

The Echo

El Eco

A film by Tatiana Huezo



102 mins / Mexico/Germany/2023/ 1:89:/5.1/Spanish with English subtitles

Berlin Festival 2023 – Encounters – Winner Best Director

Berlinale Documentary Award

Opening date tbc

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SYNOPSIS

In the remote village of El Eco that exists outside of time, the children care for the sheep and their elders. While the frost and drought punish the land, they learn to understand death, illness and love with each act, word, and silence of their parents. A story about the echo of what clings to the soul, about the certainty of shelter provided by those around us, about rebellion and vertigo in the face of life. About growing up.

Download photo set – jpg [here](#) tif [here](#)

Further information on our website [here](#):

Cast:

Montse
Luz Ma
Sarahí
Abuela Angeles

Montserrat Hernández Hernández
Luz Maria Vázquez González
Sarahí Rojas Hernández
María de los Ángeles Pacheco Tapia

Crew:

Director
Writer
Director of Photography
Sound Recordist
Post Production
Editors
Composers
Sound Design
Sound Mix
Postproduction
Co-producers
Executive Producer
Producers
Production Company

Co Production Companies
With the Support of:

Tatiana Huevo
Tatiana Huevo
Ernesto Pardo
Martin de Torcy
Marco Hernández Calvo
Lucrecia Gutiérrez (AMEE), Tatiana Huevo
Leonardo Heiblum, Jacobo Lieberman
Lena Esquenazi
Jaime Baksh (CAS), Michelle Couttolenc (CAS)
Marco Hernández Calvo
Viola Fügen, Michael Weber, Doris Hepp
Maya Scherr-Wilson
Tatiana Huevo, Dalia Reyes
Radiola Films
The Match Factory, ZDF Zweites Deutsches
Fernsehen
Insituto Mexicano de Cinematografia
(through the Focine programme)
ZDF/arte, Film und Medienstiftung NRW
IDFA Bertha Fund, Chicken & Egg Pictures

Mexico/Germany 2023 102 mins
1.89:1 DCP 4K / 5.1

TATIANA HUEZO

"Mexican-Salvadoran filmmaker Tatiana Huezo gained an international reputation with her feature debut, *The Tiniest Place* (2011), which screened at more than 80 international festivals.

Her work has been widely recognized around the world and acknowledged by the Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences with eight Ariel Awards; among them Best Documentary and Best Director for *Tempestad*, which premiered in the 66th Berlinale Forum; as well as Best Film for *Prayers for the Stolen*, which premiered in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival, where it received a special mention from the jury.



Tempestad and *Prayers for the Stolen* were both selected by the Mexican Academy to represent Mexico in the Academy Awards and the Goya Awards.

Her previous film, *Prayers for the Stolen*, had a successful festival run and was nominated for the 37th Annual Film Independent Spirit Awards as well as the DGA Awards in the category of Best Director. It was also shortlisted for Best International Feature Film at the 'Academy Awards' in 2021.

Tatiana graduated from the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) and has a Master's Degree in 'Creative Documentary' from the Universidad Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.

She has given conferences and has taught classes around the world.

Her academic activities also include editing the book *El Viaje, rutas y caminos andados para llegar a otro planeta* produced by the CCC and Documenta Madrid.

FILMOGRAPHY:

Features, Documentaries and Shorts:

1997 CAUSTIC TIME (Tiempo caustico) Short Fiction

2001 THE CORE OF THE EARTH (El ombligo del mundo) Short Fiction

2005 FAMILY PORTRAIT (Retrato de Familia) Short Documentary

2011 THE TINIEST PLACE (El lugar más pequeño) Documentary - Mar del Plata International Film Festival – FIPRESCI award, AMACC Ariel Award 'Best Documentary Feature'

2015 THE EMPTY CLASSROOM (El aula vacía) Fiction (Multiple Directors) - UNICEF Childhood and Adolescence Award – 'Best Film'

2015 ABSENCES (Ausencias) Documentary Short– AMACC Ariel Award – 'Best Short'

2016 TEMPESTAD Documentary - Berlin Film Festival - Forum, Sheffield International Documentary Festival – 'Tim Hetherington Award', 'AMACC Silver Ariel Award', 'Best Director', 'Best Feature Documentary', 'Best Director'

2021 PRAYERS FOR THE STOLEN Fiction (Noche de Fuego) Feature – Cannes Film Festival – Un Certain Regard, 'Special Mention', San Sebastián Film Festival – 'Horizons' Award

2023 THE ECHO (El Eco) Docufiction – Berlin Film Festival Encounters – 'Berlinale Documentary Award, 'Best Director' Award



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This film arose from my need to continue investigating the territory of childhood, from the desire to find an image, a sensation, through the eyes of a child, that would show me how we begin to perceive those first moments in which you feel alone and disturbed in the face of the harshness of life.

I decided to explore a rural universe because the children are prepared for the adult world too early. With this aim, I began to search for children in rural schools. After weeks of visiting different communities in Mexico, I arrived in El Eco, a tiny village where the increasingly extreme climate and living conditions frame the existence of the adults and children in a severe yet beautiful landscape.

From the moment I learned the name of the town, I was captivated. No one could tell me why it had this name; when I asked if there was any place where the voice of an echo could be heard, only a girl and an elderly woman whispered to me, as if sharing a forbidden secret: "sometimes the stones speak to us...", "the wind carries our voices from the hills, that's why they say you should watch what you say..."



Immediately I perceived strong elements in the physical and symbolic space to narratively construct the pure and mysterious gaze of the children that I wished to capture.

I was excited to imagine the visual, sonic and narrative possibilities to tell this story, where “The Echo”, in addition to being the film’s title, would be a metaphorical element that speaks to the way of life in this rural and remote community that possesses deep ancestral knowledge.

This story speaks of the echo that parents leave in their children, of that voice that clings to the soul during the formative years and remains forever. Children learn how to understand death, illness and love with each act, word and silence of their parents.

The children of El Eco assume responsibility for the care of the land and animals from a young age. They understand what the death of a sheep, a frost in the cornfields or a prolonged drought means for their lives. They also recognize their parents’ satisfaction when the strenuous effort of cultivating the land yields a harvest of sweet corn. The emotions and personal difficulties these children face are permeated by the natural world.

The consciousness that rural children possess, that all life exists in the earth, definitively moulds their vision of the world, their games and their souls.

It is in this place that I fell in love with the faces of these children with their weathered adult skin and their lively and beautiful eyes. Their gaze carried the hidden things I once believed in as well as traces of the pain that is to come, sometimes too soon. The story is told from here, from those moments that make you conscious of who you are and the world that you inhabit.

This film challenged me to tell a story where we can see the extraordinary in the ordinary. I trust in cinema to reveal that a face can be infinite, that the anodyne fields hide marvellous changes in light; and that the feeling of the adventure of what it means to grow up can be shared.

Tatiana Huezo



Interview with Tatiana Huezo by William Stottor Loud and Clear, Feb 21, 2023

Thank you for speaking to us today. I saw *The Echo* on Thursday and loved it so much. What was your creative process for the film?

Tatiana Huezo: I felt a huge need to create a film based on childhood. That is the moment when so much happens that will mark you for the rest of your life. I particularly had an interest in rural life. It's a place where children grow up and become adults very quickly, because they have to take on a lot of responsibilities, even when they are so young.

I also wanted to talk about Mexico from another viewpoint and from a different place. *Prayers for the Stolen* and my other previous films deal with this injury in Mexico, one caused to violence, kidnapping, and drug trafficking. Within all of that, there is the vulnerability of women.

My soul needed something different. *The Echo* has a little bit of this violence, but the focus is on taking care of the land and soil, and the education of children. This rural life is so astonishing that it continues at the same time as all of these difficulties.

How did you find the village, El Eco?

TH: I started by looking for rural schools set up in marginal areas. There is an organisation of teachers that work around there and helped me. It took me around six months to find El Eco. I saw the list of village names in this area and that name struck me. I was captured by it.

When I went there, there was just one room for the primary children. I found Luz Ma, the young girl who is taking care of the sheep, and she was tutoring two of the twins from the film. These twins were mirroring one another, which felt like a signal to make the film here. I also met a woman who told me stories about ghosts. She told me that in El Eco, stones would talk, and that when the wind blows, it carries the voices of them in the valley. You have to be careful, because everyone can listen to what you say! The search was over. I'd found what I was looking for.

Last year, you made *Prayers for the Stolen*, a fiction film. Before that you'd directed a lot of documentaries, and now with *The Echo*, you've gone back to

this genre. What made you transition between these two forms? What was this process like?

Tatiana Huezo: I come from documentaries, and when I did *Prayers for the Stolen*, I entered this huge production process! You have something like 100 people in the crew and new departments like makeup and special effects. Everything is new. It was huge, with respect to documentaries.

Since my very first film, I have always used a language that is very experimental, and I've always looked for something that is part of fiction in the creation of characters. I always write my scripts in advance, so I've never been that far from the process of creating fiction, but *The Echo* is the exception. After *Prayers for the Stolen*, I needed to stop this process. It takes a huge amount of money and time. I wanted to go back, put my feet on the ground, and be in touch with the people, to live their lives, enter their skin, and feel what they feel. That is the real food for my creative process, either with documentaries or fictional films.

But I do feel very comfortable moving between genres. To be honest, there is not a great difference between them, not in content, nor in aesthetic terms. They are very close in their emotional journeys, their senses, and walking into the skins of characters.

You capture El eco and the surrounding world in a very engaging and sensory based way. How did you achieve this very detailed depiction?

TH: *Prayers for the Stolen* was very important for *The Echo*. It made me more courageous and made me try new things. In *The Echo*, there is no voiceover, no interviews. After *Prayers for the Stolen*, I wanted to experiment and use what I learned from this film to capture moments of pure feeling.

I was able to go further with the aesthetics. We did a lot of work on sound, which is much more powerful than in my previous films. It was a challenge to create and represent the sounds of the animals, of the night, of the mysteries of the stories, of the changing nature and seasons. I worked with Ernesto Pardo [cinematographer on *The Echo*] and the film became a huge work visually speaking. The real challenge was to create the place as a living being, to encompass everything in the landscape and all of its changes. We also focussed on portraying faces and how they look at this world. It was also challenging to film inside the interiors without violating the intimacy.

I learned a lot from *Prayers for the Stolen* and put it into *The Echo*.