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PREVIEW: I DREAM IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE AT VQFF

Irina Rakina

The Vancouver Queer Film Festival is running from August 10 to 20, and we're so excited! We'll be posting reviews for a handful of noteworthy flicks until the festival start date, so our readers know which titles to look out for. More details regarding the VQFF program can be found on their website. Yay!

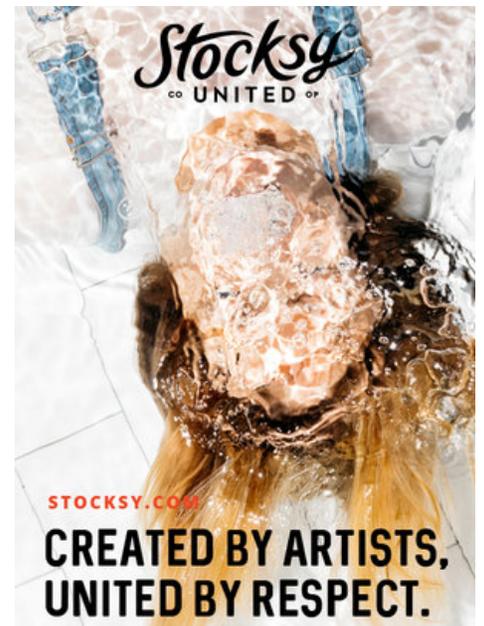


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STILL FROM ERNESTO AND CARLOS CONTRERAS' *I DREAM IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE*

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We delve into the remote territory of endangered languages in the poignant drama by Ernesto and Carlos Contreras, *I Dream In Another Language* (*Sueño en otro idioma*). The film follows earnest linguist Martin into the forest of Mexico's Vera Cruz province to study Zikril, an Indigenous language at the end of its entropy. Only three people in the world still remember its obsolete syntax and two of them refuse to speak to each other.

I Dream in Another Language is a visual study in nostalgia.

There isn't a moment when we're allowed to forget about the slow decline of Zikril, its speakers, cultural legacy, and myths. There are extended sequences filmed in the honeyed lens of the past, namely the tragic love story between characters Don Evaristo and Don Isauro. In modern day, Lluvia, Don Evaristo's granddaughter, is teaching the villagers English, because that's the language spreading virally around the world in a ruthless process of globalization. But English is what unites characters Martin and Lluvia, providing them with an excuse to succumb to romance. In this way, language is not just a ruthless tool for upward social mobility. The film expands further on that intricate entanglement between love and language. Tellingly, Don Evaristo's and Don Isauro's relationship is categorized by their shared knowledge of Zikril. Just like Don Isauro's linguistic ignorance isolates him from others. "How can you speak of love if you don't know Spanish," exclaims Maria, when presented with pretty shells by Isauro. Instead, she chooses the more educated Don Evaristo as a love interest. And so, language is also equated with power and its distribution with authority.

The Contreras brothers make a daring choice not to include subtitles for the parts spoken in Zikril. The quiet exclusion of

the viewer is strangely compelling. It allows for the full visual potential of the film to come through. We are forced to focus on the aesthetics of Zikril, without delving into the textual complexity. Language is given life through the people who speak it. This decision to exclude subtitles comes to its dramatic completion in the final scene between Don Isauro and Martin, when the latter implores in solemn frustration: “I don’t understand! I don’t understand.” And he’s not supposed to—the decline of Indigenous language is *I Dream in Another Language’s* harshest lesson, one which we are explicitly asked to learn.

I Dream in Another Language will be screening on August 10 at the Vancouver Playhouse, and on August 12 at International Village Cinemas. Tickets can be found here.

August 02, 2017 /

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