

FILM REVIEW

Carlos Yuri Ceuninck, director. *Omi Nobu*. 2023. 64 minutes. Cape Verdean Creole (with English translation). Neon Rouge Production/Korikaxoru Films, LDA. No price reported.

Carlos Yuri Ceuninck, the Cape Verdean filmmaker, takes the audience on an intricate, yet intimate journey of life, through the heart of this documentary that delicately weaves together several themes such as solitude, independence, resilience, memory, and the human spirit. Set between the late 2010s and the early 2020s on the island of Sao Nicolau in Cabo Verde, the film centers on the small village of Ribeira Funda. Quirino, the 76-year-old main character, has lived all his life in this Cape Verdean ghost village, which was deserted in 1983 when a man was killed by a rock that broke loose following a violent downpour of rain. This event left the inhabitants haunted by fear, attributing these misfortunes to malevolent forces lurking in their surroundings, and the once-thriving community dispersed.

This documentary opens with a narration by a female character who reveals to the audience the importance of memory and the inevitability of death. Then enters Quirino Rodrigues, the last man standing in Ribeira Funda. Ceuninck's lens captures Quirino's solitary existence—a life spent with only a chicken, birds, and a transistor radio for company. The radio is his only link to the rest of the world and only source of information about happenings around his neighboring communities and beyond. Through the radio, the COVID-19 pandemic is reported, amongst other events. Quirino is alone on this valley, nestled between the sea and majestic mountains. The camera reveals this deep and spectacular valley between the sea and the mighty mountains where Quirino spends his days alone, but for the company of a cock, which he feeds constantly even as he caters for himself. He becomes his own cook and housekeeper. His pastime is simply smoking and looking at his beautiful mountainous environment. It is on this majestically shot rocky coastline that he reflects on his own life and on life in general—on how brief our time is here, never knowing our eventual destination. Quirino states that as a young man, he was unwilling to leave the island despite the uncertainty of life. He says in this thoughtful and melancholy portrait, that “Life in Cabo Verde is really hard. It doesn't give any stability. It's like a boat without a keel.” Despite knowing this fact, he remains stubborn and stays back on the island, alone until he notices that he is becoming increasingly stiff and forgetful. He then faces a dilemma of whether to remain in Ribeira Funda or to leave the only place he has ever known, to live out his last days elsewhere. Quirino's resilience and quiet determination are palpable as he grapples with the

decision to leave and join his sister in a nearby town. The film paints a poignant portrait of a man torn between loyalty to his roots and the inevitability of change. Eventually, he departs Ribeira Funda, forever, to live with his sister, Maria Fortes Bia Gai, in the neighboring community. Upon getting to his sister, we see an aged man, who now becomes dependent on the sister, as even to light a matchstick becomes a burden. At the end of the film, we see the celebration of life of the late Quirino as members of his community engage in dancing and singing, and put up a memorial cross to commemorate his death.

Omi Nobu is a documentary that mediates the experiences of human condition. Ceuninck's direction allows the landscape itself to become a character—a witness to Quirino's struggle. The camera lingers on the rugged beauty of Sao Nicolau, emphasizing the stark contrast between its natural grandeur and Quirino's solitude. The film's pacing mirrors Quirino's contemplative existence. Scenes unfold gently, allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the rhythm of daily life—the creaking of wooden doors, the rustling of leaves, the twitting of birds, the rocking sea waves, and the distant hum of the radio. The narrative technique of the film and the sparse dialogue, often in Cape Verdean Creole, adds authenticity and depth. The various shots deployed by Ceuninck contribute to the action in the film.

Through intimate shots, one also witnesses Quirino's daily life. Close-up shots, which reveal Quirino's wrinkled face and expressions, also send an intense message of perseverance of the character. As the camera lingers on his weathered face, it conveys the weight of decades spent in solitude and isolation. Aerial shots of the eerie beauty of the abandoned village and collapsed buildings also indicate the town's history and isolation—linking perfectly with the depths of the desolation, silence, and remnants of human existence, evoking a sense of both melancholy and resilience. The pivotal event that led to the village's abandonment is depicted through reenactments and archival footage. The event of the 1983 rainfall that triggered a massive rockslide, killing a man in his home, was painted; and the fear and unease that followed forced the villagers to flee, leaving Ribeira Funda behind.

The film's title suggests a rather deeper subtext, as it symbolizes Quirino as a metaphorical “new man who defies societal norms, embraces solitude, and finds purpose in simplicity”. His existence becomes a testament to human endurance and adaptation.

Omi Nobu is a powerful narrative that demonstrates Carlos Yuri Ceuninck's creative talent as a storyteller. In capturing Quirino's story, Ceuninck invites the audience to reflect on the indomitable human spirit in the face of adversities and vicissitudes of life. This documentary serves as a powerful reminder that even in the most desolate of places, there exists a profound humanity waiting to be discovered.

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