

## **Women Make Movies, Latin Style**

**By Xochitl Dorsey**

Over the last thirty years, the breadth of cinematic accomplishments by Latina and Latin American women filmmakers has overwhelmingly challenged cultural and gender stereotypes and introduced non-Latino audiences to different experiences. The recent critical success of Maryse Sistach's *Perfume de violetas*, Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga*, and Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* demonstrates how Latina and Latin American women's cinema has evolved into a sophisticated body of features, narrative shorts and documentaries – work that no longer corresponds to one particular aesthetic, theme or genre. Yet prior to this recognition, the non-profit distributor Women Make Movies had begun to promote the work of groundbreaking Latin American women filmmakers, when few had heard of their work in the United States. Thus the current program, *Women Make Movies, Latin Style*, is more than a series simply highlighting our Latin American collection; it represents our deep commitment to Latina makers.

Beginning in 1983, WMM made the critical decision to address the lack of films by and about Latina women by curating a series of films and videos entitled *Punto de vista: Latina*. The program was created with a specific feminist and grassroots mandate: to present positive, inspiring images of Latin women, explore the historical contexts of the countries in which they were produced, and demonstrate the variety of cinematic styles used in Latin America. The series was screened in true guerrilla fashion – at community centers, galleries, schools, even bodega storefronts – and sparked dialogue about issues affecting the Latino community.

More impressive than the manner in which *Punto de vista: Latina* was screened were the methods used to acquire the films. Needless to say, WMM was virtually unknown to filmmakers in Latin America in the early 1980s. Through a growing network created by the global feminist community, WMM was able to contact various film organizations, among them the members of the historic Latin American women's film collectives, Cine Mujer-Colombia, Cine Mujer-Mexico, and Grupo Miercoles-Venezuela. In a matter of months, WMM acquired fifteen titles, including such classics as *Mujeres del planeta* by Maria Barea, *Conozco las tres* by Maryse Sistach, *Carmen Carascal* by Cine Mujer-Columbia, and *After the Earthquake* by Lourdes Portillo. While the films in this collection were characterized by their social and political content, they also presented a unique feminine perspective on the Latin American experience and introduced a group of highly accomplished Latina women filmmakers to US audiences for the first time.

The accolade recently garnered by Latina and Latin American women filmmakers is a sign of growing opportunities and interest in the United States; however, there is still work to be done to ensure Latinas more access to the film community. As cited by the Guerilla Girls and Alice Loca on their “Anatomically Correct Oscar” billboard, now hanging prominently in Los Angeles on the eve of the Academy Awards, women still account for only four percent of all working directors and Latinos only five percent of movie actors; meanwhile, white men write and direct 93 percent of all major films. These glaring disparities make our work at WMM more important than ever.

*Xochitl Dorsey is Marketing Manager of Women Make Movies. The series Women Makes Movies, Latin Style will be presented at the Pioneer Theater and the Americas Society in April. For a listing of the films, please see [www.cinematropical.com](http://www.cinematropical.com).*