



Una película de policías (Alonso Ruizpalacios, 2021)



Raúl Briones in A Cop Movie (Alonso Ruizpalacios, 2021)

Filmmakers' Creative Toolkit

Dr. Francisco López Ruiz

Thirty years ago, no Mexican filmmaker was nominated for an Oscar—let alone won the award. Yet the last decade was «hijacked» by Cuarón, Iñárritu and Del Toro, who won half of all directing Oscar awards. This global visibility—initiated by Salma Hayek and the *Three Amigos*—is now a reality for dozens of screenwriters, actresses and actors, cinematographers, production designer and other audiovisual professionals. These are not isolated accidents or sparks of genius, but rather the internalization of numerous processes: the understanding and use of global audiovisual languages, a growing capacity to produce world-class film and television products, the constant search for surprising narrative structures, experimentation with hybrid formats and diverse film genres, the construction of an international network and a systematic high-level professionalization that increasingly consolidates transnational Mexican filmmakers.

Creative and technological tools have been available for decades to anyone with the Internet. Knowledge and software that used to cost millions of dollars are now available for a minimal price. Filmmakers in Seoul, Los Angeles, London and Mexico City use these resources on a daily basis. Those who do not know or use these strategies are at a disadvantage in hyper-specialized, highly competitive and transnational creative market.



Obāchan (dir. estudiante Nicolasa Ruiz, UABC, 2020) | Mejor Cortometraje Latinoamericano del 37° FIC de Mar del Plata



Behua Xiñá' (Huachinango rojo, dir. Cinthya Lizbeth Toledo Cabrera 2023) | Premio del Jurado DOQUMENTA 2024 | Nominación Ariel 2024

Not only that: today it is also possible to make films with global quality without living in the big hubs of audiovisual creation. For example: young filmmaker [Cinthya Toledo](#) directed a small crew to make *Behua Xiñá'* (2023), created with fascinating [cinematic concepts](#) from her Communication thesis at the Autonomous University of Chiapas. This short documentary—narrated in Zapotec and Spanish—deals with the Binnizá custom of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec of [«rapturing» teenagers](#); the girls must then get married... but only after «proving» their virginity. In tune with the disruptive creativity that places Mexico as a world reference, *Behua Xiñá'* has already received a nomination for the Ariel 2024 Awards, the Jury Award at the international film festival DOQUMENTA 2024 and recognition at events such as the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival and the 18th Muestra de Cine y Video Indígena Chile 2024.

However, when film, communication, journalism and animation students create their audiovisual narratives, they do not necessarily implement the available creative tools, even if they know the resources because they have studied them during their university education. Strategies such as the creation of [storyboards](#) and [moodboards](#) to [write scripts](#), [enhance symbols](#) or [establish atmospheres](#) are wasted, even if they are useful to define an [audiovisual identity](#) that helps short films to stand out in international film festivals.



Cortometraje universitario *Saudade* (dir. Claudia Franco, UDLAP, 2019) | Diez selecciones oficiales



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Cortometraje [En el lugar indicado](#) (dir. Montse Villegas, IBERO, 2022) con 37 selecciones oficiales y tres premios internacionales

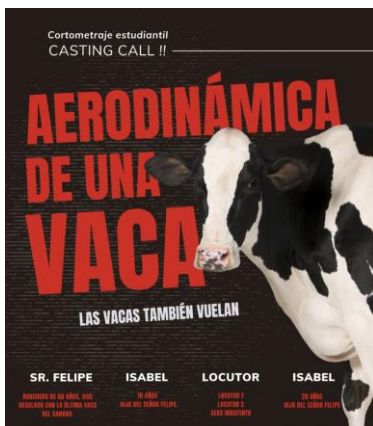


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Why do some students achieve global visibility for their short films, while others don't even try? Perhaps the most surprising absence in many university short films is the lack of creative strategies that give a distinctive personality to the narrative, as if assembling shots and just telling a story were enough to gain access to international film circuits. Students who consider attending festivals *before* writing the script obtain better results than those who already have an audiovisual production and *only then* wonder how to insert their work in a festival route. In this [Plan Internacional para Cortometrajes](#) there are nine case studies with successful strategies of students under 25 years of age—six female directors, three male directors.

The design concept emerges in architecture, theatrical scenography and film production design; one example is the expansion of the [Cineteca Nacional](#) in Coyoacán, which could have been designed as a commercial cinema and instead is inspired by university life on campus. The [visual design](#) of the 29th São Paulo Biennial demonstrates how one concept detonates multiple viable ideas that are very different from each other.



Aerodinámica de una vaca (dir. Emilia Hernández, 2024) | Selección 3er Festival Internacional de Cortometrajes del Tec de Monterrey



Whiplash (dir. Damien Chazelle, 2014) | imdb.com

Films based on powerful and suggestive cinematic concepts are [Alien](#) (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979), [Run Lola Run](#) (dir. Tom Tykwer, 1998), [Whiplash](#) (dir. Damien Chazelle, [2013](#) y [2014](#)), [Roma](#) (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2018), [Una película de policías](#) (dir. Alonso Ruizpalacios, 2021), [Los ladrones: la verdadera historia del robo del siglo](#) (dir. Matías Gueilburt, 2022), and [Una jauría llamada Ernesto](#) (dir. Everardo González, 2023).

I am very excited to see how Mexican female filmmakers are now using global filmmaking strategies to promote their films. [Tótem](#) (dir. Lila Aviles, 2023) may have appeared briefly in theaters but it won awards at the Berlinale, made the shortlist for the Oscars, and has 11 Ariel Award nominations; it is now streaming on Netflix. The documentary [The Echo](#) (dir. Tatiana Huezo, 2023) also succeeded at the Berlinale, made an impressive festival tour, has seven Ariel Award nominations, and Netflix will stream it globally. Opera primas such as [Huesera](#) (dir. Michelle Garza Cervera, 2022), [Adolfo](#) (dir. Sofía Auza, 2023) and [Corina](#) (dir. Urzula Barba Hopfner, 2024) consolidated their future from the international film festivals of Guadalajara, Guanajuato, Monterrey and Morelia, and can now face commercial exhibition in Mexico.



El eco (dir. Tatiana Huezo, 2023) | *Corina* (dir. Urzula Barba Hopfner, 2024) | *Tótem* (dir. Lila Avilés, 2023)

In the case of young film, communication, journalism and animation students, international film festivals are an invaluable opportunity to make their work visible, get feedback and start a career in the audiovisual industry. Now it is easier than ever for young filmmakers to present their work in international forums. The intense immersion required to shoot a short film can be mobilized not only to activate valuable professional skills, but also to catapult the global projection of those beginning their careers in film. To this end, it would be convenient to establish small—decisive changes—in creative strategies: from pre-production to the definition of their *festival route*.

High-level professional workshops for young filmmakers wishing to boost the international presence of their university short films might develop these creative skills:

FILMMAKERS' CREATIVE TOOLKIT

- *Cinematic Concept*
- *Narrative Structures*
- *Storyboard, Moodboard and Palette*
- *Contemporary Audiovisuals*
- *Genre Hybridization*
- *Transnational Approaches*
- *Global Networking*

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