

THE POUNGING ECHO

OF THE CUCUBANA AND THE COQUI

THE
CUCUBANA AND THE COQUI

A FILM

BY

DANIEL MALDONADO





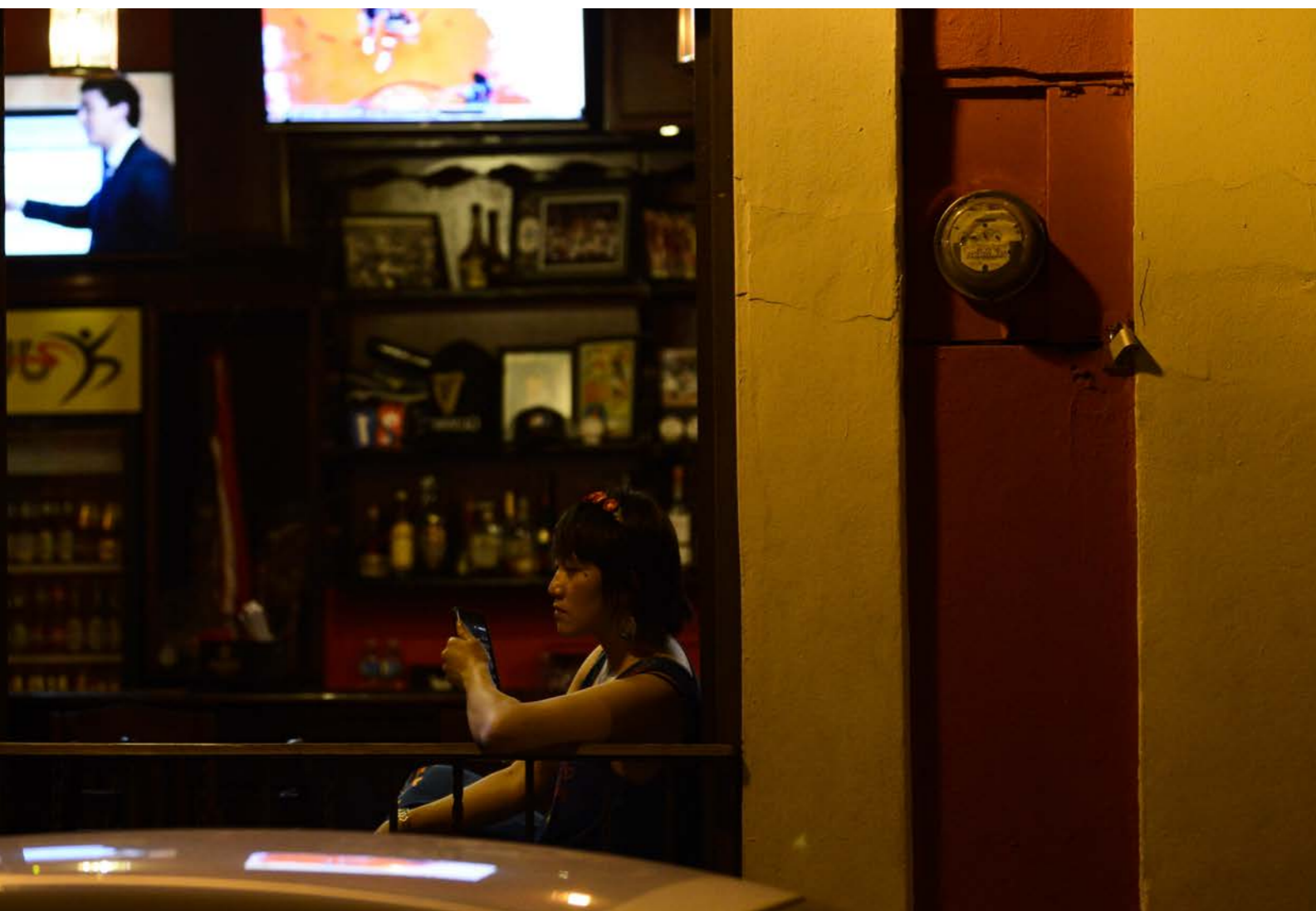
LOG LINE

⋮ ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ ⋮ ⋮



Six months of longing for the return of a lost cruise ship brings little resolution after its mysterious vanishing. Faith, hope, prayer and reason conflict in a small Puerto Rican beachside community frozen in limbo as a blind kiosk worker & her younger brother struggle with their father's disappearance. With a parental non binary, local guide and the **contradictions** of closure that surround them, their journey for answers bring dream-like manifestations and supernatural transformations of island folklore that may provide answers which religion, mysticism and even rationality cannot in a psychic landscape between the living & the dead.





SYNOPSIS



Emerging as part oneiric fable, *The Pounding Echo Of The Cucubana & The Coqui* unfolds at a small shanty beach kiosk in Puerto Rico among a row of dozens. Here Daniela, a 26 year old blind Nuyorican runs the bar owned by her father, a pianist whom mysteriously vanished six months earlier with hundreds of others aboard a missing cruise ship in the Caribbean. Assisted

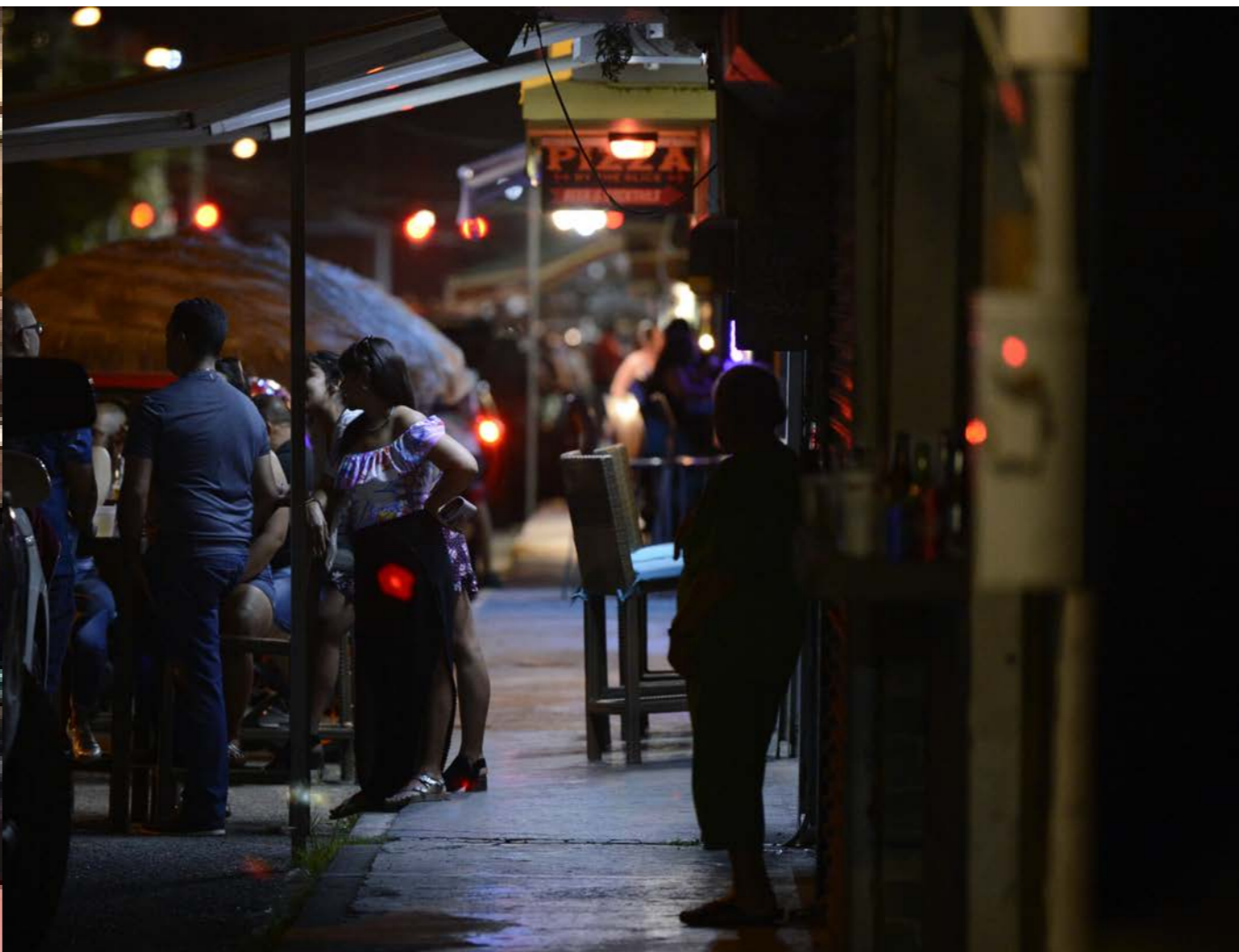
by her father's long-time assistant, Dani clings to her hope as she and the community that surrounds her, desperately await news of the ship's recovery while taking to a makeshift vigil for solace. Led by their local priest Padre Arturo, the community bring to life unshakeable religious fervor, profound grief and biting cynicism as some push for closure while others wait in hope.



Intuitive and strong willed, Dani's faith fractures as she begins to question the ongoing yet unrequited rituals and outpourings within the small traumatized community. Upon the sudden return of her scrappy younger brother Francisco from the city, Dani shares her hope despite her brother's naive conclusions. Soon after, news arrives from the discovery of strange debris in the sea which however turns out inconclusive. The kiosk brings together a group of regulars, each with their own peculiar outlooks and laments — drinking and chatting all while watching and sinking

into an ongoing telenovela as their lives become frozen in time. This includes Pati, an enigmatic, yet deeply wounded pan gender local who wanders the beaches in search of their pet iguana.

Questioning the faith practices of the church, the wise Pati shares their insights with the Dani, whom finds herself asking more questions from her dreams and false interactions, than finding answers to her fragile state. Pati's kinship with the siblings offers a semblance of insight and guidance outside of the religious and eerie incidents that arise.





A shift occurs when a massive jellyfish mysteriously washes ashore. Here Dani encounters an visionary mystic deeply connected to the animistic Taino folklore. Doña Juana helps elucidate the spiritual and mythical mysteries of the jellyfish's arrival but leaves Dani with even more questions as she strays further into her mystification. A subsequent visit goes awry after the shaman's ceremonial offerings disrupt the rainforest, separating the siblings. Faced with a dire situation both encounter magical forest experiences that lead them out separately through

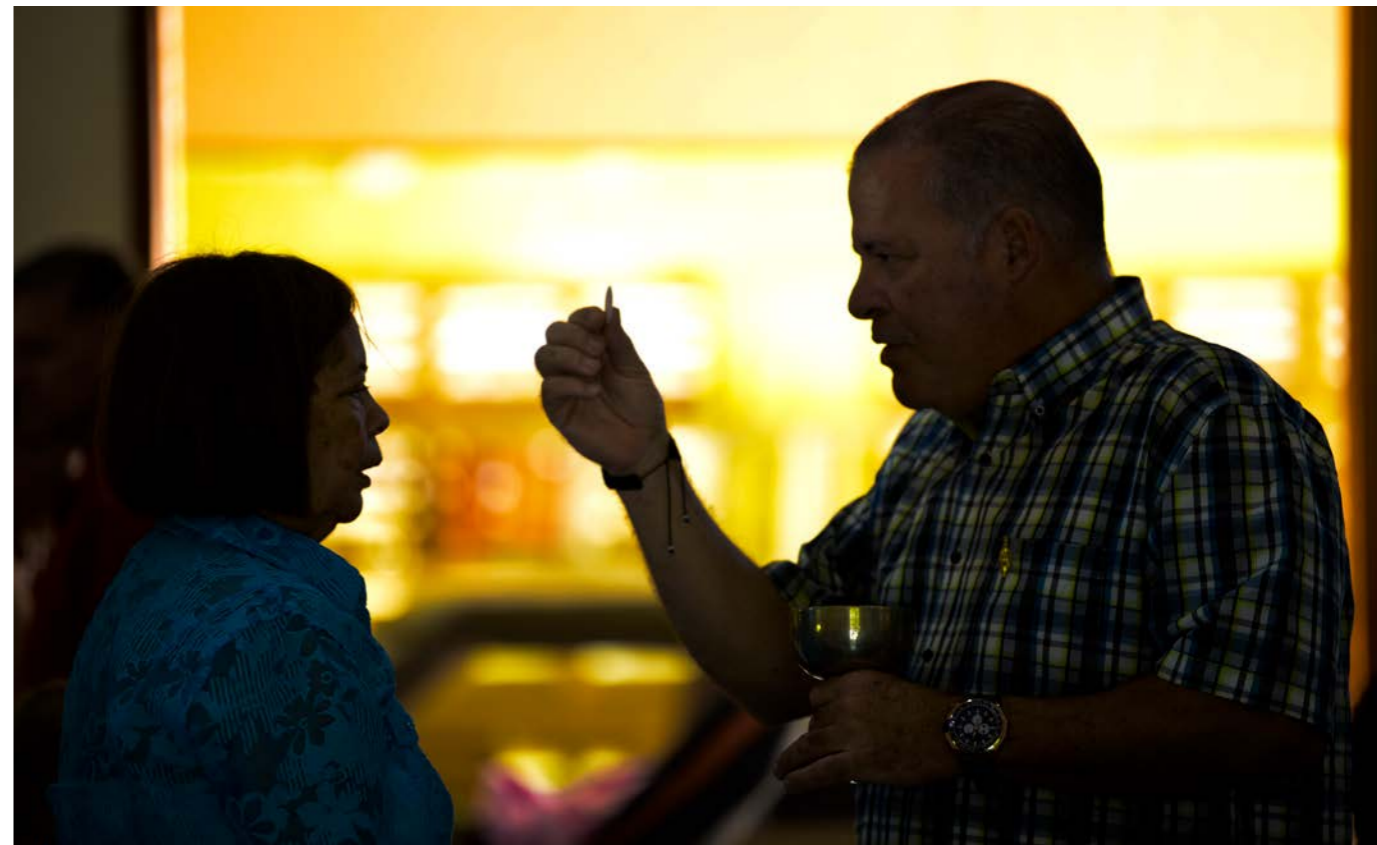
sound and light. Upon searching for her brother, Dani encounters Padre Arturo again and comes full circle to reject the church's dogma and practices. Meanwhile, Francisco experiences a revelatory moment while also discovering a trusted local is actually a walking ghost. The siblings are later reunited at the kiosk where Dani connects deeply with Pati's metaphysical foresight as a strange dense fog rolls in from the sea. Encompassing and guiding, it provides a transcendent and physically transformative moment for Dani, Francisco and Pati's suffering.

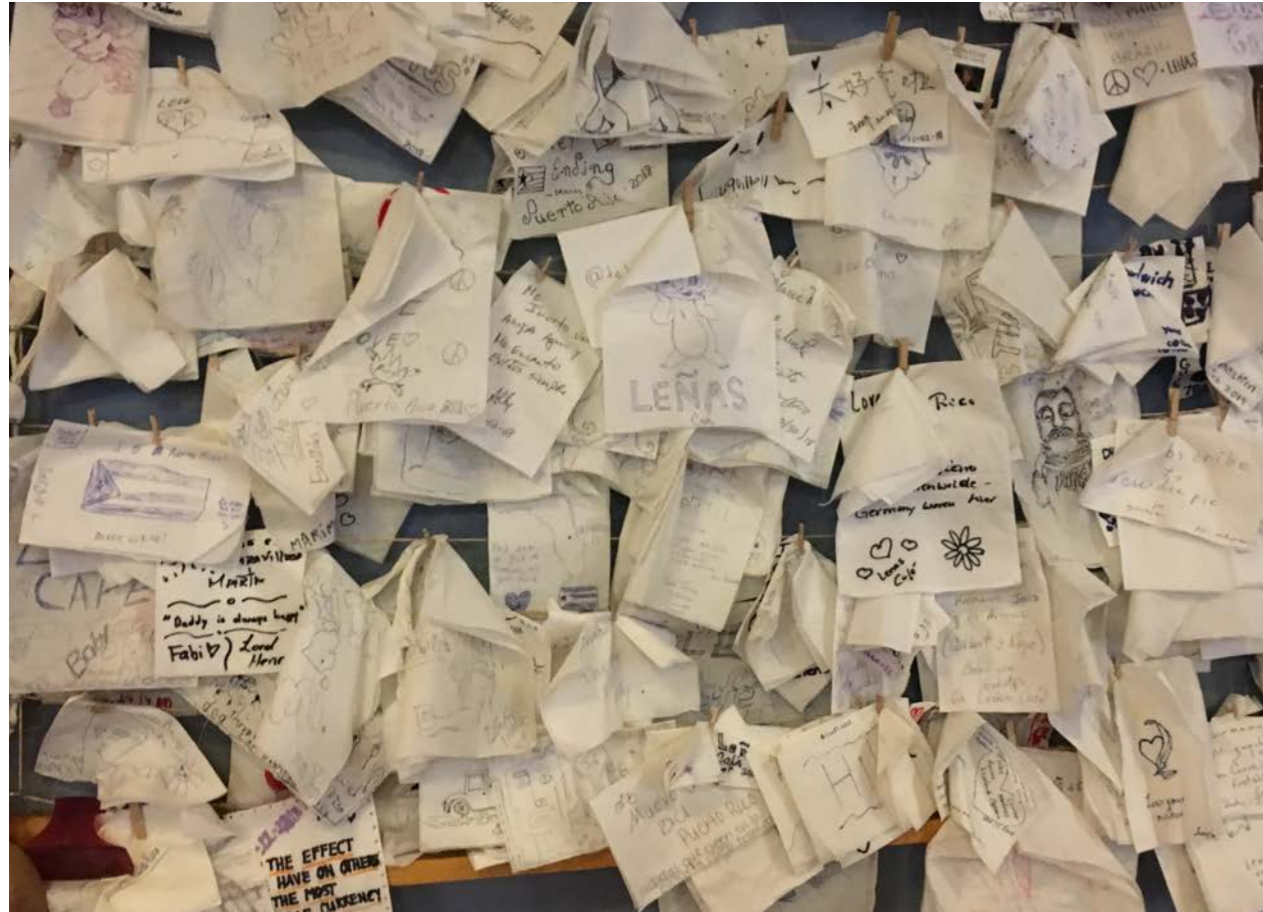
SETTING



Set in a small beach community, The story finds its characters spending their days at the town square where the nearby church provides solace and routine for the grieving. In the evening many congregate at the small amphitheater nearby the sea that has been turned into a make shift memorial for the missing passengers. It is here where many of the night time vigils have taken place. Others, spend their lonely nights cavorting in the many dark and open ended kiosks on the beach. Here you'd find anything from blaring jukeboxes, to billiards hustling to live conga players. Overall, its where many find respite in smoking, drinking and for some, following the latest drama in the daily novellas. Situated in a row of over 50 establishments, the energy is palpable and brings together all walks of life. In contrast, the nearby rainforest brings us into a mysterious world filled with thousands of species. Steeped in myth and folklore, it is where the spirits of the island have been claimed to roam. Thus it is a magical presence that ultimately brings clues to the answers being sought out. Overall, it is this community's close proximity to the sea that weighs as a daily reminder of the uncertainties which surround them. The enigma of this stretching through to the the rain forest carries the re-occurring wave or the echo which offers its form of transcendence.

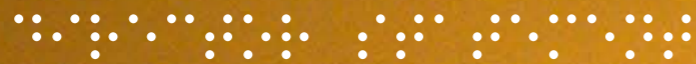








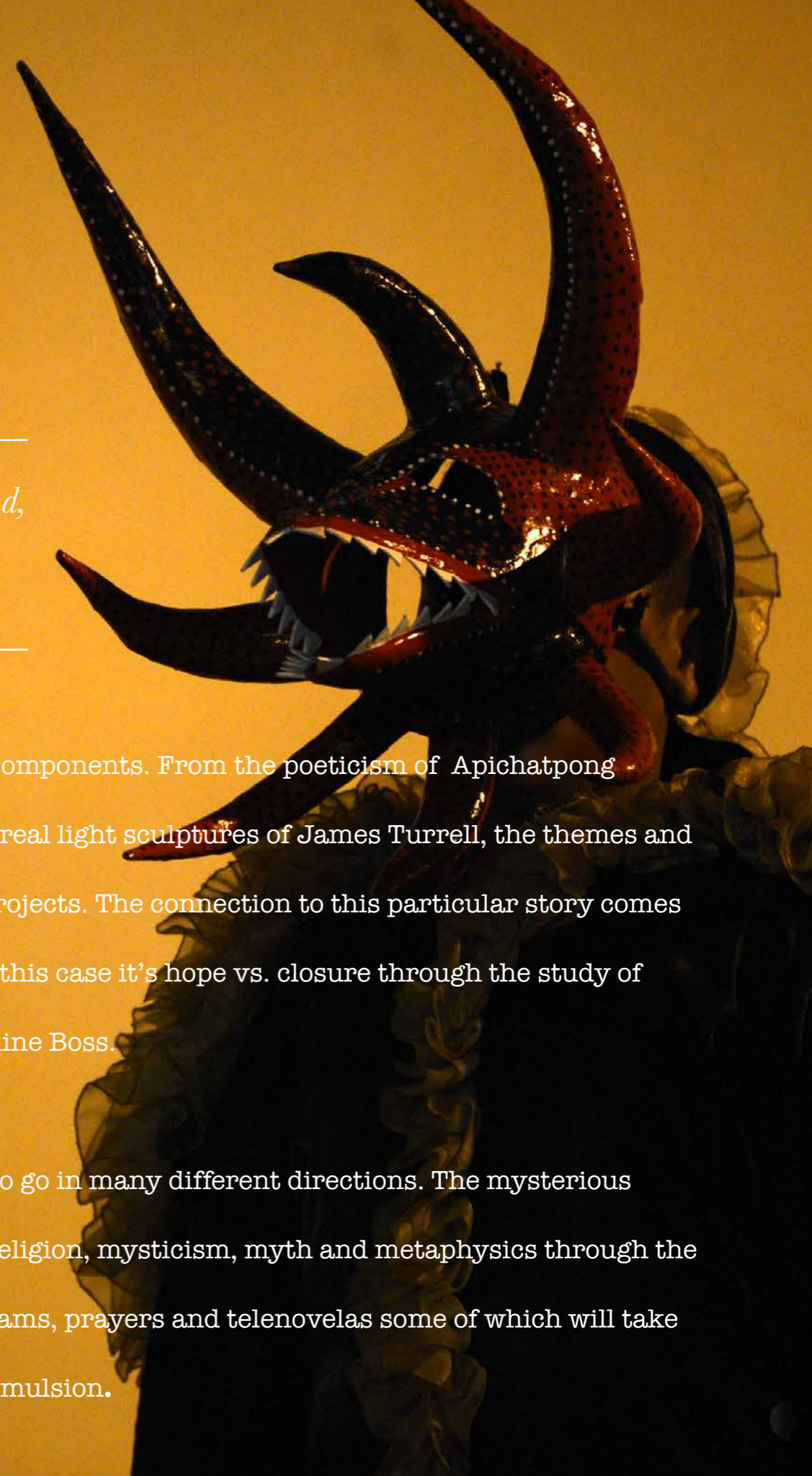
DIRECTOR STATEMENT



“When an image is perceived not just with the eye but with the whole body and mind, then one understands ‘it’ intimately” - Daido Roshi

As a LatinX filmmaker, I’ve drawn influences from a wide array of multi-cultural components. From the poeticism of Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s films to the deep listening compositions of Pauline Oliveros and ethereal light sculptures of James Turrell, the themes and stories that reflect the human spirit have occupied my interest in past and current projects. The connection to this particular story comes as a need to explore alternative ideologies in the uncertainty of complicated grief. In this case it’s hope vs. closure through the study of “ambiguous loss”. A clinical term I’ve explored through the work of psychologist Pauline Boss.

In our screenplay, the unique, emotionally complex situation allows for the story to go in many different directions. The mysterious ambiguity throughout lends itself to interpretations that delicately weave together religion, mysticism, myth and metaphysics through the prism of an oneiric fable. This manifests throughout the story in the repetition of dreams, prayers and telenovelas some of which will take the form of stop motion animation, pinhole photography and hand painted celluloid emulsion.



It is with my background in narrative and experimental film which informs and complements the other in style and tone.

With blind and non binary characters, the writing allowed us to delve much deeper into a sensorial approach. Embedding myself into the actual community while writing, this importance created the intimacy we sought to give voice to the cast of characters whom intersect with nature and science, blending into a cosmic human experience. One way this is portrayed is in the use of echolocation which serves as one of the only certainties our main character can trust.

The purpose of this story is to open a discussion or a context for a deeper understanding for how conditioning affects the human response with beliefs and uncertainty. Choosing to examine these themes through unshakeable faith, I became invested in telling this story to inspire change in perceptions on death. Using “ambiguous loss” as a starting point, I’ve taken to cinematic explorations that might allow for a more transcendent experience from grief.

Strangely enough, this can be applied to the trauma, anxieties and uncertainties Puerto Ricans have struggled with recently.

WHY NOW

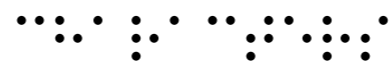
This project comes at a time when the people of Puerto Rico and our world, needs healing. A need to explore a deeper vision for contemplation within the contours of a narrative. A necessity for raising consciousness through transcendence as well as implementing social impact through diversity and inclusion, both of which I’ve addressed in previous films. This transformation from suffering through cinema is in many ways the ideal project for me at this time. It is an opportunity to continue making meaningful work through exploring cinematic boundaries to reconnect ourselves with our humanity. It’s crucial for me to not only represent the LatinX diaspora through story innovation but to take even greater risks to transform personal stories to audiences whom have shared this experience. Due to the very real and unfortunate position of neither being a foreign nor an American project , we understand the important struggle that lies before us to further open the door on stories from Puerto Rico which metaphorically finds itself ambiguously in between. It is a project that takes risks by asking the big questions but yet perceives storytelling with the heart over logic.







CHARACTERS



Like a star of the night, in the forest deep and bright, cucubana, cucubana, be our guide, be our light!



DANI | Cucubana 26

“Are our hopes just a fantasy? Is this thing you called a complicated situation, complicated loss or... what was it I heard? Ambiguous Loss, just words to hide under?”

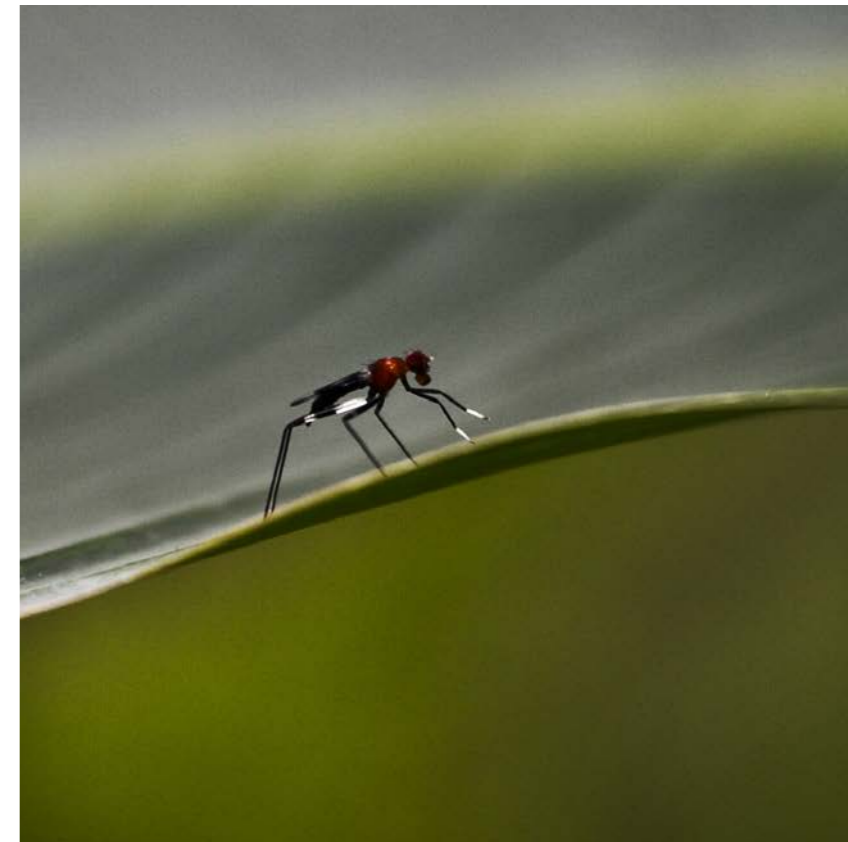
FRANCISCO | Coqui 11

*“Nothing is what we believe it to be”
Coqui, Coqui, you serenade us to sleep.
In the background of our dreams, your songs make us weep.*



PATI | Iguana Late 50's

“Water has this beautiful memory. It has a great influence and collects all this information, kind of like tears.”







“Film is a light sculpture in time” - Nathaniel Dorsky

Along with sound, this is the bridge from a script that lends itself to many interpretations. The pieces of the puzzle that give birth to a film’s vision and singular cinematic language .Early on, the quickest way to describe this story as a film was using Atom Egoyan’s Oscar nominated *The Sweet Hereafter* as a script directed by Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Two very different comparisons yet indicative of the inspirations behind this project. Furthermore, it is this vast expanse of audio/visual references from educational films to marionette shadow puppetry that the film’s style will derive from. Using a modern day fable motif which allowed for a more distinct style, the film will bring together a

balance of nature in all of its mysteries with the traumatic realities of its characters. This combination will lead to more dream -like infusions where deeper layers to the story will become unveiled such as the gigantic jellyfish that washes ashore or the extreme close ups of rainforest species engaged in “natural” acts. The style will be rooted in the story through the characters and locations whether its a blind woman sensorially navigating her surroundings or a community frozen in limbo from a traumatic event. Utilizing the openness of the kiosks will allow for a stronger misenscene and a more fluid camera.



The reoccurring themes of uncertainty are also visually manifested in both interludes of an ominous sea and a densely thick fog that enshrouds the kiosks. In addition, experimentation such as cymatics, stop motion animation as well as hand crafted celluloid implementation are only a few visual techniques in a vast toolbox ready to carefully carve out the journey of these characters. Some of the energy and frequencies of the color and lighting concepts lie in the use of natural lighting which will have its own affect on our audience. Taking inspirations from light artist James Turrell, its important that the natural environment, whether its the forest or the sea, be represented as a subtle force. Even the night exteriors will lean on the side of minimal as shadows around the beach and kiosks will be used forgivingly and to complement a partially hidden, enigmatic world. A place of secrets whereby ghosts may wander through.



However, along with recording the distinct calls of the coqui frog, the most challenging lighting component is undoubtedly documenting the natural bio luminescence of the Puerto Rican click beetle. Although, with strategic planning and some luck we hope to capture a most magical moment. Finally, the manifestation of this script cannot be spoken about without mentioning the word Echo. With both the visual and audio representations infused into the story in forms such as ritual, prayer and repetition. the film will develop a lyricism that will not only contain vertiginous but also certain ineffable moments.







DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER



DANIEL MALDONADO | Gashouse Films

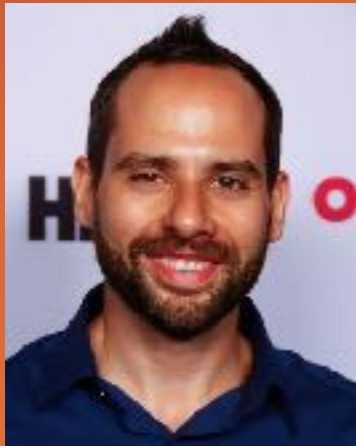
gashousefilms@gmail.com

Featured in the New York Times, Remezcla and on NBC News, Daniel is a multi award winning filmmaker who found early success in the several genres he crossed.

Former assistant for legendary NY producer Ben Barenholtz (BARTON FINK), Daniel's persistence paid off in his formative years earning him several Kodak film grants as well as acceptance into the prestigious Actor's Studio's observation program. During these years he wrote/produced and directed several diverse shorts including "BUTTERCUP", which toured German movie theaters as part of the "BLUE HEARTS OF N.Y." traveling festival of short films. Since then, Daniel's shorts have earned recognition at festivals & exhibitions both in the U.S. & internationally. This includes LALO (featuring Billy Magnussen), which was awarded BEST SHORT FILM at the HBO/NY Latino International Film Festival and went on to be licensed and nationally broadcast on SiTv/ Nuovo cable later that year. As a Creative Capital- On The Radar Artist,

Daniel has also showcased his experimental works in galleries & museums such as Rome's Maxxi Museum BNL. He completed his first feature, H.O.M.E. in 2016 starring Mexican Ariel winning actor, Jesús Ochoa. Produced by Darren Dean (The Florida Project), the film premiered at the Museum Of Moving Image in NYC. It then went on to screen at the American Cinematheque as well as over 25 international festivals garnering a Best U.S. Latino Film nomination from Cinema Tropical and several awards for Best Feature & Best Director. Currently, Daniel has been exhibiting new experimental videos in galleries on the East Coast plus a commission in post production with composer Jeff Morris. He also has a new feature screenplay set in Puerto Rico that is in early development. In addition, Daniel works as a local 52 prop master with over 15 years in the NY film production industry. He has worked closely with veteran talents from Kyle MacLachlan and Ben Stiller to Cynthia Nixon while contributing to the production design of many films such as Sundance hits Crown Heights, The Farewell and The Forty Year Old Version.

PRODUCING TEAM



ROY WOL | Autonomous Pictures

roy@autonomouspictures.com

Roy Wol is a filmmaker with a visual disability, Amblyopia. He is a p.g.a. mark holding cross-cultural Turkish-Argentine-Spanish-

Israeli-American-Jewish producer and an LGBTQ advocate. His latest film "The Garden Left Behind" won the 2019 SXSW Audience Award and is one of the "Best LGBTQ films of all time" (by Rotten Tomatoes).

He's the 2020 SXSW & NALIP Mentor; 2019 GLAAD Media Fellow; 2019 ReelWorks Mentor; 2018 Hollywood Radio and Television Fellow; 2017 IFP Narrative Lab Fellow; 2017 Trans Filmmakers Project Mentor; 2016 Harlem Cinema School Mentor. His company has

provided jobs to: 29 People with Disabilities, 48 Trans actors/crew/producers, his film "Americanish" employed a crew of 95% women with all lead positions being females.

Producing credits include: Academy Nominee, Golden Lion Winner Milcho Manchevski's "Bikini Moon" starring Condola Rashad ("Billions"); Sundance Alumni Doug Karr's feature debut "Art Machine" (FilmBuff/Netflix); NYFF Artist Academy Fellow Flavio Alves' "Tom in America" starring Academy Nominees Burt Young & Sally Kirkland (Amazon); MPAC Hollywood Bureau supported Princess Grace fellow Egyptian-American Iman Zawahry's feature "Americanish" starring Palestinian-American Mo Amer (stand up special: NETFLIX). Roy's latest episodic projects "Muslim Girls DTF" received the Impact Award from Roddenberry Foundation to employ a full writer's room of Muslim WOC; "Autom Reign" received the 2020 IFP Episodic Lab fellowship and is created by Desi-American Sundance creative producing lab fellow Sofian Khan.



ANNABELLE MULLEN | Belle Films

mullena@abellefilm.com



Annabelle Mullen -Pacheco Born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Ms. Mullen-Pacheco, a lawyer by profession, and a producer by vocation, has produced

many Caribbean fiction and documentary films. Under her company, Belle Films (Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic & Spain), founded in 2013, she develops audiovisual content in an artisanal way that touch upon social and political issues to be told through film. Her most recent projects include documentaries such as “The Last Colony” (2014) and fiction films such as “El Hombre que Cuida” (PR-Dom. Rep. -Brazil co-production, 2017) and “El Chata” (Puerto Rico, 2018). In 2017, she won the Movistar+ Development Award at Conecta Fiction, with her comedy series “Love in Times of Tinder.” Recently, she completed the MPXA, a Masters Program in Executive Production by the University of A Coruña, the Amancio Ortega Foundation and the Santiago Rey Fernández-Latorre Foundation. Her first attempt at directing is the short documentary “Unpacking,” about the migration of Dominican women to Puerto Rico.



HECTOR CAROSSO

hcarosso@yahoo.com

Hector Carosso Hector Carosso is an international filmmaker, screenwriter, and producer working in the United

States, Japan, Myanmar, and China. He wrote and produced the feature film *Kayan Beauties* in Myanmar in 2012. The film was nominated for seven Academy Awards in Yangon, Myanmar, including Best Picture and Best Screenwriting. He co-wrote the script for the feature film *H.O.M.E.* which was produced in 2016 and won various festival awards in 2017. He was a co-producer and script consultant on the 2017 feature film *Destiny's Smile* in New York and China. He has lectured on filmmaking, producing, and screenwriting in Japan, Myanmar, and China. He is the screenwriter and a producer of the feature film *Strings of a Broken Harp* in Myanmar and Japan, which was recently released.

FINAL WORDS



Through its folkloric tones and sensorial escapes, *The Pounding Echo of the Cucubana & The Coqui* is an elegiac testament that reaches for a metaphysical transcendence from deep suffering. An exploration of spiritual beings living a human life. More specifically, it traces the surreal emotional journey of a young woman experiencing ambiguous loss. Incorporating the mythical rhythms of the natural world, the story explores deeper findings of our very human lives in a phantasmagorical and psychic landscape between the living and the dead.



“A deeply creative and original story”

- The Blacklist

“..very original and beautiful..I really loved the tone, dialogue and world of this story”

- Sundance Collab - Jeremiah Zagar “We The Animals”

YOUTUBE FILM REFERENCES PLAYLIST

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbTr4fEaswddtzdx9tgg8YpRtBYbplhn>

SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6ifRCsJQEpgpL4uZqBl001?si=7qXZ1kWDQ1y52z79i7F7iA>

GASHOUSE FILMS | www.gashousefilms.com

AUTONOMOUS PICTURES | www.autonomouspictures.com

BELLE FILMS | www.abellefilm.com