

As the government plans to build a 4th cruise ship pier in Cozumel, Mexico, a man living in a jungle must save the corals before the collapse of its ecosystem.

| synopsis

Set in Cozumel, Mexico, this documentary follows two parallel threads: Germán, a solitary diver restoring coral reefs by hand, and an American family on a short holiday cruise, navigating the well-worn contours of leisure. One moves slowly, deliberately, embedded in the rhythms of the sea; the other is swept along by the temporal economy of break-time, itinerary, and return.

When their paths converge—during a reef dive led by Germán—a submerged reality begins to surface. What appeared as a backdrop to a tropical escape is in fact collapsing. The corals are not dying—they are already dead in many places, and what remains is held together by threads of labor, memory, and one man's impossible commitment.

The film unfolds as a meditation on purpose and escapism—two parallel forces that shape how we choose to live, or look away.



ACT I

Distance

Bright orange birds chirp at each other as part of their morning routine while Germán Méndez fries a couple of fresh eggs in his kitchen, styled with large Mexican tiles. He lives isolated in the jungle of Cozumel, Yucatán—the only island in Mexico with a jungle. Not a single sound of civilization, and Germán couldn't be happier.

His grueling work consists of endless efforts to revive the long-forgotten reefs. His face is marked with deep grief—he's seen firsthand the demise of the corals over the last 30 years. We follow him through his restoration site as the tragic story of Cozumel's ecological disaster unfolds.

Across the Gulf of Mexico, a family with two children slam their doors and trip over oversized suitcases as they rush to a taxi waiting by the curb. A long-awaited holiday for the parents and an ecstatic adventure for the children. Soon, they'll board a cruise ship—larger than the buildings lining the Miami skyline.



ACT II

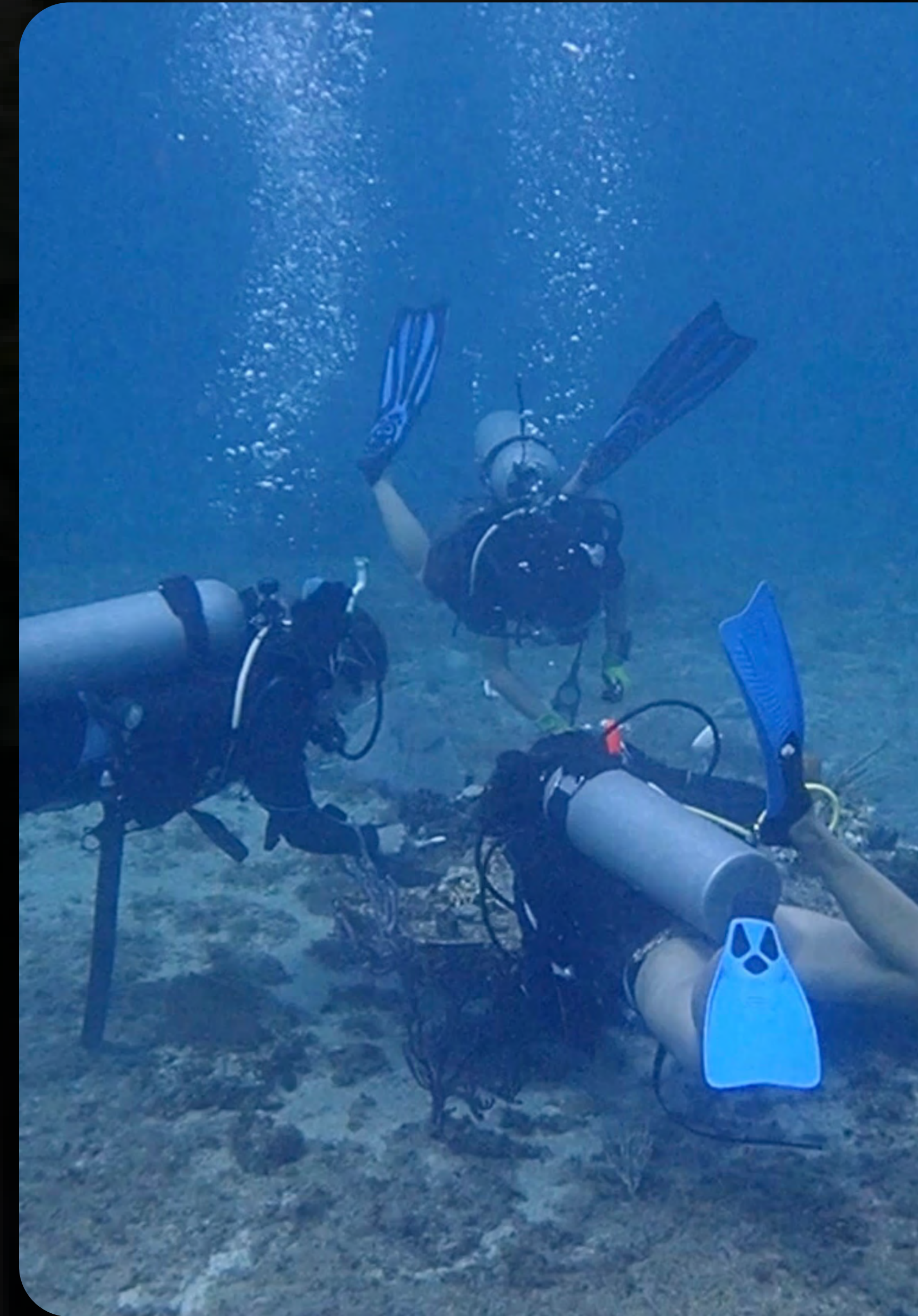
Encounter

In a bitter twist, Germán's work is partly funded by the very industry he resents. As part of his job, he leads diving tours for tourists—often arriving by cruise ships—who unknowingly contribute to the reefs' destruction. He shows them the damage firsthand, sometimes blaming them outright, unable to contain his frustration.

But it becomes clear Germán has a purpose behind his actions. He wants to leave a mark on this earth before he perishes.

Soon, the family's ship docks at one of many piers on Cozumel. They step onto the island, so foreign to them. Meanwhile, Germán gears up to lead another tour. In a short time, the family and Germán will meet—to face the uncomfortable reality of their vacation.

Germán takes them on a tour of the island. With a mixture of fury and almost pleasure, he shows them the destruction brought by tourism. The family watches—stunned—as their fantasy melts into the barren ashes of the trees below them.



ACT III

Purpose

The family, there to enjoy an escape on a tropical island, watches in dismay as they realize they've stepped into a wildlife cemetery. The question stands: with such limited options, are they really the problem? Their ignorance, their plea for a simple vacation, their fantasy of a foreign land.

Yet in weary steps, Germán's attitude begins to shift. Beneath his critical remarks about the tourists, we glimpse a kind soul. Ultimately, it's clear he wishes for the health of the land for all of us—it's one man's battle against a system so large, perhaps no single individual can stop it anymore.

The family and Germán share still moments. They laugh and reflect. Soon, the family departs. The return trip on the cruise feels familiar, but now through a different lens. They step back onto the soil of home, preparing for another day of work—their escape now over.

Germán wakes up to another day in the jungle. The birds chirp at the sight of their neighbor. The dogs chase chickens through the yard. He puts on his helmet, and we follow him along his daily route on his scooter. He nods at fellow islanders working food stalls, serving tourists.

Though he knows there is no easy escape from a system locked into society, he perseveres. For he does not aim to stop—until he sees his own children beneath the water saved.





Germán Méndez |

A marine biologist and founder of Cozumel Coral Reef Restoration, Germán is fiercely dedicated to saving the dying reefs. With bold activism and scientific rigor, he fights cruise industry damage and government inaction, rooted deeply in his love for the island's fragile ecosystems.

A simple generic family with a set of blue collar working parents and a couple of young children. They look to have a relaxing holiday away from their lives full of struggles and worries.



Tourist Family |



| director's statement

When I first met Germán, I was stunned by his deep intellect and awareness of the world around him. From the tiny specks of life between rocks to the birds soaring overhead, he knew everything by heart.

The more time I spent with him, the more I wondered why he continues to slave away for a cause that seems to only disappoint him. The corals he cares for face wave after wave of destruction, and yet he perseveres. Why hasn't he given up?

I soon realized that, to Germán, this task is the one thing he has left to do. "Even after I am gone," he would tell me in different ways, "the corals will still be here." I've never met a man with such conviction and purpose. It struck me deeply.

Then come the cruise ships—and the tourists

disembarking them—the culprits in Germán’s eyes. But here lies a paradox: while many tourists are able-bodied and financially comfortable, others simply seek a break from life. For reasons beyond their control, they arrive on cruise ships.

What I see in this conflict is the failure of a system we’ve built over decades. The working class clashes with itself—taught to blame each other for a structure created by the wealthy. Through the duality of purpose and escapism, *Island of Swallows* opens a discourse on responsibility: not to blame our neighbors, but to question the box we live in.

~ Kaito Sashihara Martinez



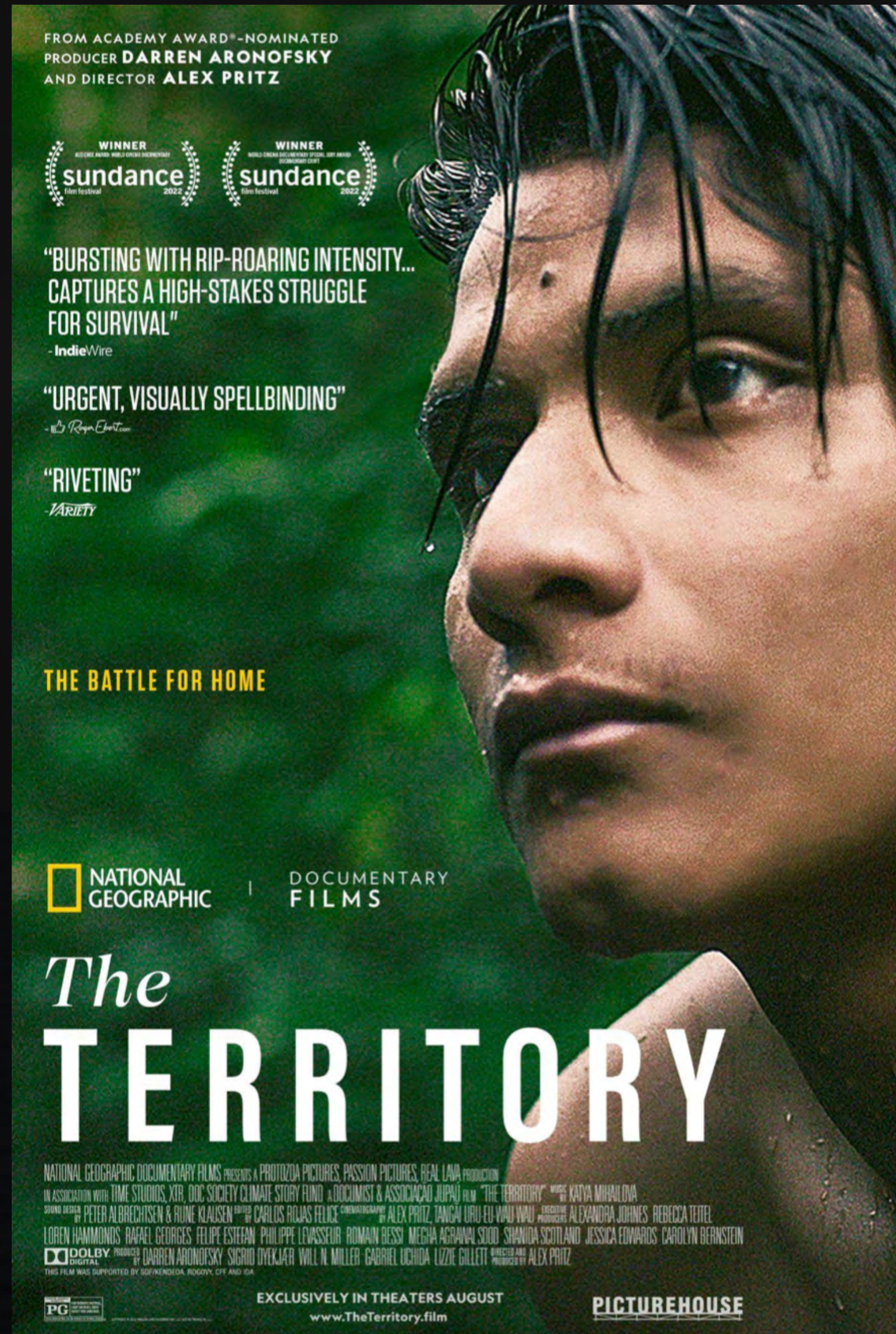


| artistic approach

This story belongs to the characters—not the filmmakers. For this reason, we’ve chosen a strictly fly-on-the-wall approach. Context will emerge organically through conversations between the characters and those around them.

We will spend extensive time diving with Germán to immerse ourselves in the world he inhabits. Underwater, we hear the current rush past, air bubbles trailing toward the sky. In the jungle, birds call, moths glide, and animals move just beyond sight.

Still moments punctuate the narrative. Germán’s life, though often turbulent and emotionally charged, is also filled with long silences and calm. These pauses serve as contrast—set against the chaotic energy of the cruise ships. Aboard, materialism is masked as leisure, and indulgence becomes self-care. I want the film to make space for viewers to question this culture: its exaggerated presence, its blind footprint stamped over nature’s quiet, restorative rhythm.







Pelargonía (2025)

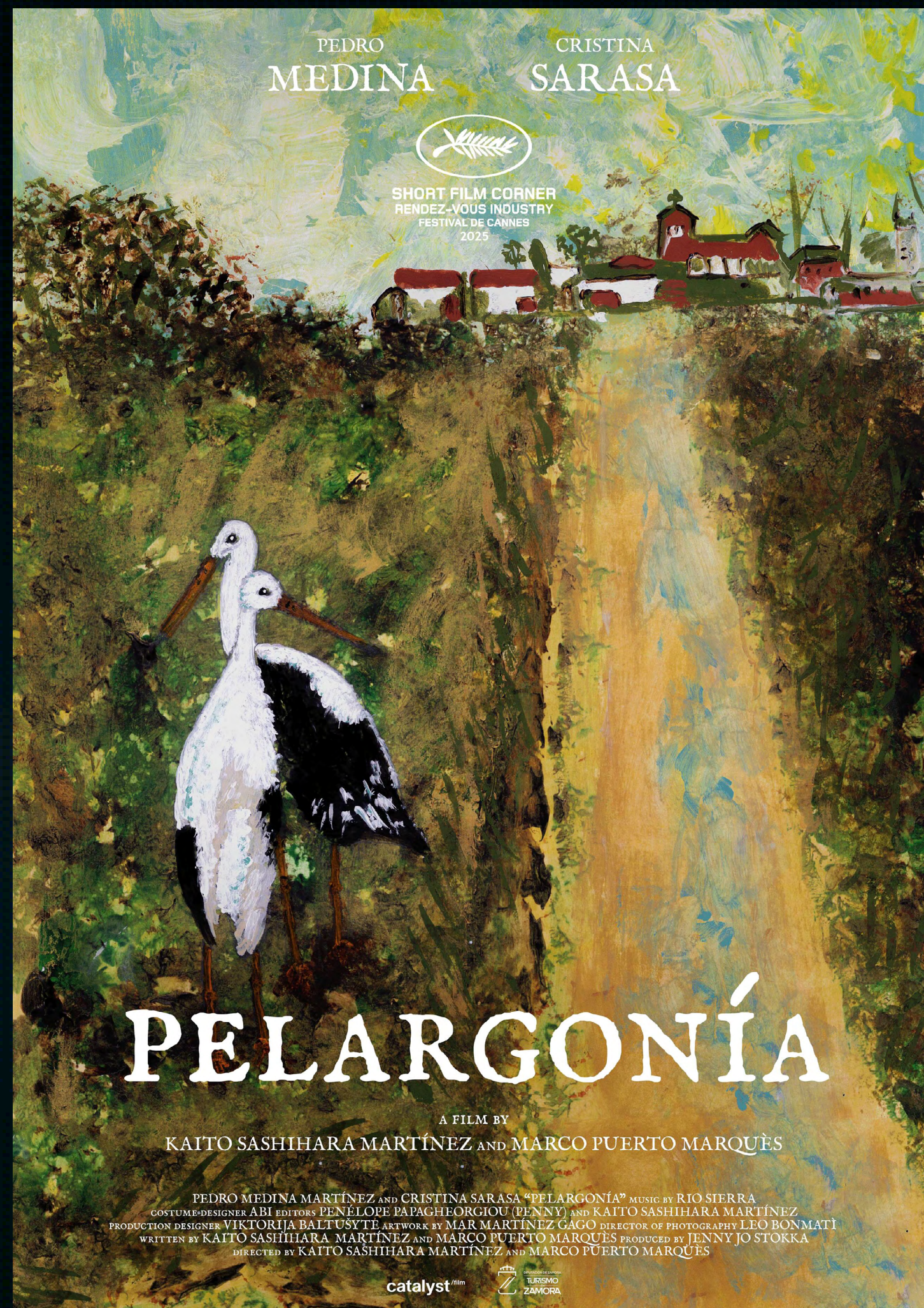
*Kaito Sashihara Martínez
& Marco Puerto Marquès*

[LINK](#)

PASSWORD:

emptyspain

Running Time: 25min



Festivals and Recognition:

Cannes Short Film Corner ~ Selected for Cannes Film Festival short film market.

LA OPINIÓN DE ZAMORA ~ Featured in the Sunday print of the newspaper and digital edition in Zamora, Spain. Recognized for an international crew shedding light to an important topic of de-population heavily affecting the area. [LINK TO ARTICLE](#)

CADENA SER ~ Featured on the national radio of Spain with an interview and a digital article covering the same topics as La Opinion De Zamora.

[LINK TO ARTICLE](#)



Kaito Sashihara Martinez
| *Director / Producer*

Kaito Sashihara Martínez is a half Japanese half Spanish director and cinematographer focused on multicultural productions. He previously worked on productions across Spain, Germany, Mexico, Portugal, Sweden, and Japan. His skill set in niche guerrilla style productions paired with his underwater cinematography has set him on a path to a free-flowing journalistic working

style.

Currently based in Berlin—where he earned his BA in Film Production from Catalyst Institute for Creative Arts—his debut short film “Pelargonía” led him to participate in the 78th Cannes Film Festival in the Short Film Corner. He is currently working on his first documentary feature as well as in pre-production for a fiction feature and an animated short film.

Jenny Jo Stokka
Producer |

Jenny Jo Stokka is a creative producer with a passion for international auteur-driven cinema. She has produced films across Germany, Spain, and the U.S., and previously worked as a production coordinator in the fast-paced world of New York advertising. In 2022, Jenny earned her MA in Creative Producing from Catalyst Institute for Creative Arts in Berlin, where she sharpened her narrative instincts and collaborative leadership style.



In 2024, Jenny wrapped production on her first feature, “Berlin Loop,” slated for release in Fall 2025. Currently, Jenny is developing her second narrative feature, as well as her first documentary feature. Her work emphasizes inclusive, sustainable production practices and international collaboration. In 2025, she joined the producing team at Cota Mil Producciones in Barcelona, expanding her reach within the European market.



Miranda Siegel | *Editor*

Miranda Siegel (born Rochester, New York) is an award-winning U.S. American / Hungarian filmmaker and translator based in Berlin. Her 2024 documentary film *Ignore Your True Feelings at Your Own Peril* was shortlisted for the German Short Film Award, and celebrated its North American premiere at the Slamdance Film Festival.

Previously, Miranda worked as a culture journalist for *New York* magazine and *Vulture*, covering festivals and fairs, participating in panels, and serving on juries.



Yosuke Hosoi | *Advisor*

Yosuke Hosoi (born Saitama, Japan) is an Emmy Award nominated film director based in Berlin, Germany. He has traveled more than 50 countries and directed travel programs and documentaries for *NHK World*, *Tokyo MX TV*, and *WOWOW*.

He has been directing the documentary series *WHO I AM*, which was nominated for the *International Emmy Awards* in 2018 and 2024, and won the official selection at *Agency for Cultural Affairs*, Japanese Ministry of Education 2017 for his work.

Our Partners



Cozumel Coral Reef
Restoration Program

Jenny Jo Stokka | *PRODUCER*

w: <https://www.jennyjostokka.com>

i: @jennyjostokka

p: +49 157 7097 8689 (Whatsapp)

Kaito Sashihara Martinez | *DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, CINEMATOGAPHER*

w: kaito-sashihara.com

i: @kaito.sashihara

p: +49 176 8080 5934 (Whatsapp)