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PRIX
LORIDAN-IVENS / CNAP
2023

MoMA
Doc Fortnight 2023
Official Selection

OFFICIAL SELECTION
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FILM FEST

fpcci/62
SELECCIÓN
OFICIAL
FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE CINE
DE CARTAGENA DE INDIAS

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2023
SAN FRANCISCO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
SFILM

Cinélatino
35th Rencontres
de Toulouse
PRIX DOCUMENTAIRE
RENCONTRES DE TOULOUSE



LA BONGA

DIRECTED BY SEBASTIÁN PINZÓN SILVA AND CANELA REYES

FEATURING MARÍA DE LOS SANTOS CÁSSERES, DAYANIS HERRERA, ÓSCAR HERRERA, PÁNFILO VALDEZ, YANETH SANTANA AND GRACIELA PALOMINO PRODUCER GABRIELLA GARCÍA-PARDO EXECUTIVE PRODUCER KELLEN QUINN CO-PRODUCER NEVO SHINAAR FIELD PRODUCER DIÓGENES CABARCAS IMPACT PRODUCER LUIS FRUTO CO-DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY TIMOTHY FRYETT CO-EDITOR LAURA HUERTAS MILLÁN SOUND DESIGN & MIX MERCEDES GAVIRIA AND TARIQ BURNEY CO-LOCATION SOUND YESID VÁSQUEZ COLORIST NATALY YEPES ASSISTANT EDITOR MARIANA VEJARANO GRAPHICS BY MARTÍN SÁNCHEZ POSTER BY CARLA MELO A FILM BY JARANA CINE AND COLECTIVO DE COMUNICACIONES KUCHÁ





LOGLINE

Two decades after a death threat from right-wing paramilitaries caused the maroon community of La Bonga to flee, the townspeople embark on a symbolic journey through the jungles of the Colombian Caribbean to resurrect a home that exists only in their memories.

SYNOPSIS

On April 5, 2001, shortly after a nearby massacre at the hands of paramilitaries, two hooded strangers entered the farming town of La Bonga and delivered a letter. The note accused the town of sympathizing with the FARC, the largest guerrilla group in Colombia. They were given 48 hours to either leave or be forcibly removed. The entirety of La Bonga—150 families—fled that same day.

Over time, the jungle that surrounded the town swallowed it whole. There exists little more than memories; an entire generation knows only of their birthplace through the stories of their parents and grandparents. Many see La Bonga as a mythical land that has vanished.

Led by the only person who has attempted to live there again—María de los Santos—the townspeople decide to resurrect a festival honoring their patron saint, Santa Rosa. To do so, they must confront the jungle to reclaim their home while facing the realities of attempting to reconstruct a place that no longer is.

Through the years, María has made the arduous 3-hour trek to La Bonga countless times. Many think she's crazy for doing this on her own, that she's risking her life in vain. But María's deepest fear is that she'll die away from her land and that her grandchildren will never be true Bongueros. Interspersed with the epic journey of the main group, we accompany María on one of her trips, only this time she walks with her 15-year-old granddaughter, Dayanis, who has never set foot in La Bonga. María attempts to instill in Dayanis the image of the land she loves, believing that if she remains the only person to actively seek a path to return, La Bonga will be lost forever.



DIRECTORS'NOTE

Our creative practice is fueled by the power of collectivity and shared memory. Our goal is to challenge the tired perspective of many of the stories told about Colombia, those that sensationalize violence and simplify and reduce its victims. Through this project, we seek to create a collective memory and a new way of relating to our stories. We believe in the power of cinema to bring us together, to create a space of convergence. In the union between image, word, and sound, the audience can realize how history is stored in our bodies and how different layers of time are present in the spaces we inhabit. We want to create opportunities where reality, imagination, memory, protagonists, and the production team intertwine to make each other more complex and create from collectivity.

Our production team has a variety of experiences around immigration with fluctuating distances that have affected our relationship with home, family, and identity. The process of making this film has been for us a journey to our own country. Sebastián returned to Bogotá a couple of years ago after living in the United States for twelve years, during which his lens was constantly focused on his home country.

Canela has lived most of her life in Colombia but had to temporarily emigrate to the United States at the age of seven after her father received death threats from paramilitary groups. Our producer, Gabriella, is the daughter of Colombian immigrants who raised her in Miami due to the conflict, which forced her to grow up far away from most of her family. Our relationship with Colombia has been marked by the desire to return, in different ways. And although our migration stories do not compare to the situation of the bongueros, we understand what it means to be away from our land and the desire to shorten that distance. We are from a generation that is only now discovering the opportunity to understand where we come from.

The film is also a co-production with communications collective of San Basilio de Palenque, Kuchá Suto.

Kuchá Suto is a collective of Afro-Colombian creators who actively use different media to preserve their culture and create dialogue around the importance of their ancestral heritage. We created this film in collaboration not only with Kuchá Suto but also hand in hand with the community of La Bonga. Our team worked together with the community guided by some of their social leaders such as Yaneth Santana and Luis Fruto in a two-year development process that included several community meetings and many deep conversations about the process of creating the film. In the end, the most important and lasting result of this project will be the memories of its creation, the shared memory of hundreds of people who came together around a shared vision and the desire to return home.

TOPIC SUMMARY

The people of La Bonga are descendants of enslaved people who fought for their freedom in the jungles that surround Cartagena. Their communities are known as Palenques, a name given to the improvised wooden forts built to protect them against constant attacks from their enslavers. For more than 400 years, Palenqueros have fought to preserve their ancestral heritage. Yet, while their rebellion laid the foundation for the greater independence of the Americas, their stories are little known and rarely acknowledged. When they are it's often through a folklorized lens or one focused entirely on hardship.

While it's important to acknowledge the injustices of displacement---with more than 40 million living in internal displacement worldwide--the prevalent discourse boxes communities into victimhood and simplifies their reality. In the time that we have been making this film, it has become more evident to us how the word "displaced" is carved into both Colombia and the global subconscious as a perpetually victimized unit. Both journalism and cinema have created characters with a limited future, with little agency, who live on the margins and whose history has already been written. We seek to put the emphasis in a different place. There's an urgent need for stories that shift the focus to eye-level vs top-down portrayals. If our history is cyclical, a collective return is also possible. For this reason, we have sought to make a film in which the force of collective action predominates in the construction of our memory and our history.





CREW BIOS

SEBASTIÁN PINZÓN SILVA co-director

Sebastián Pinzón Silva is a Colombian documentary filmmaker. He studied film and television at the Savannah College of Art and Design and he has a master's degree in documentary media from Northwestern University in Chicago. His directorial work has been screened at festivals such as Locarno, MoMA Doc Fortnight, and New Directors / New Films. His short Palenque won Best Latin American short in FICValdivia in 2017. His film *La Bonga*, co-directed with Canela Reyes, received the Loridan-Ivens prize for the best first feature film at Cinéma Du Réel in 2023 and the award for best documentary at Cinélatino in Toulouse. Sebastián worked as an assistant editor for *MINDING THE GAP* (2019 Oscar Nominee). He has since worked as editor and cinematographer for productions for National Geographic, Honnold Foundation, and the Truth Commission of Colombia. Sebastián was named one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Cinema in the United States by Filmmaker Magazine in 2019. He is co-founder of Jarana Cine, SITE Collective, and Video Consortium Colombia, a global network of support and connection between documentary filmmakers.

CANELA REYES co-director

With a background in anthropology and literature, Canela Reyes has worked as a director, screenwriter, and researcher on films and community development projects around Colombia. She worked as a co-writer, researcher, and co-producer on the films *Lapü* (Sundance, Berlinale 2019), and "*Carropasajero*" (World Cinema Fund, FDC). The projects she has worked on have also been exhibited at festivals such as CPH:DOX, DocsBarcelona, Cinelatino, FICCI, Documenta Madrid, DOKer Russia, and Thessaloniki DF, among others. Her first feature film as a director, *La Bonga*, co-directed with Sebastián Pinzón Silva, received the Loridan-Ivens prize for the best opera prima at Cinéma Du Réel in 2023 and the Best Documentary award at Cinélatino in Toulouse. She co-directed *Omí VR*, a virtual reality experience around Afro-Colombian santería, and she took part in the Afro Religious Systems Group for three years. She worked as a documentary filmmaker at the Gaia Amazon Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung in Colombia. She is co-founder of the production company Jarana Cine, and of Video Consortium Colombia, a global network of support and connection between filmmakers.

GABRIELLA GARCÍA-PARDO
producer

Gabriella is a documentary filmmaker drawn to stories of our relationship to place, the non-human, and climate justice. She is currently based between Washington, DC and Bogotá, Colombia. A 2020 Sundance Creative Producing Fellow and 2020 Impact Partners Producers Fellow, Gabriella has been supported by Catapult Films, ITVS, IFP/The Gotham, BAVC, Visions sud Est, and NOFS, among others. Her work as a cinematographer has screened at festivals including Sundance, SXSW, Full Frame, and Hot Docs. Her short film *THE BARDIA* (Mountainfilm, 2022) has played in 3 countries and over 10 festivals. She is currently co-directing her first feature film, *FENCED*, with Sam Price-Waldman and producer Jonna McKone. And is producing two features: *LA BONGA*, from directors Sebastián Pinzón Silva and Canela Reyes and *BACKSIDE* with director Raúl Paz Pastrana. Previously, Gabriella produced short-form documentaries at National Geographic, filmed over 150 musicians at NPR, designed an intensive summer film program for high school students at Yale, and led horse treks through Chile. Gabriella believes deeply in community building and is the founder/director of the DC Video Consortium where for four years she led a team of organizers to program monthly events and mentorship, bringing non-fiction creators together. She is a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design, has taught film to high school students at Yale, and led horse treks in Chile.

LAURA HUERTAS-MILLÁN
co-editor, script consultant

Laura Huertas Millán es una cineasta y artista visual franco-colombiana, cuya práctica se sitúa en la intersección entre el cine, el arte contemporáneo y la investigación. Seleccionada en festivales de cine como la Berlinale, el Festival Internacional de Cine de Toronto (TIFF), el Festival Internacional de Cine de Rotterdam, el Festival de Cine de Nueva York y en Cinéma du Réel, sus películas han ganado premios en el Festival de Cine de Locarno, FIDMarseille, Doclisboa y Videobrasil, entre otros. Ha tenido más de veinte retrospectivas de su trabajo organizadas en todo el mundo, en cinematecas como TIFF Lightbox de Toronto, el Harvard Film Archive y en la cinemateca de Bogotá, y en festivales de cine líderes como Mar del Plata y Rencontres du Documentaire de Montreal.

Huertas Millán tiene un doctorado práctico en "Ficciones etnográficas" desarrollado entre la Universidad PSL (programa SACRe) y el Sensory Ethnography Lab (Harvard University). Trabaja como educadora en espacios académicos y alternativos. Huertas Millán forma parte del colectivo artístico, de investigación y curatorial Counter-Encounters (con Onyeka Igwe y Rachael Rakes) sobre la antropología crítica y las estéticas y políticas del encuentro.





PRODUCTION COMPANIES

JARANA CINE

Jarana is a new film production company, founded by Canela Reyes and Sebastián Pinzón, two Colombian filmmakers with experience in directing, producing, writing, camera, and sound.

Through Jarana we create cinematographic works focused on rethinking the documentary genre, questioning hierarchical and centralist dynamics, and favoring the multiplication of individual and collective (and hopefully also non-human) subjectivities when creating cinema. For this reason, we strive to create films that are produced hand-in-hand with the communities. We also seek to create alliances with audiovisual collectives from different areas of Latin America and find options for the distribution of our works to be done in conjunction with other creations of local collectives.

Ultimately, Jarana means for us the possibility of knowing the world through the images and sounds created from the union of perspectives as different from those that exist in our country. It means having the freedom to jointly search for the many layers of meaning that overlap in reality, through aesthetic exploration, a vindication of community struggles, and creative work based on memory and imagination.

COLECTIVO DE COMUNICACIONES KUCHÁ SUTO

In San Basilio de Palenque, the Communications Collective is in charge of disseminating and projecting the Palenquera culture. In addition to being a strategy to safeguard the heritage of the community.

The KuchaSuto communications collective, which means "Listen to us" in the Palenque language, promotes different local initiatives related to memory and cultural expressions. This collective was born in 1999, initially formed as a seedbed for young people and teachers from the Benkos Biohó Agricultural Technical Educational Institution, trained and focused on community radio programming work. Its objective was to educate, addressing issues of school life, values and reinforcing the Palenquera language through different programs. It is a way to reconstruct the historical memory of the Afro-descendant communities that have been violated and victims of conflicts, and an avenue to disseminate and make visible the ethnic-cultural diversity of Afro-descendant communities through the production of audiovisual and digital content.



AWARDS

PREMIO LORIDAN-IVENS A MEJOR ÓPERA PRIMA CINEMA DU RÉEL 2023

“Documentary cinema is many things at once: a political position, an image, a structure, a relationship that changes and moves according to needs. Finding a film that has all these qualities at once is unusual; when it comes to a first feature, it’s exceptional. The bodily exploration of an erased history, two intertwined journeys to different eras combined with magnificent simplicity, a monument to Afro-Colombian history and tradition based on benevolence, fluidity, and hope.”

- James Lattimer, Ariane Michel, Clara Schulmann, Fern Silva, Maria Giovanna Vagenas

PREMIO PATRIMONIO CULTURAL INMATERIAL CINEMA DU RÉEL 2023

“Using a fundamental freedom again, that of rejecting the situation and leaving. More rarely, the freedom to go home. Long walk together, taking the old road. Look for strength there: ‘Speak!’ and singing. Here is the ancestral place founded by a marron community, when the ancestors freed themselves to impose themselves free against the colony. You cry when you finally arrive, because 23 years ago you had to leave by force, and now everything is ruined. Proceed to the Virgin and caress the walls of the school that have remained firm. Set fire to the undergrowth and dance in the ashes. Raising the devastated land dancing, making it dance too, like fireflies. Restoring your home by hand with soil. The individual and collective gestures return once again.”

PREMIO MEJOR DOCUMENTAL CINÉLATINO RENCONTRES DE TOULOUSE 2023

“With immense pleasure, we award the Best Documentary Feature award to Canela Reyes and Sebastián Pinzón Silva for ‘La Bonga.’ A luminous film of memory and transmission, of return and reconstruction. A film that pays tribute to all those who resist all over the world, to all those who, whatever happens, ‘keep walking.’ We were moved by a unique and subtle aesthetic and writing that brings an entire community to life. It is also a collective performance, both of the protagonists of the crazy adventure in which they lead us and the production team. A film about sharing and complicity between filmmakers and those filmed. .”

- Penda Houzangabe, Joëlle Cammas, Jean-Luc Gabenisch, Maryline Gini



SCREENINGS

2023

True / False

MoMA Doc Fortnight

Cartagena Film Festival

Cinéma du Réel

Cinélatino Toulouse

SFFILM

New York Colombian Film Festival



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Original title: La Bonga

Film length: 77 mins

Countries of production: Colombia-
USA

Year of completion: 2023

CREDITS

FEATURING

María de los Santos Cásseres
Luz Dayanis Herrera
Óscar Herrera
Vicenta Cásseres
Pánfido José Valdez
Yaneth Santana
Luis Eduardo Fruto
Graciela Palomino
Yulibeth Barón

DIRECTORS

Sebastián Pinzón Silva
Canela Reyes

PRODUCERS

Gabriella García-Pardo
Sebastián Pinzón Silva

FIELD PRODUCER

Diógenes Cabarcas Zurita

CO-PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

Rodolfo Palomino Cassiani

CO-PRODUCER

Nevo Shinaar

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Kellen Quinn

EDITORS

Laura Huertas-Millán
Sebastián Pinzón Silva
Canela Reyes

CO-WRITERS

María de los Santos Cásseres
Canela Reyes
Sebastián Pinzón Silva
Gabriella García-Pardo
Timothy Fryett

SCRIPT CONSULTANT

Laura Huertas Millán

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Sebastián Pinzón Silva

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Yaneth Santana
María de los Santos Cásseres
Pánfido José Valdez
Yulibeth Barón

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Diógenes Cabarcas Zurita
Rodolfo Palomino Cassiani

COLORIST

Nataly Yepes Pinilla, Feels Color
Company

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Táriq Burney

POST-PRODUCTION SOUND

Mercedes Gaviria
Táriq Burney

LOCATION SOUND

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Canela Reyes

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Ómar Herrera

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Sophie Gordon

ART DIRECTOR

Rafael Herrera Guerrero

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DCP & CONFORM

Jorge Román, Crayola films

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María Padilla

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Yeis Herrera

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Deider Herrera

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Martín Cañate

Alejandro Cañate

Banda 6 de Agosto de Mahates,

Bolívar

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Deider Herrera

Óscar "el Gordo" Herrera

Yoimer Flórez

Elevith Flórez

Pablo José "Papito" Cásseres

Roger "Rojo" Santana

Jesus "McKensey" Márquez

Luis Rafael Cásseres

Albeiro Herrera

Ramón Arturo Herrera

Yeisson Sandoval

Willy Herrera

Aníbal Martínez

Nepomuceno Herrera

"El Ñoño" Herrera

Onayi "El Cacique" Herrera

Victor Ortega

Yoiber Herrera

Andrés Herrera

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Juan "Campeón" Yaular

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Yeison Herrera
Yeliseth Márquez
Yenifer Márquez
Yerlis Méndez
Yiseth López
Yoives Jesus Masah o Masatt?
Yorbis Navarro
Yosnaidis Santana
Yudis Martínez
Yuslanis Pérez
Zuley Herazo Herrera

Y el resto de la comunidad
bonguera

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LEGAL ADVISOR, COLOMBIA
Andrés Jaramillo, Legal Radiolem

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JARANA CINE
Canela Reyes
Sebastián Pinzón Silva

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COLECTIVO DE COMUNICACIONES

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Jarol Salas
Javier Blanco
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Juan Martínez
Keiber Núñez
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Sabino Cassiani
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Mina Fitzpatrick
Timothy Fryett
Nevo Shinaar

Sebastián Pinzón Silva

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Visions du Réel Industry

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Forero
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La comunidad de La Bonga



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