

FILM REVIEW BY VASJA STANKOVIC FOR

# WE

MARCOS ALMADA RIVERO, ALEJANDRA CHACÓN GALLARDO, MONIQUE ZEPEDA

Making a documentary about a certain tragic event in human history is never an easy task, especially when its narrative is based on survivor recollections. A clever balance between factual information and personal experiences is very important in order to stay true to what has really happened, and deliver the author's message at the same time. The audience needs to feel that these elements are subtly intertwined to form a powerful real life story with a good moral, while the author's artistic expression doesn't fall behind. This is exactly what the short animated film "We" achieves with authenticity and style.

The directors Marcos Almada Rivero, Alejandra Chacón Gallardo and Monique Zepeda decided to tell this philanthropic story through animation, which proved to be an excellent choice. If this was yet another documentary made from archive footage of post-earthquake terror that occurred in Puebla, Mexico on the same day 32 years apart (what a strange coincidence!), it would have been an uneasy watch that many viewers couldn't relate to. The soft, cartoonish animation relieves us of the inevitable tension and horror while we witness both painful and heroic acts of earthquake survivors; it also gives us a different, more distant perspective of humanity as a whole, because the animated characters pretty much look the same – they're all animated.

As someone who didn't know much about these catastrophic events, at first I had a problem with the limited amount of information revealed about the earthquakes. This was probably an understandable screenwriter's reaction that changed completely after a few minutes; what I expected to be the purpose of this film soon became totally irrelevant. I began to focus on the intimate confessions of survivors who didn't care much about the actual earthquake in terms of the dread and destruction they left behind, but more about the compassion and solidarity of fellow citizens who did everything to help each other. In short, what could've been a story about a natural disaster turned out to be an amazingly warm and poetic story about what makes us human.

This brings me to the most important aspect of the film: its greatest value is the direct, yet optimistic way of showing us our most frequent fear – the fear of other humans. It may even be considered a cautionary tale that warns us of what would happen to our society if we were to ignore or forget to think of other people. It's a story with a hidden message: real disasters occur when we choose not to help people in need. Only if we work together there is a chance to overcome our obstacles, mental or physical. From a writer's point of view, such a powerful message coming from an eight and a half minute-long animated film is not something you see every day.

The editing, the animation style, the colors and sound design all blend together perfectly. There are some truly unique approaches to animation that simply stuck in my mind, such as a red heart beating inside of a chest of a person trapped in debris. The use of background music and sound effects combined with fast cutting in certain scenes make them very dramatic and intense. But what is really impressive is that none of these elements are exaggerated or out of place; they're all so carefully selected and well-dosed that there is not a single pathetic, or "cheap" moment in the film. Considering the very touchy subject, I honestly admire the directors' vision and sense of measure from beginning to end.

In conclusion, I failed to find any weak spots in this film, which is quite rare in my line of work. Beyond doubt, "We" is a great example of strong storytelling, thoughtful direction and aesthetic quality. It's a charmingly unpretentious and down-to-ground debut that deserves to be seen.