

EL BEAT



A photograph of two men in a physical struggle, overlaid with a teal color filter. The man on the left is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt and pants, and is holding the arm of the other man. The man on the right is shirtless and wearing light-colored pants, and is pushing back. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with some foliage and a building.

What is El Beat?

EL BEAT is a cross-platform narrative consisting of a VR experience, an interactive documentary and a linear film. It unfolds the story of Benkos Biohó, an enslaved African and founder of the first free town in the colonial Americas, and the story of his descendants, the people of Palenque. It is a tribute to the African diaspora and the Black Power of Latin America.

El Beat (film)

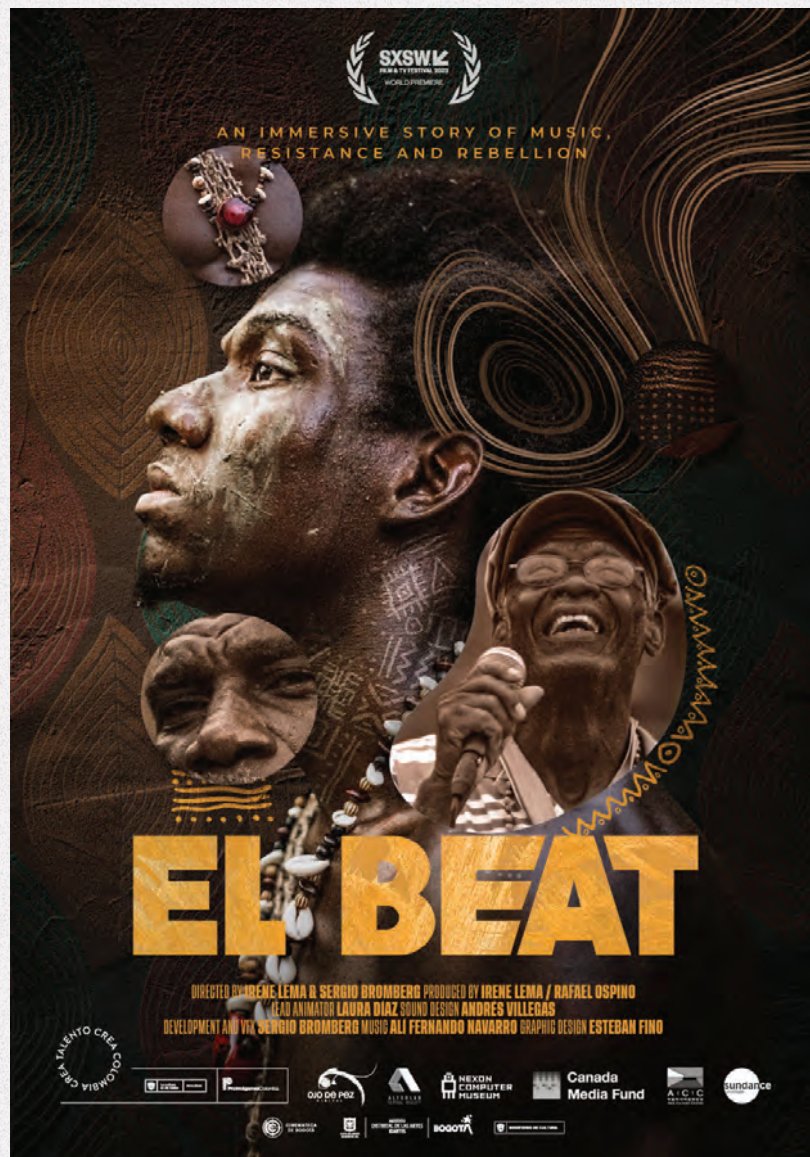
The film was born as a documentary, evolving through the narrations of its protagonists and ended up being a hybrid film (documentary + fiction + interactive). It narrates the escape of Benkos Biohó, the emancipated African leader, and his struggle to liberate his people from slavery. In parallel, the story of his descendants, the people of Palenque and the maestro Rafael Cassiani is told through their own language and music. It is a story of rebellion and resistance brought to the present day.

El Beat VR

El Beat VR is a journey from the coast of Senegal to the territory of Palenque, following the route of enslaved African men during the colony. It's a 6DoF immersive experience featuring natural Palenquero actors staged in a symbolic and dreamlike universe combining pointclouds, 3D models and Tiltbrush sculpting. El Beat VR explores the beginning of the African diaspora in Latin America.

Marímbula

The physical mise-en-scène of the project is an interactive installation featuring an augmented traditional musical instrument that interacts with scene lights and triggers field-recordings and musical sounds of the town of Palenque.





About the project

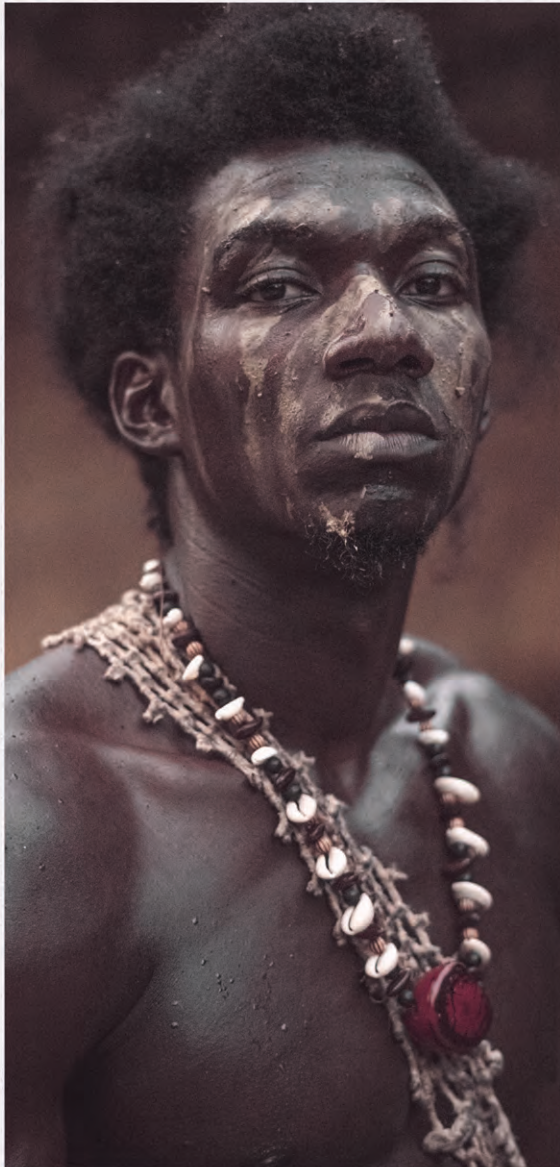
There are projects that have a life of their own, and EL BEAT is one of them. It is first and foremost a musical project and a "playground" which allowed us to experiment with multiple ways to narrate a story.

EL BEAT was born in Cuba during the shooting of a documentary film. The richness of Cuban music prompted us to reflect on the elaborate mestizaje of Colombian music itself. Our first take to explore the intricate genealogy of Colombian music was to set up musical encounters between contemporary and traditional musicians from different regions of the country, and this is how Jacobo Vélez and his band "La Mambanegra" traveled to Palenque, in northern Colombia, to meet maestro Rafael Cassiani. However, during the first filming, the significance of Palenque's history of music and resistance came to light, and this is how Benkos Biohó, the protagonist of the story, would end up occupying its pivotal role.

Later on, the creation of a dreamlike universe that would allow us to recreate the beginning of the African diaspora in Latin America took shape as a VR experience. Having natural

actors from Palenque was a must, and therefore the team decided to develop a volumetric system to capture actors in a way that was both realistic and malleable. The interactive installation came naturally as the need for a physical mise-en-scène for the project, and it was developed thanks to the Asia Culture Center, in South Korea.

Finally, the documentary experience meets fiction through an interactive narration, and this is how this cycle finds its closure. We wanted to create a story that would allow us to have fun, but it ended up being much more than that. This project was created thanks to the Colombian Cinematographic Fund, Mincultura Colombia, CreaDigital, IDARTES, NewMedia (Proimagenes and Canada Media Fund), Sundance Institute and the Nexon Museum. Its World Premiere took place at SXSW and the film was screened for the first time at the Cartagena International Film Festival.



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Behind El Beat

Irene Lema
Director

Documentary filmmaker and XR creator. Her work has been premiered in festivals like FICCI in Latin America and SXSW in the USA, while she has been trained in spaces like the NewFrontier talent Forum in Sundance and the IDFAcademy in Europe. She has been a grantee of the Sundance Institute Interdisciplinary Program and the NewMedia program (Proimagenes Colombia/Canada Media Fund) among others. She also has been winner of the documentary and the transmedia creation award of the Colombian Film Fund.

Carolina del Mar Fernández
Documentary Co-Director

Carolina is a documentary filmmaker and sound recordist. Her project 'Las Gaitas en la Nevera' shows musicians from the Colombian capital in their search for identity - New Creators FICCI 2005 selection. She has worked with traditional music and new Colombian music looking for ways to communicate the legacies that have survived from ancient times. She also has extensive experience in direct sound, being one of the first women to work in this field in Colombia, and she is currently part of the Colombian Association of Cinematographic Sound (ADSC). As a sound recordist, she has been recognized on several occasions, including the 2016 Macondo Awards nomination for best sound for the film 'Violence' by Jorge Forero.

Sergio Bromberg
Immersive media co-director

Sergio is a physicist, creative coder and VR technologist with an MSc in Music Technology (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona). In recent years he has worked as technology director and programmer of several projects in the interface between art and science.. As a VR technologist, he participated in Scarecrow (Sundance, 2020), Sim The Blind (BIFAN, 2020), RainFruits (Cannes, Tribeca, 2020), and he recently codirected El Beat (SXSW, 2023). Sergio currently works as a Deep Learning Engineer specialized in 3D reconstruction for the Korean startup Recon Labs.

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