

TIFF PRESENTS

# HIGHER<sup>^</sup>LEARNING

Cuban Women Filmmakers in the Diaspora  
Film Screening Programme Description

## Roots and Routes: Cuban Cinemas of the Diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*(Travelling Showcase of Cuban Diasporic Film + Media Arts. Montreal/Kingston/Toronto, Canada, 2015)*

Diasporic cinemas are a central part of Cuban culture on and off the island in the post-2000 era. Cuban film and media production today is shaped by diasporic experiences, identities and multiple forms of contemporary mobility. The act of moving homes defines new constructions of social imaginaries and alters feelings of national belonging as well as practices of citizenship. Today's young Cuban filmmakers in the diaspora unsettle former notions of exile. They look not only at their roots but also at the numerous routes within which their work circulates. Plural, contextual, and mobile sense of nationalism, feminism, cosmopolitanism and racialization characterize their audiovisual practice.

The histories of cinema and diaspora have both shaped the expanded geographies of Cuban culture. The Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) was the first cultural institution founded after the Revolution of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959. This institution defines the importance of audiovisual production on the island and created the basis for the imperfect cinema movement that emerged in the 1960's, which was appropriated and contested by following generations of filmmakers. Political and economic transformation in the country caused different moments of massive migration. Three recognized migratory waves have shaped Cuban exilic history: one that extended from 1959 to 1962 (from the success of the Cuban Revolution to the Missile Crisis), a second one in 1980 known as the Mariel Boatlift and a third one in the early 1990s due to the fall of the Soviet bloc and its economic subsidies to Cuba. This latest exodus reached its peak with the *balseo* (rafter) crisis in 1994 a time when the country lived its worst economic situation. The filmmakers that participate in this project lived in their childhood in Cuba in that era of scarcity and creativity euphemistically called "The Special Period". Currently, they are part of the over 100 Cuban filmmakers who live and produce audiovisual work in the diaspora.

This project aims to contextualize the recent Cuban experience of what Hamid Naficy has called "accented cinemas" by coordinating a curatorial series that will promote, in Canada, the work of young filmmakers who live or have lived temporarily or permanently off the Island. The films in these programs explore different aspects of the filmmakers' politics of place in terms of their cinematographic influences, modes of production and discursive inclinations. In both explicit and implicit ways the movies discuss the challenges of insertion and accommodation of these artists in their host societies and their different expressions of personal and collective belonging. Some look at home and the past with nostalgia, others connect critically with their "here and now" in a global, re-territorialized manner.

One of the main characteristics of this new generation of "filmmakers in motion" is the diversity of their location and the variety of their storytelling. They work in cities as diverse as New York, Mexico

Zarza, Zaira. Introduction in *Roots and Routes: Cuban Cinemas of the Diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Montreal March 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

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City, Berlin, Paris, Luanda, Seoul, Geneva, Toronto, Montreal and Madrid. Also, their films span experimental narratives, to first-person affective documentaries; from two-minutes-long fiction academic exercises to genre feature length movies. As a result, their work contributes to the eclectic and heterogeneous mediascape, a fragment of which features in the programs below.

Community outreach is relevant to this series that hopes to appeal to Latin American, Caribbean and other diasporic communities in Toronto, Kingston and Montreal. But it especially seeks to engage a broader community of local cultural producers: artists, film and media curators, students and active movie-goers in general.

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