

Official Selection
Guadalajara International
Film Festival 2008

WINNER
Social Justice Award for Documentary
Santa Barbara International
Film Festival 2008

WINNER
Big Sky Documentary
Film Festival 2008

WINNER
Award of Excellence
The Accolade Competition
2007

clear films presents

WHEN CLOUDS CLEAR

a documentary by anne slick and danielle bernstein



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WHEN CLOUDS CLEAR

Después de la Neblina

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Short Synopsis

When Clouds Clear is a feature-length documentary that delves into one remote community's radical resistance to a proposed copper mine that would level and destroy their way of life forever. Set in the isolated cloud forests of the northern Andes Mountains, the film is narrated by the founders and children of Junín who depict how the village's daily life has been affected by the rich ore deposits that were discovered beneath their land.

As two invading mining companies become increasingly brazen in their attempts to infiltrate and control the area, the community must coalesce into a united resistance in order to survive. Still, some citizens side with the wealth that the companies promise, causing irreparable divisions, pitting friend against friend and father against son. Suddenly these once-peaceful farmers find themselves thrust into a dangerous world of corruption, splintered households, murder and arson as they fight tenaciously to protect their land and families.

Directed and produced by emerging filmmakers Anne Slick and Danielle Bernstein, *When Clouds Clear* is a gripping and beautiful documentary shot on a patchwork of 16 mm, Super 8 and video that serves as a reminder to us all that wealth and poverty cannot always be measured in dollars and cents. The documentary won the Award for Social Justice at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival and the Artistic Vision Award at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival.

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Long Synopsis

“¡Están aquí! ¡Son de La Empresa!” The walkie-talkie crackles violently with static as a woman’s frantic voice cries on the other end. “They’re here! They’re from The Company!”

In an instant, a pack of tattered work boots pound down the mountain trail, flanked by battered machetes, as they race toward the Check Point. On the other side stands the enemy, The Company. It waits at their doorstep, pacing like a hungry puma looking for the perfect moment to strike.

But before there was the puma, there was peace.

For half a century this isolated village nestled deep in the cloud forests of northern Ecuador was a quiet hamlet composed of a handful of simple farming families. The citizens went about their lives unconnected to the outside world—the men tending to the fields, the women keeping the homes and the children filling the noisy, one-room schoolhouse. Their land was good to them and always provided more than they needed. But one day, this abundance became a curse.

In the mid-’90s rich deposits of copper were discovered in the region. Soon, International mining corporations arrived at their doorsteps, determined to extract the valuable ore, no matter the cost. That cost, as the citizens of Junín soon learned, would be not only their land but also their village and their very way of life.

When Clouds Clear is a remarkably intimate look at the struggle of one small town to protect itself in the face of capitalist conglomerates. As discord and confusion rip through Junín from outside pressures, relationships begin to splinter apart from within, pitting friend against friend and father against son. But with the senseless killing of one of its citizen, the community coalesces into a united resistance movement in what is quickly becoming a perilous battle for survival.

After repeated failed attempts to bring these egregious human rights violations to the attention of the Ecuadorian government, the community is forced to radicalize. In a pivotal decision, villagers set fire to a mining exploration camp, temporarily expelling the invaders but also setting a dangerous precedent for extreme actions when a second company later arrives.

A host of community members narrate the story of their struggle, including village founder Don Rafael Piedra, Polivio Perez, the eloquent leader of the resistance and Marcia Ramirez, a passionate young lady who fondly remembers the day the mining camp burned. Another young villager named Robinson Piedra reflects on the situation with wisdom beyond his fourteen years. Despite the turmoil enveloping his world, he speaks with a youthful hopefulness that some day, with his education, he will help banish the Company forever and return peace to Junín. His future, he realizes, is also that of the land’s, and in order to survive they will both need each other.

Crafted from 16 mm, Super 8 and archival video footage, *When Clouds Clear* is a beautiful patchwork of textures and voices that tells the extraordinary tale of one community’s transformation from a simple village to a powerful grassroots social movement. Directed and produced by co-directors Anne Slick and Danielle Bernstein and accompanied by a breathtaking original score by Juan Carlos González, the film is ultimately a story about humanity and our visceral desire to protect family and homeland.

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A Conversation With The Directors

As two young women from Atlanta, how did you become interested in a subject like ecological and social activism in Latin America?

Danielle: The story of how we came to make this movie starts years ago. We have been learning about Ecuador and hearing about this cloud forest for most of our youth due to the fact that in the early 90's a passionate science teacher convinced our school to raise money to purchase 520 acres of primary cloud forest which is now known as the Siempre Verde Reserve in the northern Andes of Ecuador in an area called Intag.

Over the years our school provided kids with the opportunity to visit the reserve. In 2005 Anne's brother worked as caretaker of this reserve, and on a trip to visit him she learned more about the grassroots mining resistance that was taking place in the area. At the time we were both working on documentary films and in our last years of college so when Anne returned and energetically proposed the project, I accepted.

Anne: I have always been interested in the idea of Magical Realism present in Latin American history, literature, art and cinema and many of my favorite authors, filmmakers and artists are from South America. When I went down to visit my brother in Ecuador and saw the beauty of the Intag and heard the story of these people's strength, I couldn't stop thinking about it as a place like Macondo in *100 Years of Solitude* and wanted to make a documentary about their personal history. Danielle and I had already collaborated on many films and projects together, and I knew it couldn't have been done without her.

Why did you choose to shoot much of the film in 16 mm?

D: Anne and I both came from a background in fine art. I had been doing mostly sculpture and photography, and Anne studied sculpture and film and was incorporating 16 mm experimental shorts into installation spaces. Film was just a natural progression for us. My dad is a great photographer who has an amazing photography collection that I grew up admiring.

Anne and I chose to shoot *Clouds* on an old Arri 16 mm camera for a number of reasons. In a practical sense, the Arri has its roots in World War II so it's built to hold up to lots of traveling, humid conditions and wear and tear. Artistically, we were influenced by experimental filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage and wanted to emphasize the feeling of nostalgia and timelessness you get when you step foot in Junín. We also feel that 16 mm and Super 8 speak to the intimacy of the experimental exploration of this project.

You speak about Junín, Intag and Cotacachi at several points. What is the difference?

A: Intag is the "biological" zone that the village of Junín and the Siempre Verde Reserve are located in, whereas Cotacachi is the governmental state. It's like saying I am from the "Bible Belt" versus the state of Georgia. It is one of the top 25 biological hotspots in the world and home to thousands of rare plants, animals and insects. It's also home to about 18,000 Ecuadorians, both mestizo and indigenous. The Junín mining project would take place at the two main riverheads for the region. If polluted, it would affect everything down stream, which is what makes Junín so key in protecting Intag.

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A Conversation With The Directors

How were you two received in the village when the townspeople learned that you intended to document their struggle? Were there any ways that you aided them while you were there?

D: They were really skeptical at first. The community had trouble in the recent past with company employees posing as tourists to steal photos and water and soil samples. After meeting the leaders of the village and talking to them we gained their trust and integrated ourselves into the community slowly. During our stay we taught filmmaking workshops to the community and gave them video cameras to use themselves. There's a quote by the Argentinean filmmakers Getino and Solanis that says, "The camera is a tool more powerful than a gun when it comes to creating social change in Latin America." I think our presence there was really greatly appreciated. There's some important archival footage of events that took place in December that was actually filmed by Karina Cultid, a 17 year-old girl from the community that we had taught to shoot video. The camera is their number one weapon.

A: We also would edit short videos and make DVDs for the anti-mining cause or make banners for the protests. Like Danielle said, we gave the community cameras, but we would also bring back medicine or particular supplies whenever we'd go to the city. And while we were in Junín we often helped out in the kitchen too, cooking, cleaning and taking care of the kids sometimes. They really became our surrogate families so we did our chores as if we were home staying with Mom and Dad.

There must have been countless moments when you both turned to each other and said, "This is nuts. I can't believe we're doing this." What was one of those moments?

A: Every time we got on the bus in Otavalo to go further into Intag I would think, "I hope we make it to town." The roads were really bad—very narrow and curvy along the ridge of steep mountainsides—and the drivers would go super fast through thick fog while blasting loud cumbia music. I remember this one bus ride. I had a window seat so I could unfortunately see straight down the mountain. We were going downhill, fast around a corner through the fog, and we missed a serious wreck with another bus that was coming up the mountain by about a centimeter. I became really good at sleeping on the buses so I wouldn't have to see these close calls again.

D: Or there was that time we got separated during the hunt for miners in Cerro Pelado.

A: Oh yeah. We got lost in the woods and separated from the other groups. It was getting late, and we had no communication device. Finally we found one of the other groups from Junín who had just kidnapped six workers from the mining company. Two of the leaders left on a motorcycle to go get a pickup truck to bring everyone back to town, but they got attacked on the way home and were brought to jail. We all felt like we were in danger so we stayed up all night long on watch and then left before the sun rose in order to get back to town. All I kept thinking was, "What the hell am I doing in the middle of a forest with a bunch of kidnappers!?"

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A Conversation With The Directors

So was there any point in the filming that you felt fearful for your own lives?

D: No, the people of Junín were very protective of us. If they thought we would be in danger they would let us know. But when you are in the moment, as documentary filmmakers, safety is not always the first thing on your mind.

A: We were mostly scared of the police. The nearest police station is four hours away, and whenever a policeman comes to Junín, it means trouble. There was no way to trust them, they were often getting paid off by the company, or sometimes they were not even police but rather company employees impersonating police. There was one time when I was taking pictures of some men who were standing in the road, and we all got our information taken down by men who we thought were police. Later, our names showed up in a denouncement from Ascendant saying that we were ringleaders in the kidnapping of 57 people.

The community of Junín did actually detain those men in the church, which you see in the film, but we weren't even in the country at the time.

How did the young boy Robinson who opens and closes your film take on the role as the audience's guide through the story?

A: Robinson's family lived and care took the tourist lodge where we stayed so we became really close with them. We interviewed him once on a hike—only audio—and when we came back to the US to develop film and go over all our material we realized his voice and perspective was amazing. After we returned to Ecuador to edit we rushed back the village to get another interview on camera. Since he was thirteen the first time we interviewed him we were scared that his voice might have already changed while we were gone. I think we got to him just in time; we had one really long, two-hour interview with him, and the next time we saw him his voice was totally different.

One woman remarks in the film that poverty doesn't exist in Junín because people have all they need (food, shelter, etc.) even if they are jobless. What were your feelings on that, having seen their situation firsthand?

D: We would agree with her. They have so much food there; I think we both gained 10 pounds. But one problem with a town like Junín—and one man mentions this in the film—is that everything is fine until someone gets sick, and then there's no money to take care of them. Although there are alternatives to mining, very few organizations are able to offer jobs that pay immediately and regularly. It is understandable yet unfortunate that some people feel that mining is the best alternative. It's hard to judge them when they're doing it to take care of a sick family member.

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A Conversation With The Directors

What has taken place in the community since the end of filming your documentary over a year ago?

A: A new president, Rafael Correa, was put into office in January 2007, and one of his goals was to kick out all international companies that are acting against the Ecuadorian constitution. Ascendant was one of the first companies forced to stop all activity in the region. Since then they've stopped, but they're really only waiting it out until the country destabilizes again.

D: Yeah, and Correa and the Ecuadorian government don't necessarily want to protect the land; they just don't want international companies to take the resources for other countries. So, the risk of a copper mine being developed is still very high.

What plans do you two have for future projects?

A: We've got a few things we're working on right now that are along similar lines, one also based in Ecuador and another in the Arctic.



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The Filmmakers

Anne Slick – Director/Producer

Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Anne began her filmmaking career while attending college at NYU. Some of her production projects have included work on Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* as well as archiving the library of works by experimental filmmaker Jack Smith. With a background in fine arts and film, Anne has directed and produced a range of experimental documentary shorts and film installations using 16 mm, Super 8 and video, but *When Clouds Clear* is her directorial debut for a feature-length documentary.

Danielle Bernstein – Director/Producer/Cinematographer

Danielle's award-winning work as a photographer and filmmaker has produced documentation on topics ranging from the disappearing fishing community in the 16 mm short *Almahrosa*, screened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, to a variety of video installations and sculptures which have also been featured at MFA Boston. Her most recent project, *When Clouds Clear* is the first feature length film co-directed, produced and shot by the emerging filmmaker from Atlanta, Georgia.

Ivan Mora – Editor

Ivan lives in Quito, Ecuador, where he has edited *Propuestas Opuestas*, directed by Andrés Barriga, *Qué Tan Lejos*, directed by Tania Hermida, and *Crónicas*, directed by Sebastián Cordero. He also directed and edited the film *Vida del Ahorcado: Los Estudiantes* which won an Agustín Cueva Ordóñez Award for Best Production of the Year and *Silencio Nuclear* which screened in the 59th Venezia Festival, the Festival Latinoamericano de Cine de Trieste, IV Festival de Cine de Derechos Humanos en América Latina y el Caribe, the La Habana New York Film Festival, the Chicago Latino Film Festival, Cardiff Latino Film Festival and the Great Britain and Stockholm Film Festivals.

Gabriela Calavache – Co-Producer

Gabriela was raised in Ambato, Ecuador, but now lives and works in Quito with El Otro Lado Films. The talented filmmaker has produced and directed a number of short films and one feature, *The Committee* which have shown at film festivals in Mar del Plata, Argentina; Guadalajara, México; Huesca, Spain; Jove, Spain; São Paulo, Brazil; as well as the Chicago Latino Film Festival and the La Habana New York Film Festival. Already she has been awarded Second Place in the Iberoamerican Festival of La Latinidade 2001 in Ponte de Lima, Portugal, for her work *Orange Alert* and Second Place in the Iberoamerican Video Festival 2002 at the Catholic University of Quito for *The Mirror*.

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Festivals

- Santa Barbara International Film Festival - January 2008 - World Premiere, WINNER of the Social Justice Award for Documentary
- Big Sky International Film Festival - February 2008- WINNER of the Award for Artistic Vision
- Guadalajara International Film Festival- March 2008- In Competition, TBD
- Cinestrat International Film Festival- April 2008- In Competition, TBD
- New Orleans Human Rights Film Festival- April 2008- In Competition, TBD
- Atlanta International Film Festival- April 2008- In Competition, TBD
- Rincon International Film Festival- April 2008- In Competition, TBD

Film Markets

IDFA Docs for Sale - November 2007

Awards

Social Justice Award for Documentary, SBIFF
Artistic Vision Award, BSDFF
New York State Council of the Arts Individual Artists Grant
The Accolade Award for Excellence in Film
The Pittsburg First Filmmakers Grant
The Lubo Fund Grant
The Exposition Fund Grant
Fiscal sponsorship and 501(c) 3 status through Film/Video Arts New York
Fiscal sponsorship and 501(c) 3 status through Women Make Movies

Press

- Positive News International Newspaper - "Unclouding the Truth" by Stephanie Friede, Summer 2006.
- Siempre Verde Newspaper - "When Clouds Clear" by Angela Morris Long, July 2006.
- Intag Newspaper - "Daily Life and Resistance to Mining in Junin" by Pablo Ventancourt, September 18, 2007.
- Democracy Radio, Quito - on-air interview, August 2007.
- Santa Barbara Independent- "When Clouds Clear" by Barney Brantingham, Feb. 2008.
- New West Magazine- "An Ecuadorian Village Stands Strong in When Clouds Clear" by Grant Rhodes, Feb. 2008.
- KBGA University of Montana Missoula Radio - on-air interview, Feb. 2008

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“When Clouds Clear” Credits

Directed and Produced by

Anne Slick
Danielle Bernstein

Line Producer

Stephanie Friede

Direct Sound

Amelia St. Peter Blair

Additional Camera

Karen Nedivi

Production Manager

Billy Gregoriadis

Production Assistants

Fernanda Sosa
Juan Carlos Donoso
Daniela Espinosa
Amy Poncher
Logan Beitmen
Sinnel Sandoval

Intern

Carey Baldwin

Fiscally Sponsored by

Women Make Movies

Co-Producer - Ecuador

Gabriela Calvache (El Otro Lado Films)

Editor

Iván Mora Manzano

Editing Assistant

Juan Carlos Donoso

Animation

Pablo Gordillo

Location Management

Victor Carrera

Score Musicians

Juan Carlos González, guitar
Sebastian Molina, cello
Santiago Rosero, percussion

Archival Material

Acendant Copper S.A.
Archives of Cotacachi, Ecuavisa
Program La Televisión-Telesistema
(RTS)

Produced in Association with

Film/Video Arts, Inc. (NYC)

Cinematography

Danielle Bernstein

Sound Design and Musical Recording

Esteban Brauer and Rana Estudio

Additional Sound

Victor Carrera
Pablo Gordillo

Translators

Pablo Cisneros
Sandra Ramirez

Original Music

Juan Carlos González

Additional Music

“El Corozón de Contraluz”
Inti-Illimani
WEA International, Warner Music Chile
©2004

“Latitud Cero”
El Grupo Marabu
©2006

“Justicia Propia”
Los Tucanes

“El Pueblo Unido”
Inti-Illimani
WEA International, Warner Music Chile
©2004

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The New York State Council of the Arts, a state agency
Lupo Fund, Inc.
Pittsburgh Filmmakers First Works Grant
Exposition Fund

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77 minutes, Spanish with English subtitles, 16 mm and DV, color and B&W.
DVD available in NTSC with English subtitles.
Filmed entirely on location in Imbaburra, Ecuador.

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Clear Films

Clear Films is the artistic collaboration between filmmakers Anne Slick and Danielle Bernstein. Both young artists are dedicated to creating and supporting original work that brings unique stories to light through innovative approaches to film and video. Recent productions include *When Clouds Clear*, *La Celebración*, directed by Santiago Soto, and *Segundo Oportunidad*, directed by Víctor Carrera. Clear Films' presence in New York and Ecuador has broadened its access to both North and South America.

As experimental filmmakers, we constantly strive to explore the relationship between people and their surroundings. In the process of creating our films, we bring our sense of wonder and discovery to the screen as we uncover the hidden stories of people and places worlds away from our own. It is our belief that the experience of encountering new cultures and landscapes should be just as raw and real to the audience watching it as it was for us filming it.

To support the community through a fund started by us please visit:

www.givemeaning.org/clearfilms

For further information about how you can help the mining resistance in

Ecuador please contact these organizations:

DECOIN (Defensa y Conservación de Intag): www.decoin.org

Ayuda en Acción: www.ayudaenaccion.org

Intag Solidarity Network: www.intagsolidarity.org

Intag Newspaper: www.intagnewspaper.org

Earthworks: www.earthworksaction.org

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