



Collective Monologue

Director: Jessica Sarah Rinland
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Production Company: Trapecio Cine
With the support of: INCAA, Hubert Bals Development Fund, Ikusmira Berriak, The Film Study Center - Harvard University, Mother Pictures
Production Support: Bord Cadre Films, Cine Argentino, INCAA - Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales, Hubert Bals Fund, Mother Pictures, The Film Study Center at Harvard University
Executive Producer: Melanie Schapiro
Development Production 2020: Maravilla Cine, Paula Zyngierman, Leandro Listorti
Producers: Melanie Schapiro, Jessica Sarah Rinland
Associate Producers: Dan Wechsler, Jamal Zeinal-Zade, Andreas Roald
Production Manager: Malena Villafañe
Production Supervisor: Camila Cicchino
Archive Consultants: Ashley Kerr, Rosana Menna
Assistant Director: Flor Vaccaro
Camera: Jessica Sarah Rinland
Additional Camera: Juan Maglione
Camera Assistant: Florencia Labat
Editing: Jessica Sarah Rinland
Consultant Editor: Pablo Mazzolo
Titles: Zoe Trilnick Farji, Denis Dallo
Sound Design: Philippe Ciompi
Sound Recording: Guido Ronconi
Sound Mixer: Philippe Ciompi
Foley and Voice: Jessica Sarah Rinland
Argentina-Netherlands-USA-UK-Switzerland 2024
104 mins
Digital

Courtesy of Sovereign Film Distribution

Total running time 130 mins

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Experimental

Collective Monologue

+ director Jessica Sarah Rinland in conversation with academic and critic Erika Balsom

Shot in Rinland's signature attentive style, *Collective Monologue* documents and explores the circumstances in which animals are cared for across a series of Argentinian zoos and animal rescue centres. Simultaneously moving and thought provoking, Rinland's film illustrates the complex power of human, animal relations as variously parrots, turtles, anteaters and monkeys receive close, individual care against a backdrop of institutional management and change.

Director's statement

In 2019 I revisited Buenos Aires Zoo, 23 years after my previous visit. It had recently reopened after being closed for three years to re-evaluate its position as a zoo and change its name to 'Ecopark'. Due to the efforts of their employees and animal rights activists, this zoo and others across the country began to critique their purpose and undertake the process of structural transformations including a move towards functioning conservation spaces, and translocating animals to wildlife sanctuaries. The zoos remain under construction, within an urgent process of transformation.

During one of my many visits to the zoo, I met Maca, zookeeper coordinator and activist for animal and workers' rights. She has worked between Buenos Aires and La Plata Zoo for over 20 years, dedicating seven days a week, all year around to the animals who live there and continue to arrive due to illegal trafficking. Over the years I became friends with Maca, accompanying her while she worked and told animated stories about the history, quotidian activities, and political struggles of the zoos.

While researching I met Majo, head of Heritage at Buenos Aires Zoo who gave me access to editions of the Zoological Newspaper published between 1892 and 1920, aimed at both the scientist and layman. Among the essays, daily anecdotes, scientific data, numbers of visitors, number of animals deceased per month, cost of items including toilet seats and nails; there is very little mention of zoo employees, and only one mention of a 'zookeeper' (translated from the Spanish word *cuidador* meaning carer). More than 120 years later, the employees, specifically the zookeepers, remain in the shadows, overworked and undervalued. *Collective Monologue* shines a light on this labour which these employees devote their entire lives and souls to.

Filming on 16mm allowed for this intense sensitivity and attentiveness in contrast with the surveillance technologies used in the zoos which create a distanced, regimented, institutionalised perspective. Various scenes in *Collective Monologue* were filmed at night with infrared technologies of camera traps typically used by biologists to track species. The camera trap dates back to 1889 when George Shiras began photographing animals at night using jacklighting, appropriated from the Ojibway tribe's hunting technique: fire is placed in a pan at the front of a canoe making it possible to see the animal, whose attention is caught by the flames, causing it to stand still. The person sits in the shadows at the bow of the boat invisible to the animal, camera in hand, ready to shoot.

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The soundscape in the film focuses on the stark combination of the symphony of animals with the urban backdrop: the drilling at the city zoo transforms into the cicadas in the rewilding landscape, together with vocal communications between the employees by means of two-way radios and WhatsApp voice messaging.

Notions of care radiate throughout *Collective Monologue* both within the story, formally, and throughout its production. As with most of my films, there is a focus on the haptic: the physical gesture and sense of touch between a human hand and an object, tool or being. As Maca and other workers navigate through these spaces, people, flora, fauna, and heritage buildings are documented and experienced without hierarchy.

About the filmmaker

Jessica Sarah Rinland is an Argentine-British filmmaker. She is a recipient of numerous prizes including Special Mention at Locarno Film Festival and Best Film at DocumentaMadrid for *Those That, at a Distance, Resemble Another* (2019), Primer Premio at BIM – Bienal de Imagen en Movimiento for *Black Pond* (2018), Arts + Science Award at Ann Arbor Film Festival, for *Adeline for Leaves* (2014), and Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Schnitzer prize for excellence in the arts in 2017. Her work has been exhibited at University of Tennessee's Downtown Gallery, Southwark Park Galleries, London, Taipei Biennial, Somerset House and Bloomberg New Contemporarie. She has had retrospectives of her films at Anthology Film Archives, NYC (2021), Doc's Kingdom, Portugal (2021), Aricadoc, Santiago (2021), Eureka Film Festival, Bogotá (2020), Curtocircuito, Spain (2018) and London Short Film Festival (2016), Flaherty Film Seminar (2022). Her films are held in the BFI's collections.

Production notes