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## FINLANDIA: An Interview With Horacio Alcalá

**When I showed up at the screening of Finlandia at the Everybody's Perfect film festival in Geneva, I hadn't even watched the trailer beforehand. Not because I was uninterested, but it had been a while since I had experienced a movie without any expectations. Just the pleasure of viewing and discovering a world.**

Finlandia's world is so vivid. I was very unprepared for how colorful and alive this film is. Breathtaking shots of Mexico's nature, a sharpness and saturation of bright, bold colors along with a powerful story pulling us into the life of a little known community – the Muxes.

We're taken into the rich but complex lives of this third gender, that find community in a common identity, in Juchitan de Zaragoza, in the South East of Mexico. Alongside the Muxes' daily struggles, unforgettable life changes are brewing: a deadly earthquake and a Spanish fashion designer's confrontation of cultural appropriation tie the story together.

Already shown in over 45 festivals worldwide while winning awards and already making considerable impact by its topic and introducing the first Indigenous musician to score an international film, we sat down with the film's Spanish-raising, Mexican director and writer, Horacio Alcalá, to discuss his vision of the film.

**Dean Moncel: Everything about this movie felt so intentional, from the colors to the music. Could you talk about your process and vision for this film?**

Horacio Alcalá: I'm a filmmaker, specialized in documentary. This is my first fiction. So I used the structure of the documentary to make sure that you learn about [the Muxes] when you see the story, and it's not just fiction. Also, I wanted to integrate European music, as we have Wagner and Mahler with the local music. In the end, it's a play. As an artist, I have the right to play with all these elements to see what comes up. The recent elements like the throat singing, of course, that element comes from Mongolia. The Muxes don't do that. The wall, is a normal wall, nobody goes there to cry or to say anything. This film belongs to the magical realism and very popular in Latin American literature.

**DM: What is it rather easy or challenging to make these choices regarding fiction or documentary style?**

HA: I know how to do the documentary. It was more difficult to make it look like fiction, so you don't feel like you are watching a documentary, because then you are learning about real things with real people.

**DM: How did you work with authenticity? How did you feel showing something as authentically as possible, was it a really big concern for you?**

HA: You know, although it's a story about the Muxes, it also has a lot to do with my story. My mother was a seamstress, that's why I decided that the characters were with textiles. And I was in the church when I was 10, helping the priest, as Mariano does. So I think I brought the little things from my life, even though I'm not a Muxes, and I think that brings the credibility to the film and its authenticity.

**Audience Question: How did the first contact with the Muxes take place?**

HA: The first thing before doing the project was to go to Juchitan and meet them. We didn't do anything, but talk to each other, drink Mezcal. The script came much later, once we became friends. We had to work closely. They are not only in front of the camera, but also behind it, as they were the ones doing the costume designs and decorations.

**AQ: The question of the third gender must be brought up. [...] it's a very valued gender in the society that these individuals live in, but at the same time, we see in the movie that the influence of religion and the threat of violence. Could you speak more about this contrast?**

HA: When we started the research, we saw all the documentaries from the BBC, National Geographic, etc. And we found out that they were very romanticized. It was a perfect place for them to live. We got there and said: "this isn't the way it is." They are accepted but they are also refused. They dress however they want, they can have parties, but they cannot fall in love, they can't have a partner, because their job is to take care of the family. They are accepted to a certain point but not for everything. We call it a double moral.

**DM: What kind of feedback did you get from the Muxes about the film?**

HA: Well they were in the process of filming. They have seen the film, and they loved it. Of course, they said "I would have done this differently", but in the end, it is my film. It has to be how I see it.

**DM: I noticed a lot of contrast in the movie, cultural clashes, colors differences, religions... How do you feel about this contrast that is present in your movie?**

HA: Actually, we wanted to have this completely different universe. The colors we see of Marta [the Spanish fashion designer] is not the place where she lives, it's the color of her soul. That's how she thinks, she thinks in black and gray, no color. When she gets to Mexico, she gets obliged or pushed to see things in a different way. [...] Through these colors, we talk about the evolution of a person.

**Spoiler alert**

**DM: There's definitely a lot of different perspectives in this movie, and we can understand why Marta was struggling in making her decision. How do you feel about the ending of this movie? It does come back to nature taking control?**

HA: To me, it's the nature listening to them. And at some point, the nature says "enough. This has to stop. I'm gonna do something." And the nature decides to give our characters a new start. So now, they start again in a different way.

**AQ: And to finish, what was the film's reception on behalf of the Muxes?**

HA: The first screening was at a film festival in Guadalajara, in Mexico. The Muxes were there. It was a mix of emotions, because not everyone in the country knew about them, and suddenly an international film festival is showing a screening about them. It was very emotional [for them].

Discover more about Finlandia here:  
<https://www.everybodysperfect.ch/events/finlandia/> ;  
<https://www.instagram.com/finlandialapelicula/>