

Study Abroad Cuban Cinema Course  
Spring 2019  
UVM  
John Waldron professor

Contact Information:

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 1-4 or by appointment

Course Description:

Along with viewing and discussing films the course will be taught in conjunction with professors from the Universidad de la Habana as well as luminaries involved in filmic production in Cuba. There will also be tours of Havana as well as time for exploring. The grade is dependent on attendance and participation as well as a short response or reaction to the experience as a whole.

By the end of the week the student will be able to:

- Describe how Cuban film has responded to the cultural and historic pressures Cuba as a country has faced since the revolution
- Explain the different ways particular directors have “imagined themselves and their communities (women, African, gay etc)” forming part of Cuba and the revolution in general
- Discuss the challenges facing Cuba today

The course grade will be based on the following:

Class participation: 50%

Final project: 50%

This “project” can be a short, 3-5 page reaction/response, a short video, or other project (with instructor approval). The topic of the project should be a response to the weeklong experience that, in some way, presents in a thoughtful and informed way what the student has learned over the course of the week. The project should be related, however loosely, to the bullet points above.

Overview: Though Cuba has endured the constraints of an economic embargo going on fifty years it has, nevertheless, produced some of the best, most innovative, and popular cinema in Latin America. In fact, it is known internationally for the quality of its artistic production particularly in the realm of cinema. This course will provide an introduction to Cuban cinema seen through the lens of the social and historical context that frames its production. In particular the course will emphasize the conversation between the films

and social and political life in Cuba. Some questions that will guide our investigation follow: if the implementation of the Revolution required a new way of imagining one's political, social, and economic self in relation to one's larger community, what was cinema's role in that imagination? How has Cuban cinema negotiated complex issues surrounding shifting socio-economic practices: for example, the radical increase in the number of women in the workforce; declarations of racial equality; and housing shortages? How did Cuban Cinema continue to provide a form and forum for debate about Cuba's role in the world: for example, the US Embargo/Blockade, the war in Angola, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the influx of foreign tourists that began in the 1990s?

Course plan (subject to change before departure and dependent on availability of the people in question):

Upon arrival or before please turn in a brief statement of what you wish to accomplish during the week here.

We will arrive on Saturday and use Sunday for orienting ourselves to the campus and Habana in general. The course plan below will occupy us during the day. During the evenings we will have time to take in whatever concerts or cultural events that happen to be scheduled. Though it is impossible to say exactly what these might be at this time, generally speaking the problem is usually more a question of deciding what to do from the multiple options. The student can also use this time to tour Habana and exchange with the locals.

Monday, Day 1: Objective: By the end of the day the student will have a good understanding of Cuban history as well as the major figures in Cuban Cinema. We will achieve this by the following:

Historical overview, principle figures in Cuban film history as well as the context in which they emerged. Screening of the first film produced by ICAIC (Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos), *Historias de la revolución* by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1960). Comments and considerations by professors and alumna of Universidad de la Habana. Debate and discussion with students.

Tuesday, Day 2: By the end of the day the student will understand how the Cuban revolution attracted the attention of the world and will see how it was represented by well-known filmmakers from other parts of the world.

In particular we will talk about the work of Agnes Varda, Chris Marker, Theodor Christensen, Mijail Kalastov. We will view short examples of their films. Then we will discuss, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, his work and style by analyzing *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968). Presentation by Cuban filmmaker and discussion with students.

Wednesday, Day 3: The objective for today is to understand how women have transformed and been transformed by the Revolution.

We will analyze the following films: *Retrato de Teresa* and *Mujer transparente*. In addition several Cuban women filmmakers will discuss the films with the class.

Thursday, Day 4: By the end of the day the student will understand some of the important issues related to being gay in Cuba through viewing and discussing films.

In order to achieve this, we will watch the classic film, *Fresas y chocolate* and view some shorts by Fernando Pérez along with the short film, *Madagascar*. There will be a presentation by Cuban scholars followed by a question/answer period.

Friday, Day 5: Today is more open ended in the sense that we will try to guess what the future holds for Cuba and Cuban cinema.

We will do this by looking at art video as well as some recent experimental cinema in conjunction with the amazing and award winning *Suite Habana*.