

Matt Turner on *My Two Voices* (Mis dos voces)

‘It’s difficult to immigrate,’ says one of the women in Lina Rodríguez’s *My Two Voices*. ‘You leave everything: your food, your essence, your culture, your people, your language.’

While not explicitly autobiographical, the third feature from the Bogota-born, Toronto-based filmmaker feels like a very personal project, delving deep into the experiences of three women – Ana, Claudia, and Marinela – who, like the filmmaker, migrated from Latin America to Canada. Speaking candidly and lucidly over the film’s course, they describe navigating an array of difficult experiences: isolation and cultural dislocation, legal and language-related struggles, workplace discrimination and domestic violence. ‘We all struggle when we come here,’ the woman adds.

As the women speak, Rodríguez does not show their faces – revealing her subjects only at the coda of her film. Instead, shooting on 16mm in constant close-up, she has cinematographer Alejandro Coronado delicately track their hands as they complete various tasks: cutting hair, scrubbing dishes, weaving a pendant, driving a car. As well as blending the women’s stories together and turning their individual voices into what the filmmaker has referred to as ‘a choir’ of collective testimony, this stylistic choice also has another effect: it shows how the women move through the world. Touch and gesture become non-verbal forms of language, revealing, through the heightened tactility of each selective perspective, the women’s physicality as well as their personalities – their presence.

In between these shots, Rodríguez captures off-kilter, abstracted perspectives of unidentifiable landscapes, or has Coronado scan over the various objects (paintings, jewellery, children’s toys, other handcrafted goods and trinkets) that adorn the women’s homes. These shots give the viewer an imperfect, slightly off-centre sense of colour, texture and place that is designed, the filmmaker has noted, to mirror the disorientating experience of migration: leaving home for an unfamiliar culture and environment.

This sense of dislocation seems to be key to Rodríguez’s project. The film’s title refers to the sense of in-betweenness that comes from being split, both literally and psychically, across two continents, two climates, two cultures and two languages. ‘A part of ourselves always stays there,’ says one of the women, explaining the distance she feels from her home but also how speaking Spanish keeps her and her children connected, tethering not just her to ‘the motherland’ but future generations too.

As a receptacle for the everyday discomforts, frustrations and resentments that can constitute the immigrant experience, *My Two Voices* could be bleak. However, instead, it is also warm and empowering, marked by the sense of rejuvenation and restoration that can come from putting thoughts into words and sharing a story with a receptive listener. Rodríguez’s three subjects have a well of stories to share, and through the attentive use of style and structure, the director constructs a vessel for these narratives to be received, processed and artfully represented. *My Two Voices* is a rare sort of thing: a formalist film with a heartfelt, human centre.

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