



The other José Martí

A Miami filmmaker examines the sexuality of a Cuban icon at the MOCA's Optic Nerve XI. BY HEATHER COOPER

Juan Carlos Zaldívar wants to redefine what it means to be a man. "It is a question that needs to be revisited over and over. The definition of man is cloudy. Being a man now and for a long time has meant not having feminine aspects, in the general sense of the word," Zaldívar says. "I disagree with that because men have X and Y chromosomes, and by denying that, we create a lot of problems for ourselves."

Zaldívar raises this argument in his short film *Martí and I*, which attempts to interpret the life of the 19th century Cuban national hero and literary icon José Martí. The film, which will screen Friday at the Museum of Contemporary Art's Optic Nerve XI short film festival, strips away the machismo that is generally associated with male historical figures. It depicts Martí, who is credited with helping to liberate Cuba from Spain, in an effeminate light.

Martí and I, which the Miami-based Zaldívar is developing as a full-length movie, is saturated with historical and literary references taken from Martí's diary, his poems and Cuban history. To date, the filmmaker has spent more than five years researching Martí's public and private lives. For the full-length version of the film, Zaldívar plans to incorporate elements from his own life and further investigate gender roles in contemporary society.

The abstract film was shot using a single, fixed-camera angle and resembles an old silent movie, complete with onscreen intertitles and scratched and missing frames. Zaldívar does, however, narrate the film.

The opening scene reveals a single candle lighting a dark, empty room as an actor portraying Martí approaches the camera to describe how someone has stolen six pages from his diary. The film goes on to explore a less-celebrated aspect of Martí's life — namely, his supposed homosexuality — through letters he wrote to his mother describing how women felt like "stone" to him and an essay defending Oscar Wilde.

Zaldívar became interested in the question of Martí's sexuality while helping a family member look for a Spanish copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The book is generally considered an early gay manifesto, and Zaldívar found Martí was the first person to translate it into Spanish. He also discovered Martí had a close relationship with Whitman,



An icon revisited: Juan Carlos Zaldívar (above and with Cruz Mera below) portrays José Martí in *Martí and I*.



which his film describes as a sexual one, though Zaldívar has no evidence to support the claim. Toward the end of the film, Martí is literally

transformed into the subject of one of his most famous poems, "La Bailarina Española," or "The Flamenco Dancer." Zaldívar argues that the poem expresses Martí's admiration for and



More to come: Zaldívar

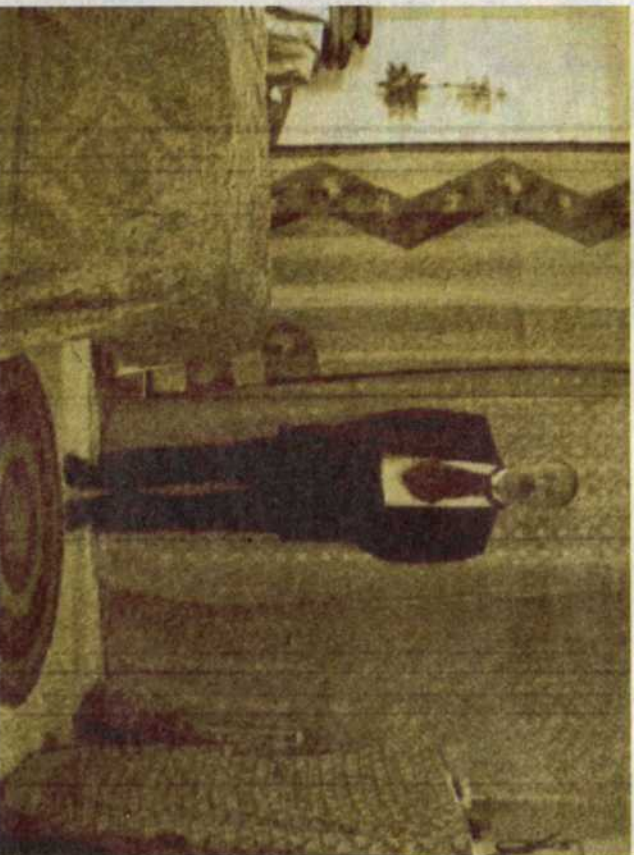
desire to possess he, as a man, Martí and I will be screened at the Optic Nerve XI short film festival, run by Florida, on Friday, Oct. 15, at the Museum of Contemporary Art's Optic Nerve XI short film festival, strips away the machismo that is generally associated with male historical figures. It depicts Martí, who is credited with helping to liberate Cuba from Spain, in an effeminate light.

The festival is a celebration of the work of the filmmaker, Juan Carlos Zaldívar, and his short film *Martí and I*. "I consider it the work of the filmmaker, Juan Carlos Zaldívar, and his short film *Martí and I*. "I consider it the work of the filmmaker, Juan Carlos Zaldívar, and his short film *Martí and I*.

Optic Nerve XI
7 and 9 p.m.
Contemporary Art Museum
North Miami Beach
305-893-1111

Other José Martí

filmmaker examines the sexuality of a Cuban icon in the MOCA's Optic Nerve XI. **BY HEATHER COOPER**



An icon revisited: Juan Carlos Zaldívar (above and with Cruz Mera below) portrays José Martí in *Martí and I*.



More to come: Zaldívar is developing this short as a feature.

desire to possess qualities in the dancer that he, as a man, could never have.

Martí and I is just one of 15 short films that will be screened at Optic Nerve. All the shorts were created by artists living in South Florida, run no more than five minutes and were selected by a panel of jurors from a pool of about 65 submissions. "The jury, which changes each year, looks for a combination of technique and "innovative use of images, sound, language and movement," says Bonnie Clearwater, the museum's curator and director.

The festival's other films include Jordan Service's *Meter*, which uses parking meters to express the idea that top-level decisions don't always have practical applications; and Christina Molina's *Wow! Whitering Strips (Miss Everything)*, which satirizes beauty pageants and the cosmetics industry.

Zaldívar says Optic Nerve provides an ideal venue for a noncommercial work such as *Martí and I*.

"I consider myself a video artist because it is the work that moves me the most," he says. "I feel the museum and other film festivals would be more receptive to the concept of the film."

Optic Nerve XI will take place

7 and 9 p.m. Friday at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 770 N.E. 25th St., in North Miami. Admission costs \$5. Call 305-893-6211 or visit mocanomi.org.

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