values.

"Vaychiletik," (Juan Javier Pérez)

Produced like "Negra" by Daniela Contreras and Nicolás Défosé at Chiapas-based Terra Mostra Films, and directed by Pérez, a Tsotsil Mayan like Sero, both alums of Contreras and Défosé's San Cristóbal de las Casas Documentary Film School. Here, in a taboo-busting movie laced with humor, Pérez turns the camera on his father, ordered by the Gods in dream to be a musician, leading a band at the 42 traditional festivities, though the effort has become a calvary and he'd like to step down. World premiered at Biarritz Latin American Film Festival in September 2021.

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Vaychiletik
Courtesy of Nicolás Défosse

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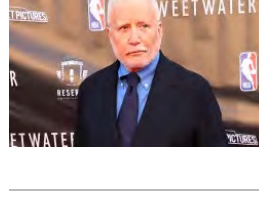
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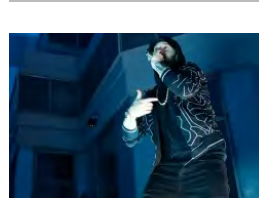
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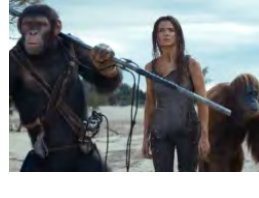
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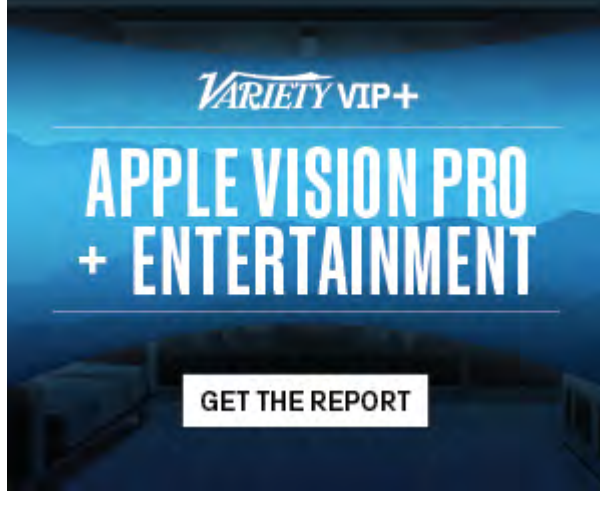
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