



# La Laguna

(The Lagoon)

2016 | Mexico/USA | Documentary | 38 min.  
Dir: Aaron Schock

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Set within the rainforests of southern Mexico, **La Laguna** tells the story of a Mayan boy's remarkable journey from childhood to adolescence. While Yu'uk and his younger brother José enjoy a childhood of uncommon freedom in the jungle, Yu'uk's family's problems begin to mount and leaving his village – and his beloved little brother – may be his family's only hope.

## SYNOPSIS

Set within the rainforests of southern Mexico, **La Laguna** tells the story of a Mayan boy's remarkable journey from childhood to adolescence as he searches for his place in the world.

Yu'uk and his younger brother José enjoy a childhood of uncommon freedom in the forest – exploring the mountains, finding wild animals, and most of all, fishing for their family in the enormous lagoon in a constant effort to be just one step ahead of hunger. At age 12, Yu'uk is already a master of the jungle and is training little José in his footsteps.

In his village school, however, Yu'uk finds himself lost in a world he cannot fully comprehend, uneasy in a language and culture both foreign and beyond his grasp: "*I don't know what Mexico is. Is it a city? I am not too sure.*" In response, Yu'uk searches for understanding and identity in the remnants of a vanquished Mayan civilization that still exists in his father's stories and in the ruins he and José discover around the forest's enormous lagoon.

When Yu'uk's family problems begin to mount – a failed crop, an elderly father who can no longer work, the birth of a sister's gravely ill child – his carefree life in the jungle with José comes under threat. Yu'uk begins to comprehend that leaving his village and his beloved little brother may be his family's only hope.

Intimate and immersive – and eschewing ethnography by focusing squarely on unique individuals – ***La Laguna*** tells a story of one boy's difficult choice. Through Yu'uk's story we feel deeply the waning moments of childhood, the strength of fraternal bonds, the need for identity, and ultimately the search for a place in a world not of your own making.

## **AWARDS**

Panavision Best North American Short – Palm Springs Shortfest  
Best Documentary Short – Woodstock Film Festival  
Youth Jury Award – Aspen Shortsfest  
Special Jury Mention – Aspen Shortsfest  
Jury Honorable Mention – HotDocs Canadian International Film Festival  
Jury Honorable Mention – DOXA Documentary Film Festival  
Best Documentary Short – Nevada City Film Festival  
Best of the Fest – Nevada City Film Festival  
Cinema Eye Honors Shortlist 2017

## **FESTIVALS**

HotDocs Int'l Documentary Film Festival	Full Frame Documentary Film Festival
Aspen Shortsfest	Palm Springs International Shortfest
DOXA Documentary Film Festival	Guanajuato International Film Festival
DOCNYC	DOCS:MX (Mexico City)
Hamptons International Film Festival	Woodstock Film Festival
Camden International Film Festival	DocumentaQro (Mexico)
Olympia IFF (Greece)	San Cristobal IFF (Mexico)
DC Environmental Film Festival	Family Film Festival (Portugal)
Environmental Film Festival Australia	Nevada City FF

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

In all my films I begin with individuals and settings that spark my curiosity and begin filming with the faith that a story will emerge. This was also the course by which I came to make ***La Laguna***.

I first met Yu'uk and his family while on a trip to the southern Mexican state of Chiapas to learn more about Southern Mexico (my previous film, ***CIRCO***, had taken me through much of Central and Western Mexico). My travels eventually led to the

small village of Metzabok, located on an immense and beautiful lagoon in the middle of a rainforest, and home to Yu'uk and his family.

I quickly met Yu'uk and his little brother José though their uncle who served as the village boatman, and the two boys became my guide through the lagoon and jungle and introduced me to their family and school. I was immediately struck at how knowledgeable and at ease the brothers were in the rainforest. In his short 12 years of life, Yu'uk not only could fish and harpoon to provide food to his family, but he was also teaching little José about the ways of the forest. How was this knowledge and way of life still possible?

I learned that Yu'uk and his family are Lacandon Maya, believed to be the only indigenous group in Mexico to have never been conquered by the Spanish. They maintained their autonomy by retreating further and further into the forest, and only began to make sustained contact with outsiders in the middle of the 20th century – nearly 450 years after the conquest. As a result, the Lacandon possessed an intimate knowledge of the rainforest, especially so for poor families like Yu'uk's who rely even more heavily on the lagoon and forest to sustain them.

At first, I conceived the film to simply contrast Yu'uk's two worlds and educations, his adventures in the forest in contrast to his struggles to learn Spanish and other basics in the school. However, each time I visited Mexico to film his family was in yet another crisis – and each time Yu'uk seemed more serious in thinking of his future. Over time his family's mounting economic problems raised questions about how Yu'uk, their oldest son, could provide for their family.

Increasingly, it became clear to me that the core of the film would be Yu'uk's journey from childhood to an early adolescence where he would begin to reconcile his Mayan and Mexican identities – and begin to find a place for himself in the world.

For me, the heart of the story is Yu'uk's tender and rich relationship with his younger brother José, and the childhood they spend together through long and listless days exploring the jungle. It is this childhood idle – and the forces that come to threaten it – that form the emotional core and arc of the story.

I describe what I do as immersive, visually-driven, point-of-view storytelling. Film is unique in that it works is a visual-emotional way, and my goal is to fully immerse the viewer in the world of the subject by using the medium's special ability to convey experience. Above all I am interested in exploring universal themes that allow audiences to connect with people they might not otherwise think they would, which I believe is the core value and purpose of documentary filmmaking.

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

Principal photography for *La Laguna* was conducted during 5 visits to Mexico over a period of 18 months. Director Aaron Schock worked alone during this time, and was responsible for producing, directing, cinematography, and sound recording. The film was shot on the Canon C300 in Canon Log in 23.98. All sound was recorded on camera with the Neumann KMR 81i MT microphone.

## CREDITS

Director/ Producer / Cinematographer	AARON SCHOCK
Editor	JOHNNY BASSETT
Supervising Editor	MARK BECKER
Music	JOEL GOODMAN
Color Grading	BEGONIA COLOMAR
Sound Design & Re-recording Mixer	RON BOCHAR
Sound Assistant	SARAH STREIT
Sound Post Facility	C5 INC, NYC
Additional Music	BENJAMIN KRAUSE
Orchestrations	JOEL GOODMAN BENJAMIN KRAUSE
Assistant Editing and Translation	PAOLA GUTIERREZ – ORTIZ
Translation	ROSA VALENZUELA SOLORZANO JAIME OMAR YASSIN JAMES NATIONS

## Featuring:

YU'UK FELIX VALENZUELA SOLORZANO  
JOSE VALENZUELA SOLORZANO  
JOSE VALENZUELA CHAN K'IN  
LUISA SOLORZANO LOPEZ  
ROSA VALENZUELA SOLORZANO  
GUADALUPE VALENZUELA SOLORZANO  
MARISOL VALENZUELA SOLORZANO  
MARISOL VALENZUELA SOLORZANO  
MARTHA VALENZUELA SOLORZANO  
GERALDO LOPEZ MARTIN  
JUAN LOPEZ GARCIA

*Special Thanks to the community of Puerto Bello Metzabok,  
Municipio de Ocosingo Estado de Chiapas, Mexico*

## BIOS

### **Aaron Schock**

Emmy-nominated director Aaron Schock holds a MA in public policy from Columbia University and worked for many years in social research at Columbia and in non-profit community development in the South Bronx before making documentary films. His most recent feature is *Circo* (2011), which premiered at the Los Angeles and London Film Festivals, won the grand jury prize at the Hamptons International Film Festival (among other awards), was distributed theatrically in the US, UK, and Canada and shown nationally on PBS's Independent Lens and internationally on HBO.

### **Johnny Bassett**

Johnny is an editor for documentary and fiction film. Recently, he edited Sundance '16 Narrative Short *Jungle* (dir. Asantewaa Prempeh), and *Ma Fi Ekhwe* (dir. Emma LeBlanc). He is currently working on a feature documentary about life in the street gangs of Denver, CO. In 2014, Johnny attended the Sundance Doc & Story Lab as a contributing editor. After studying history at Harvard, he started his editing career under Jean Tsien, ACE.

### **Mark Becker**

Mark Becker is a documentary editor, producer and director. He has edited several documentaries including *The Lost Boys of Sudan* (2003) and *Circo* (2010). His short *Jules at Eight* (1996) won an IDA Student Documentary Awards special jury prize, and his feature debut *Romántico* (2005) was nominated for two Independent Spirit Awards. He directed and edited the Emmy-nominated film *Pressure Cooker* (2008) with Jennifer Grausman. Mark was co-director and editor of *Art and Craft* (2014), a winner of National Board Review Top 5 Documentaries and shortlisted for an Oscar.

### **Joel Goodman**

Joel Goodman creates music for narrative feature films, documentaries, and television. As an Emmy Award-winning composer Joel has scored over 125 films and television programs that have received 5 Oscar nominations, 15 Emmy awards and over 25 Emmy nominations. He has scored over 40 films for HBO, as well as the Oscar nominated *Claude Lanzmann: Spectres of the Shoah* (2015). His other credits include and *Everything is Copy* (2015), *An Honest Liar* (2014), *Being Elmo: A Puppeteers Journey* (2011), *Racing Dreams* (2009), and *The Cats of Mirikitani* (2006), to name a few.

## **DISTRIBUTION/CONTACT**

### **Aaron Schock**

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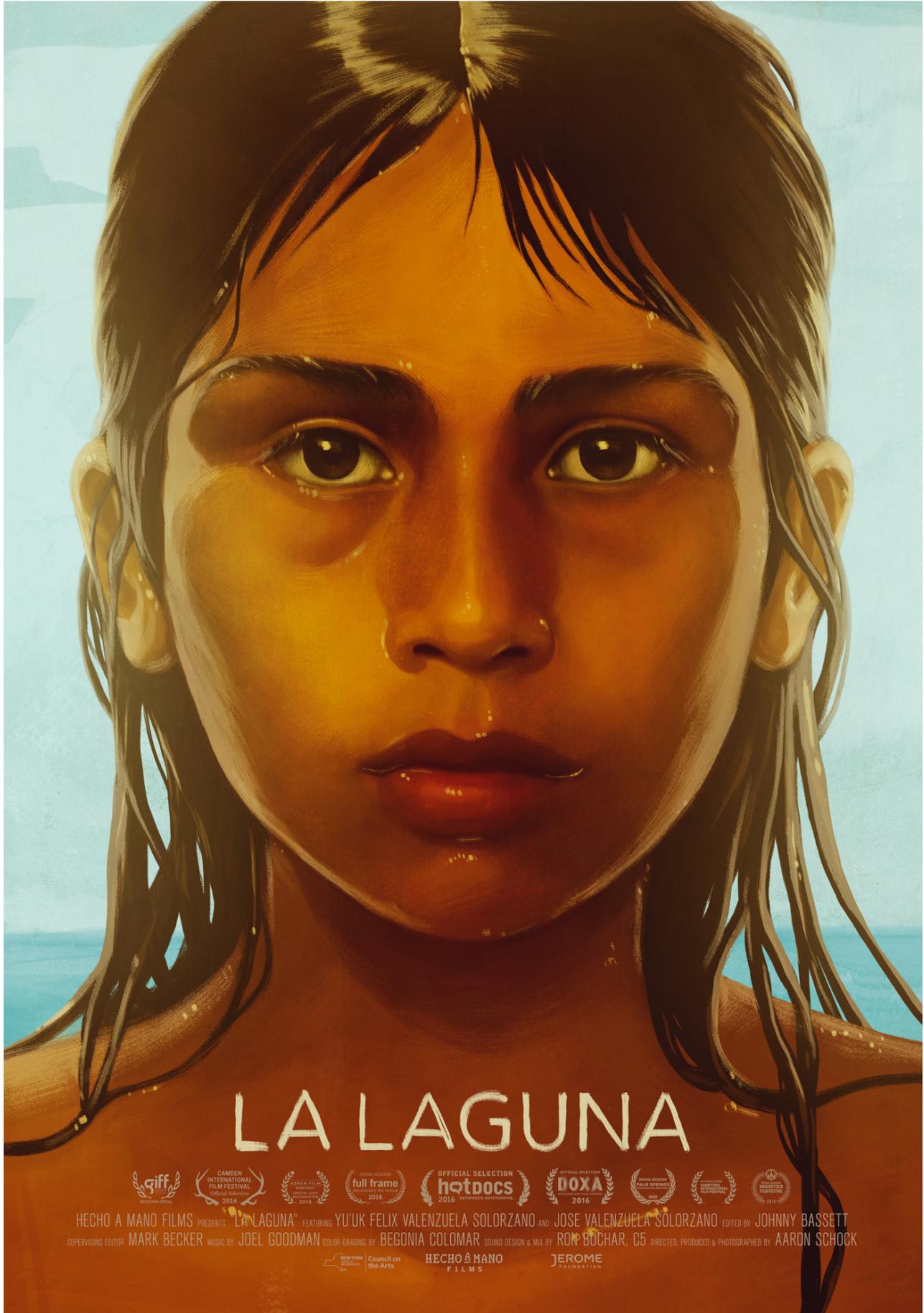
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# LA LAGUNA



HECHO A MANO FILMS PRESENTS "LA LAGUNA" FEATURING YU'UK FELIX VALENZUELA SOLORZANO AND JOSE VALENZUELA SOLORZANO EDITED BY JOHNNY BASSETT  
SUPERVISING EDITOR MARK BECKER MUSIC BY JOEL GOODMAN COLOR GRADING BY BEGONIA COLOMAR SOUND DESIGN & MIX BY RON BOCHAR, C5 DIRECTED, PRODUCED & PHOTOGRAPHED BY AARON SCHOCK

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