

New U.S.-Cuba Relations Could Mean a Lot to Film



Havana, January 5 (RHC)-- After U.S. President Barack Obama announced his administration's change in policy regarding Cuba, many discussions of a different kind are taking place across the nations. For Randy Astle in *Filmmaking, Financing and Production*, while not disregarding these discussions, it is a good a moment to look at the possibilities normalized relations might create for U.S. and Cuban filmmakers, according to an article published by *Filmmaker Magazine* on Monday.

Astle spoke with Diana Vargas, Alys Nahmias, and Alexandra Halkin — who have worked in Cuba or are involved with disseminating Cuban film in the U.S. to respond to some questions in light of President Obama's announcement. Some of the questions included expectations for the future of the Cuban film industry and predictions on U.S.-Cuban co-productions and collaborations.

Still, the U.S. blockade poses obvious limitations on American filmmakers hoping to work on the island as well as for Cuban filmmakers themselves.

"I'm not sure how the co-national production model will adapt, since Hollywood's production model is entirely different from how the Cuban film industry operates. It's worth speculating, though, that in the most immediate future we will see U.S. filmmakers using Cuba as a location destination. They will be shooting and working as well with local crew. This could pull in around three to six million dollars for the Cuban film industry, which, with Cuban filmmakers discussing a new film law at this moment, could also

mean better opportunities to invest the profit in local productions,” said Diana Vargas, artistic director and programmer of the Havana Film Festival New York.

“We should see an opening for Cubans to attend the audiovisual markets in the United States (such as the American Film Market) and sell their productions. The same should be true for U.S. distribution companies looking to sell U.S. film productions in Cuba. Until now, it has only been through film festivals and third-party intermediaries that U.S. audiences have been able to watch Cuban films, and Cubans have been able to watch U.S. movies only through piracy,” Vargas stated.

According to Alysa Nahmias, documentary director/producer, “Cuba has a strong artistic tradition in cinema, and many talented filmmakers are working there today. I cannot and would not claim to speak for them, but as everyone says in Cuba, “no es fácil”—it has not been easy for them.” “I hope Cuban filmmakers will now have increased access to cutting-edge technologies, from production equipment to crowd-sourcing on the Internet. It would be marvelous for them to be able to win production grants from U.S. organizations and to travel to U.S. film festivals more easily,” Nahmias added.

“The U.S. embargo is still in place and prohibits U.S. financing of fiction films. One exception is the support of documentaries. At this critical juncture and time of transition, Cuban documentary filmmakers are key in telling the stories of a changing Cuba and I encourage U.S. funders to take the initiative to support these productions,” stated Alexandra Halkin, documentary filmmaker and Director.

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