



**WINNER 'BEST HUMAN WILDLIFE INTERACTION'**

**International Wildlife Film Festival**

2015 / Canada, US, Mexico / English & Spanish / documentary

67 min / ARRI ALEXA ProRes HD / Color / 1.85 Aspect Ratio

**Mariposa Productions**

**Ali Alvarez**

**tel: +44-7894-498-594 // [ali@mariposaproductions.tv](mailto:ali@mariposaproductions.tv) // mariposa-uk.com**

**film site: [deathislife.co.uk](http://deathislife.co.uk) / [muerteesvida.com](http://muerteesvida.com)**

**Monarch butterflies have brought hope  
to people at the darkest times of loss.  
In Mexico, when they arrive for Day of the Dead,  
they are thought to be souls of the departed.  
Coincidence?**

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

MUERTE ES VIDA is a meditation on death as a part of nature. The film captures a bold and colourful look at Mexico - both the natural world and the vibrant culture - creating an atmospheric exploration of the relationship between the mystical journey of the Monarch butterfly, the deaths of individual people and the celebration of the Day of the Dead. It suggests a symbolic, rich, and inexplicable bond between man and nature.

## **MEDIUM SYNOPSIS**

MUERTE ES VIDA is documentary about the connection between death and nature. The film's central Mexican character, Sabino, believes the Monarch butterflies that arrive every year are the souls of departed family coming back to visit as they arrive in time for Day of the Dead after an epic journey from Canada and the Northern United States.

The Monarch butterfly and its migration is the connection between the film's characters. It also serves as our reason to be in Mexico for Day of the Dead, experiencing an often unseen side of Mexican culture as we spend it in true indigenous-style with Sabino and his wife.

Leading to this, we are told stories of hope from Canada to Mexico. From the Bishes in Ohio who were given a glimmer of hope on the day of their son's funeral by a hatching chrysalis, to Detective Amadeo Pulley in New York City who saw hundred of Monarchs at Ground Zero, to Clive - as far away as England- who saw a Monarch at the same time a young friend crashed her car.

This film gives us a glimpse into authentic Mexico, as well as the determination of both these butterflies and these people to persevere through life.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS**

MUERTE ES VIDA is documentary about the connection between death and nature. It's a film about the hope that nature can bring and how life itself is something we are all a part of. We see how different people grieve, how they each have a different experience of loss and how something as small as a Monarch butterfly brings them all hope.

The Monarch butterfly and its migration is the connection between all these people, it also serves as our reason to be in Mexico for Day of the Dead. Here in Michoacan, the butterflies arrive in time for the Day of the Dead and are thought of as the souls of departed family coming back to visit each year. Our central character (Sabino) and his wife (Hilaria) are the characters we continue to come back to throughout the film. They are our reminder of being truly connected to nature, looking at death as a natural part of life, and they serve as a contrast to the other characters in North America.

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By telling stories from Canada, the United States and Mexico MUERTE ES VIDA shows a universal connection between those across cultures. Its storytelling style is that of a "poetic documentary" and, with the Mexican cultural theme, will be at home in artistic programming. With its environmental thread it will also bring a new way to engage audiences with natural history.

Butterflies and technology don't immediately go hand in hand, but the internet has played as a core part in the making of this film. From initial research and story finding on the [monarch website, Journey North](#), to [raising initial funds on Kickstarter](#) then connecting with the characters through Facebook before heading out to film. In post production renowned interactive company, B-Reel, have designed an interactive

website ([muerteesvida.com](http://muerteesvida.com) / [deathislife.co.uk](http://deathislife.co.uk)) for the film which is a fresh departure from film sites usually associated with documentaries - this website allows you to share a story and add to the project. Alvarez says. "I had to unlearn some advertising habits to make this film, but also got to use a lot of what I learned in all those years to make this. To me, everything about this project is storytelling at its purest and most honest. I love it."

## AWARDS & RECOGNITION (Click for websites)



### **FILM FESTIVALS:**

### **WORLD PREMIER:**

Thessaloniki Documentary Festival - Images of the 21st Century -

### **AWARDS:**

Best Human Wildlife Interaction - International Wildlife Film Festival -

### **OFFICIAL SELECTION:**

Asolo Art Film Festival -

Warsaw Film Festival -

Portland EcoFilm Festival -

LA Femme Film Festival -

## **FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT**

If you haven't lost someone close, you will. Death is a natural part of life and in Western society we have grown very far from this idea. My own mother died when I was 11, and by making this film and meeting these people, I have definitely had old wounds healed. The people I met while filming this had incredible hearts. Their views on loss are something I hope can be a comfort to anyone that watches this.

I want this film to show the Mexican attitude towards death, and Day of the Dead where the departed are celebrated, honoured and their souls are welcomed home every year for us to be with. The butterflies in Mexico remain one the most beautiful phenomenons I have ever seen, and I hope their beauty on the screen serves as comfort and beauty to the taboo topic of death. The film's intention to connect people and nature, and to bring some magic to what some see as The End.

## **PRINCIPLE CREW**

Director/Producer - Ali Alvarez

Executive Producer - Richard Stewart

Cinematographer - Sara Deane

Sound Recordist - Marcelo de Oliveira

Editor - Carly Baker

Music - Luis Almua, Luke Fabia, Peter Raeburn

## **CREW BIOS**

### **ALI ALVAREZ - director / producer**

Following a career in show-jumping, Ali graduated in 2001 from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Ca. with Honors in Advertising. Ali then worked for 11 years in commercial media, creative directing films with DAMIEN LEWS and music videos with OK GO. She has won international awards such as a Gold at the Cannes Festival of Advertising. Her first short documentary, I Voted Today, was selected for viewing at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival, and at the Portobello Film Festival was nominated for

Best New Director and won Best Documentary. This is her first feature length documentary.

### **RICHARD STEWART - Producer**

Richard is an award winning cinematographer, working for over seventeen years in his field. He has worked a wide range of projects from nature documentaries to feature films and music videos. Most recently has was cinematographer on THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS with Pulse Films which premiered at SXSW and is gaining much acclaim on the festival circuit. Recently, Richard has been a producer on feature films and he is in production on two.

### **Sara Deane - Cinematographer**

Sara Deane studied cinematography at the National Film and Television School in England and she has worked in feature films for over 15 years. She has been lead cinematographer on nine features, numerous short films, promos and commercials. Highlights include Best Cinematography at the Van D'or Independent Film Awards 2012 and Tacita Dean's "Film" exhibition for Tate Modern museum.

### **Marcelo de Oliveira - Sound Recordist**

Marcelo is a filmmaker, producer, sound designer and location sound recordist whose work has been recognised by Werner Herzog, Philip Glass and Tom Tykwer. With sound central to his working philosophy, Marcelo's films have been screened at international renown festivals such as Edinburgh International Festival, New York Rooftop, Sheffield Doc Fest and also through cinema distribution. Through his audio work he has contributed to BAFTA award winning films, TV documentaries and films screened at Sundance, IDFA, SXSW among other festivals.

### **Carly Baker - Editor**

Carly is a London based editor, with over 10 years experience working in post-production and in-house at some of London's leading creative companies. Carly is passionate about creating exciting and visually stimulating work - from commercials, music videos to films. Her work spans from music videos for Kanye West, to films for Nick Knight and the BBC.

## **Peter Raeburn - Original Music**

Peter is a composer, producer, songwriter, and creative director of award-winning music company Soundtree Music. His work can be found in the BLUE VALENTINE soundtrack and he was musical supervisor on UNDER THE SKIN. His work has been recognised by the Cannes advertising festival, BTAA, British Independent Film Awards and BAFTA. He has written an original score for this film alongside Luis Almau and Luke Fabia.

## **TOP 10 QUESTIONS**

### **How did you get the idea for this film?**

I was completely blown away when I saw the Monarch butterflies in Mexico years ago. It's the most amazing thing I have ever seen - you couldn't take enough drugs to imagine this forest of butterflies. The tree branches sagging with them, being able to HEAR them as there are so many that you can actually hear the sound of their wings. Being Mexican, my family hadn't even mentioned this spectacular thing in our own country. You'd be surprised how many Mexicans haven't even seen it. I came back from that trip and tried to write these butterflies into every advertisement I could when my boss at the time said "Stop! Why don't you just write a film about them?" So I did. I started researching and found their connection to Day of the Dead. After that, I came across the Ground Zero story and put one and one together, and knew this is the story I wanted to tell.

### **How did you get the film off the ground?**

This could have never happened without [the successful Kickstarter campaign](#) that financed the filming. Before we even made it, just the idea of it, got me close to £39,000UK of funding and we were off! All the way through this process, I thank those individuals who believed in this enough to get it going.

### **How did you find the Ground Zero story?**

This is going to sound crazy, but I think I dreamed it. I was looking through my research and the stories I'd found but couldn't find the Ground Zero story. I searched through every email, folder, paper - no where. So I googled 'Monarchs at Ground Zero' and came across [this article in The Guardian](#) about 9/11, it mentioned Amadeo in it. I found him on Facebook, of all places, and after a few months of persuading him I wasn't someone trying to scam him on the internet, I got him to talk to me. It's all luck of the butterflies, I tell you, this project is filled with it.

**What's 'the luck of the butterflies'?**

There's something bigger happening on this project that has been helping me all along. In the early days, I met with a woman at the Mexican Embassy in London and it turned out her mother was the president of the biggest Monarch butterfly charity in Mexico. She helped me meet Sabino and get permission to film at the butterfly sanctuary. Just the other week, I was at a BBQ talking to this really lovely man. We got around to my film and he said to send it to him. Turns out it was DANNY BOYLE (I didn't recognize him!) and he really enjoyed the film! Luck of the butterflies, I tell ya.

**What's your experience of loss?**

My mother passed away from cancer when I was 11. Having experienced such a profound loss at such an early age has shaped the way I look at life. It's ever-so-short and every moment counts. To me, it's all about the people in my life and the moments I share with them, there is nothing more. Nature has always been central to my life, I'm a big animal lover, so I guess this film comes from all this.

**Have you had a monarch moment?**

Not specifically linked to the death of someone, but I had a serious horse riding accident in 2012. I suffered a serious brain injury and the first time back on a horse when I was recovered was out in California. There was a Monarch in the arena as I got back on. After this film, who knows, maybe it was my mom?

**What do you think the essence of the film is about?**

How we are all connected in our common experiences and how we are a part of the world around us.

**What have you learned in making your first documentary?**

I'd had so much experience in advertising, I had to UNLEARN a lot of ad tricks. In ad-land you save the punchline for the end, and I really had to undo that and get the viewer in on the story right up front and take them on a journey. I loved it. I also have learned what it's like as a producer, to keep going when you get so many no's. Keep going. Believe in your story, have passion when you share it with others, and the right people will fall in love with it and help you make it.

**Any production stories?**

I was talking to Danny Boyle for an hour and didn't know who it was.

**Go on, what's the Danny Boyle story?**

I was at the BBQ and the man next to me was saying some interesting things. So I said, "You sound like a smart man, I have a question for you." It was a good question because an hour later we're chatting away and my film comes up. I explain it and he says, "You should send it to me." and sends me an email to that effect. As it sent from his phone I see FROM DANNY BOYLE. I had been talking to him that whole time and didn't have a clue! Idiot! Needless to say I sent it. He took the time to watch it and we met again to talk

about it. He said the quote below. Amazed, I was totally amazed and it gave me so much confidence that someone of his calibre enjoyed it.

## COMMENTS / REVIEWS

***"Few films could connect the world of a humble farmer in Mexico and the harsh world of a detective at Ground Zero, but this one manages to do it with honesty and a dash of poetry."***

- Danny Boyle

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***"Here is a unique film about death, life and the planet earth - beautifully told through the eyes of a unique variety of people, whilst enchanting the viewer with the images of the butterfly migration. Fascinating and moving without being too sentimental which is always such a hard path to tread."***

Kai Hsiung, Ridley Scott Associates managing director

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***"Ali is both inspired by and inspiring about the relationship between people and nature. She has a unique talent for expressing this relationship in beautiful words and images. This is the perfect story for her to tell."***

Julia Kenyon,

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***"The whole concept of metamorphosis of butterflies and the unique overwintering and migratory behavior of the monarch has affected people of many backgrounds and cultures in uplifting and touching ways. I think your film is a powerfully emotional exploration."***

Lincoln Brower, *The world leading Monarch butterfly expert*

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