

## Los Mosquitos

### Project Description

#### STORY

Los Mosquitos is a 14 minute narrative short film that delves into the complexities of family, cultural identity, and the universal human desire for belonging. We follow Aby, a 15 year old Honduran girl living in the United States struggling with the feelings of belonging to the new place and family that has taken her in. Aby is trying to come to terms with the separation from her mom, as she sees reflected in her own process of abandonment in her freshly arrived 10 year old cousin Nata. Her rebellious spirit represents her inner turmoil on the day of the quintessential American Holiday that her aunt and caregiver, Magda, has ended up assimilating: Thanksgiving. The holidays and tension with Magda heighten her desire to leave. As Nata finds out about her plan, Aby confronts the girl about her mom's abandonment. The harsh words burden Aby as she escapes, and it is ultimately her own consciousness that brings her back home, to face the absence of her own mom by sharing about it with Nata.

This story was nurtured by my experiences with the Álvarez family for two years now. I connected with them through my previous short film, Comadre, and have since continued to bond over time with them. As a fellow Central American myself, I felt the desire to understand the nuances of sharing a household and creating a new family in a new space. I wanted to portray the happy times, the fun times, but also the complexities of the relationships that are generated in these conditions, and the way children are made to grow older as immigrants.

#### STYLISTIC & VISUAL APPROACH

Los Mosquitos is a film about glimpses of hope when there is seemingly none, much like a ray of light in the darkness. The film's atmosphere is very dark, and most of the story takes place during the night time, because I wanted to accentuate the heaviness of the emotional turmoil and loneliness the characters are experiencing.

Inspired by Rebecca Solnit's essay *Blue is the distance*, I've used the color blue/green to symbolize Aby's longing. Longing for a better place, longing for her mom, longing to leave and escape. The desired goal is always moving, it does not actually ever materialize. Just like the color blue of the mountains in the distance keeps transforming in different shades of green once you get near. The dream is unattainable, but perhaps it is not about the dream but about the company that Aby needs.

In addition, an important visual component of the film are the floaters. The small dots and lines that Aby sees, especially with her eyes closed. Floaters are a medical condition that most of us live with, but it is a condition that we don't usually speak of, nor are we able to exactly verbally share the experience of them. In the same way, our character's Aby and Nata experience the absence of their mothers, without entirely being able to express their feelings about it, but always being accompanied by that absence.

In this way, the floaters have a dual meaning. On one hand it is a metaphor of the things we hold inside that we may or may not share with others, and on the other, in the most literal layer, they are the smallest speck of hope that we keep within us, when everything seems to be simmered in complete darkness.

## **PRODUCTION PLAN**

This project is part of the director's work as an MFA graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. We assembled a diverse group of collaborators that have different cultural backgrounds and have a common sensibility and interest for the intersection of cultures.

Our cast is composed of real Honduran women and girls whose personal lives loosely inspired the script. Through extensive work with the family, Nicole was able to gain a deep understanding of the nuanced life of Central American immigrants and bring truth to the development of the characters and their relationships.

As part of the process, Nicole reengaged the women of MISMA, an all female group of immigrant domestic workers. The group, who has collaborated with the team on a previous short, was founded in 2013 and provides educational programming and empowerment workshops for its members. Nicole met the three principal characters in the film through the organization. As a key partner in the project, MISMA provided a platform to gather some of the required resources for production. Many other members of the organization are also pictured in the film.

## **PROJECT STATUS**

We've just freshly finished the post-production of the film, and are currently entering the distribution of the project. We have great desire for the film to connect and be shared with audiences around the world.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

We would like to reach festivals in Europe like Berlinale, Cannes - La Cinef, Locarno and Rotterdam; as well as festivals that support Latinx content like Rencontres de Toulouse and Biarritz Amerique Latine. Given the subject matter and the Central American characters in our film, we are looking forward to approaching festivals in Latin America like the Oscar-Qualifying BOGOSHORTS, which has previously featured the director's work.

In addition, we're aiming to apply for festivals in the United States such as SXSW and Sundance, as well as festivals focused on the Latinx experience, such as NYLFF and LALIFF.

We are applying to the AFS Short Film Grant in the hopes we can have support to apply to the festivals, and if selected, to be able to share the experience of sharing the film with audiences along with the protagonists of the film. It is our aim to celebrate them and their experiences, and allow them to see themselves and their stories presented on the screen.

## **FUNDRAISING AND THE AFS GRANT FUNDS**

We secured the production funding through UT Austin's Moody Innovation Grant (\$██████), the New Orleans Film Society Southern Producer's Lab (\$██████), the UT Austin Graduate School Continuing Fellowship (\$██████) and the director's personal funds.

The AFS Grant funds requested (\$██████) would be destined to the distribution of the film. We're hopeful and have the desire to further showcase the film in other festivals in the US and around the world, but we are unable to cover all the submission fees. We also want to use some of the funds to invite our natural actresses to join us in the selected festivals, so they can truly be part of sharing their experiences on a big screen and with an audience.

## Los Mosquitos

### Treatment

Aby, a 15-year-old Honduran teen living in the US, has a rebellious spirit that clashes with the weight of the immigrant expectations imposed by her caregiver, aunt Magda. In the film, Aby's inner turmoil is at the surface, as she comes home in an intoxicated state one night. Aunt Maru pulls her into the bathtub to sober her up. After Aby confesses she smoked, Maru is both angered and disappointed. She doesn't know how to care for Aby anymore. Once alone, Aby closes her eyes to, trying to find solace in the floaters, little mosquito-like shaped dots and lines she sees with her eyes open and closed. She's interrupted by her 10 year old cousin, Nata. She comes to pee in the bathroom, but at the same time she asks Aby to tell the story of the mosquitoes. Nata is friendly and only desires Aby's attention and friendship, but all her actions are read as annoying to Aby.

On the day of Thanksgiving – a quintessentially American holiday–, and amidst Magda's preparations for the party, Nata will become insistent on reaching out to her own mother, who has recently stopped answering her texts and calls. Aby continuously declines to lend her phone, but Nata manages to steal it for a moment, with the excuse of doing her homework. This action upsets Aby, and they start to fight about it, but their discussion is cut short by a call on Aby's phone.

Aby is asked out by her friend to another party that same evening. He promises to give her a ride, once she calls him. Aby gets excited about hanging out with him. However, as she tries to leave for it, she's stopped dry by Magda. Her phone is taken away from her and she is made to stay at home to celebrate Thanksgiving with her "family", which only further frustrates her.

Aby tries to find peace by herself, laying in the backyard and seeing the floaters in her eyes, but is interrupted by Nata's insistent request to play together. Nata confesses she sent a message to her mom earlier, and asks her if she can check if she's answered. Aby no longer has her phone to check, but as she feels sorry for Nata, she diverts her attention by teaching her how to dance for the evening's party.

At the party, Aby feels completely out of place, surrounded by Magda's friends and family. Nata, on the other hand, is having a wonderful time. Aby decides to escape the party as everyone is outside, distracted. She enters Magda's room and finds her phone, but is caught in the act by Nata, who starts screaming for Magda, knowing that Aby is planning to leave. Aby tries to hold her down, but as she isn't able to keep Nata quiet, she becomes desperate and harshly lets Nata know it is obvious her mom will not reply to any of her messages any more. Nata is destroyed by the words.

Aby runs out of the house.

In the street, Aby continuously calls her friend to have him pick her up for the other party. She insists, however he never picks up nor reply her texts. She starts to become aware of her surroundings, and her loneliness. Suddenly, in the dark, she hears Nata's voice, asking her to play. Aby becomes scared and lights the street with her phone's light. Nata's figure appears on and off, like a blur. Aby tries to calm down by closing her eyes. She sees her floaters once more, and she hears Nata's voice once more, asking her where she's at. Aby opens her eyes

Aby returns home, to find Nata laying in bed in their room. Nata doesn't want to engage with her. Aby makes an effort, she slowly lays next to Nata, and starts to apologize to her. Nata is moved, and turns to Aby to ask her about her mom once again. She wants to know if her mom won't reply because she can't or because she doesn't want to.

Aby hesitates, but she replies with honesty. She doesn't know. She tries to bring comfort to Nata by mentioning her own mom for the first time, and letting her know that she isn't alone in feeling this way, because her own mother wouldn't come for her either.

The film ends with the story that Nata had asked Aby to tell her in the bathroom. She asks once more to hear it as they lay together. It is the only story that Aby tells that mentions her mom, about the time she first started to see floaters. The floaters appeared in the darkness when she closed her eyes. She was so scared, she asked her mom: *How can I see something, in complete darkness?*

**PROJECT: Los Mosquitos**

**BUDGET SUMMARY**

EXPENSES				RESOURCES	Actual	Anticipated	Total
	Cash	In-Kind	Total				
Pre-production	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]	UT Austin RTF Moody College Innovation Grant	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]
Production	\$ [REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]	UT Austin Graduate School Continuing Fellowship	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]
Post-production	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]	Southern Producer's Lab - New Orleans Film Society	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]
Distribution	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]	UT Austin RTF Moody Equipment (In-Kind)	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]
				Personal (Cash)	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]
				AFS Grant Cash	[REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]	\$ [REDACTED]
<b>Total Cash "+"</b>		\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	<b>Total Actual</b>	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
<b>Total In-Kind</b>		\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	<b>"+" Total Anticipated</b>	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
<b>"=" Total Expenses</b>		\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	<b>"=" Total Resources</b>	\$ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]