
Senior Projects Spring 2024

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El niño

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Bard College

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El niño

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts of Bard College

by
Sasha Qvist

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024

My short film *El niño* was shot over the course of two nights in Brooklyn, NY during January 2024. It is sixteen minutes long and follows two close friends as they reconnect and struggle to understand one another after having spent some time apart. The plot is shaped around different beats of tension between these two protagonists that arise from both external and internal circumstances. However, what drives each character the most in this film are their anxieties and the resulting coping mechanisms. The tension arises from neither friend being able to understand the other's method of taking control.

During the preproduction phase, I thought of a strategy my screenwriting professor Sayeeda Moreno had taught me two years earlier. In order for a narrative to connect with others through humanity, it ought to come from personal truths within the writer. These personal truths can be questions or assertions and can concern just about anything, and the story that arises from them can exist in an entirely different universe from the one it originated from. As a writer, I chose to not stray too far from these truths of mine because as a filmmaker I am not yet able to say something both heartfelt and far removed from my own experiences. I chose my neighborhood as a setting, and casted my younger brother and two close friends from high school because I wanted to simplify the whole process for myself.

I chose these actors because I trusted them to know what I wanted as a director. Although I aimed to make my script simple, I wanted to make sure that the actors I worked with were able to understand what was being said between the dialogue. Additionally, the chemistry that already existed between these three actors for about seven years also proved very important for the believability of their relationships on screen.

My crew was composed of two other students at the Bard film program. Jack was in charge of sound during the shoot, which meant capturing both dialogue and ambiance in downtown Brooklyn and during a game of basketball. While having to cut mid-take due to supposedly lackluster audio felt like a nuisance on the day, I was very appreciative for his moments of outspokenness while editing. Eve operated the camera and helped me refine my shot list. The day before the shoot we walked through my previously scouted locations with the camera and discussed the blocking and shot selection, which really helped me as a director when being faced with a lot of things that weren't within my control on set. I am also extremely grateful for her input and gentle nudges to keep shooting whenever I grew hasty and wanted to expedite the process.

Another important element during the whole process of making this film was sharing my ideas with others around me, people within and beyond the Bard film program. Talking to professors, students, friends, and family members about my work was just as helpful and encouraging as hearing about their own projects and ideas, and each person I engaged with communicated their own bits of personality. While I definitely tried to build upon my own personal truths in the making of this film, I couldn't help but incorporate the sentiments of those around me, regardless of whether I agreed with them or not.

My film ends with each character alone, and the resulting feeling is more cynical than I had intended. While there is no resolution where both friends finally feel comfortable with each other before the credits roll, I do not want to say that these two characters are permanently incapable of evolving their relationship. Instead, I wanted to use these moments of tension and detachment to portray a more difficult period in a much longer relationship. Looking back, I regret not writing and then capturing a more hopeful ending. Although I'm not sure it would have made the cut.