

ROOTS AND TIDES

02.03 – 03.07.2025
Mishkin Gallery

Black Cinemas in the Caribbean Basin



Film Festival Schedule and Events

FEB 03–07	Luis Arnías, <i>Bisagras</i> . 2024. Senegal/Brazil/ Venezuela, 18 minutes	Thursday, 02.06, 6-8pm [on Zoom]: Filmmaker Luis Arnías in conversation with Dr. Rojo Robles
FEB 10–14	Mariana Rondón, <i>Pelo Malo</i> . 2013. Venezuela, 93 minutes	
FEB 18–21	Juan Andrés Arango García, <i>La Playa D.C.</i> 2012. Colombia, 90 minutes	Tuesday, 02.18, 6-8pm: Expanding the Black Gaze: A Conversation with Dr. Elena Martinez and Dr. Rojo Robles
FEB 24–28	Nino Martínez Sosa, <i>Liborio</i> . 2021. Dominican Republic, 99 minutes	Thursday, 02.27, 12-2pm: <i>Encounters Magazine</i> Zine Launch
MAR 03–07	Rosamary Berríos Hernández, <i>Santiago de las Mujeres</i> . 2023. Puerto Rico, 63 minutes	Tuesday, 03.04, 6-8pm: Documentary Filmmaking and Black Spirituality in Puerto Rico featuring Rosamary Berríos Hernández, Dr. Margarita Rosa, and Dr. Rojo Robles, presented with Baruch Black and Latino Studies Department



Black Horizons: Cinematic Reflections of the Diaspora



Curator's Statement by Dr. Rojo Robles, Black and Latino Studies Department, Baruch College, CUNY

The Caribbean Basin refers to the geographic, cultural, and historical region that includes the Caribbean Sea, its archipelago(s), and the surrounding coastal areas of Central America, northern South America, and the southern portion of North America. This fluid region has been shaped by its history of colonization and resistance, trade, and migration, involving European and US imperial powers, African enslaved and free peoples, and Indigenous cultures. While the Caribbean Basin remains a crossroads of cultures, languages, economies, and visualities, the African diaspora within it tends to be neglected, underestimated, or completely erased from cultural and, more specifically, film discussions.

Europeans violently brought between 10 to 12 million enslaved Africans to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade, with approximately 4 to 5 million of them situated as forced laborers in the Caribbean and 3.5 to 5 million in Latin America (primarily Brazil). By Western design, the Caribbean became a laboratory for *racecraft* (the creation of “race” to gain and sustain power and wealth) and plantation economies. This forced migration led by war, ecological devastation, and extraction of resources and labor had profound social, cultural, and economic effects worldwide. It also shaped the Afro-Caribbean and diasporic compound identities as we recognize them today. As Patrick Manning argues, “the history of Africans and people of African descent ... lies at the center of the history of all humanity. The tale of modernity cannot fairly be told without full attention to the African continent and peoples of African descent.”¹

This five-film festival, *Roots and Tides: Black Cinemas in the Caribbean Basin*, engages with the remnants of that history. I designed the festival to provide

an interactive view of the present to reveal the critical place of Black people in the literal and symbolic construction of the Caribbean and Latin America. Afro-descendants have been integral for the development of infrastructure, major and underground economies, spiritual systems, cuisines, fashion, poetics, and the arts. A common result of coloniality in the hemisphere and the islands has been the exclusion of Afro-descendants from nation-building and modernization projects. In response to that anti-Black exclusion, I foreground the idea of a “nation on no map,” as William C. Anderson (via Gwendolyn Brooks²) has outlined it. “I see the ‘nation on no map,’” says Anderson, “as a group of people using skills others may struggle to recognize to develop new thinking, new language, and new societies. I envision a nation that doesn’t need to be a nation and that doesn’t need to be on a map, because it knows borders, states, and boundaries cannot accommodate the complexity of our struggles.”³ Inspired by these ideas, and rather than replicating this barring by zoning into national cinemas, this series encompasses a large area of the Black world and emphasizes relations, submarine, and subterranean thematic threads.

The series focuses on the drama, transformation, woes, wonders, and bodily and spiritual renewal in the lives of Afro-descendants. Necessarily, the films examine negative aspects of the afterlives of slavery in the form of displacement by military conflicts, cultural deprivation, racial profiling and discrimination, religious persecution, patriarchal abuses, and lack of housing, jobs, or healthcare. Yet, seen from another angle, all the films showcase Black people’s (of different ages and genders) intellectual reach, creativity, and acute contributions to their corners of the world, to the basin, and more so, to global culture.

This duality—grappling with the enduring afterlives of slavery while celebrating the intellectual, creative, and cultural contributions of Afro-descendant communities—offers a foundation for engaging with critical frameworks like the “Black Gaze.” By the early 90s, celebrated scholars Manthia Diawara and bell hooks underscored the power of the “Black Gaze.” Their frameworks are still generative in comprehending this corpus.⁴ The “Black Gaze” is a conscious, critical, and political act of spectatorship that challenges the whiteness of the status quo and seeks to reclaim agency, dignity, and authenticity in the portrayal of Black lives in media and film.⁴

More recent theorizations, such as the one articulated by Tina Campt, allow us to understand Black cinema and visual culture as acts of affective and reparative labor. The “Black Gaze” fosters confrontation, intimacy, and accountability, expressing a witnessing structure that grapples with Black life’s precariousness while affirming its strength.⁵ Expanding on this, alongside Lorgia García Peña, we can situate Blackness (in film) as a project of possibility and being, mapping

diasporic circuits that connect race, colonialism, and migration. In this view, Black Latinidad becomes a horizon—a set of critical translation spaces for reimagining knowledge and defiance.⁶

These perspectives highlight how Black cinemas refuse white-dominated audiovisual norms by centering Blackness and its diasporic dimensions to reframe visual politics and affirm cultural sovereignty. These Caribbean films explore the material and symbolic dimensions of *roots*—both as connections to flora, to ancestral legacies, and as hair, challenging Eurocentric standards of beauty and the moral judgments imposed on Black embodiments. They interconnect Afro-diasporic spirituality with the principles of marronage and unsteady ocean archives, investigating Black ecologies, community, and gender formations. Through the lens of contemporary filmmakers across the Caribbean Basin, *Roots and Tides* aims for critical conversations and connections to engage deeply with the histories and visions shaping Afro-Caribbean experiences.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Manning, "Preface," xv.
- 2 The Gwendolyn Brooks poem where the phrase "nation on no map" can be found is entitled "The Blackstone Rangers." Anderson reads it as a poem about gangs, "groups, often formed by people who have been forced to move and migrate to cities" and who take on "new names, new identity, and new shape." (Anderson, "Introduction," 11.)
- 3 Anderson, "Introduction," 11.
- 4 See, Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," 211-220; and hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," 288-302.
- 5 Campt, "The Intimacy of Strangers," 27-42; "Black (Counter)gravity," 45, 47. "Adjacency and the Poethics of Care," 171-2.
- 6 García Peña, "Introduction: Race, Colonialism, and Migration in the Global Latinx Diaspora," 2-5.

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Luis Arnías, *Bisagras*

02.03-07



2024, Senegal/Brazil/Venezuela, 18 minutes

Luis Arnías is “daring to imagine” the journey of enslaved Africans to America in his film *Bisagras*. Shot in black and white on 16mm film, Arnías employs skillful and unpredictable edits, unusual angles and close ups, and a soundtrack of percussion (much like the beating of a heart), to give texture, shape, and intimacy to traces of history both embodied and external. At times manipulating the film directly, Arnías explores “connection through the film’s emulsion and my skin.” Like a searching eye that sees the joy, beauty, and culture within the Afro-Caribbean diaspora coupled with the haunting remnants of slavery, *Bisagras* brings the viewer on a journey of identity, history, and their merged expression.

SPECIAL EVENT

Thursday, February 6, 6-8pm [on Zoom]: Filmmaker Luis Arnías in conversation with Dr. Rojo Robles

Zoom RSVP: <https://baruch.zoom.us/meeting/register/8LE0Wf8NTqCgEhF0b2KNTA#/registration>

02:10–14

Mariana Rondón, *Pelo Malo*



2013, Venezuela, 93 minutes

Set in Caracas, Venezuela, against the backdrop of a changing political landscape, this story follows a young boy and his strained relationship with his mother as his desire for straight hair alienates them from one another. Rondón explores “what happens when there is no respect for our differences—the violence that surges and wounds that occur when these differences are not honored,” through a portrait of a family (and society) grappling with the effects of European beauty standards, homophobia, racism, and poverty.

Juan Andrés Arango García, *La Playa D.C.*

02.18-21



2012, Colombia, 90 minutes

Tomas is a teenager growing up in Bogotá with a single mom after the family is displaced from the predominantly Black pacific region by the Colombian civil war. Unwelcome at home by his mother's boyfriend, he leaves to look after himself. He is reunited with his older brother who was deported back to Colombia and together they search for their younger brother who frequently goes missing due to substance use. When their lives converge, it reveals the different choices each brother has made in response to their circumstances. While Tomas is being pulled into the paths of his brothers, he finds his way into hip-hop culture through hair styling, ultimately leading him to make his own decisions for his life and independence. Against the struggle to survive in a poverty-stricken area where racial dynamics are stark, the drive to create, to self-express, and to be free endures.

SPECIAL EVENT

Tuesday, February 18, 6-8pm: Expanding the Black Gaze: A Conversation with Dr. Elena Martinez and Dr. Rojo Robles

Nino Martínez Sosa, *Liborio*

02.24-28



2021, Dominican Republic, 99 minutes

Based on a true story, this film follows one of the few messianic figures within Dominican culture, that of Papa Liborio. After having been missing for days in the aftermath of a hurricane, Liborio reemerges and claims to have received powers from God to spread healing and peace. He gains followers and creates a modern maroon (Black self-sufficient) community in the rural hills of the San Juan province. However, when the US Marines occupy the territory, tensions arise which culminate in a violent clash. Quietly and beautifully expressed through the perspective of different believers, Sosa's film renders Liborio as a three-dimensional figure while encapsulating the air of mystery, lore, and misunderstanding around him.

SPECIAL EVENT

Thursday, February 27, 12-2pm: *Encounters Magazine*
Zine Launch

03.03-07 Rosamary Berrios Hernández, *Santiago de las Mujeres*



2023, Puerto Rico, 63 minutes

This heartfelt and celebratory documentary looks at a small Puerto Rican town's annual tribute to Santiago el Apóstol, a weeklong festival honoring the three images of Santiago (los Niños, los Hombres, and las Mujeres). Hernández focuses on the stories of women whose families for generations have kept this tradition alive. Beyond the festival's history, the film reveals the impressive dedication, strength, and spiritual resilience of these women, who are themselves pillars of the community. With charm and humor, the film shines a warm light on the struggles, hopes, and values woven into the procession of Santiago de las Mujeres.

SPECIAL EVENT

Tuesday, March 4, 6-8pm: Documentary Filmmaking and Black Spirituality in Puerto Rico featuring Rosamary Berríos Hernández, Dr. Margarita Rosa, and Dr. Rojo Robles, presented with Baruch Black and Latino Studies Department



Credits



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