



BLACKSCRACKLE FILMS PRESENTS

# LANDFALL

A Film By Cecilia Aldarondo



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Section: Documentary Competition Running Time: 91 minutes Country: USA

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## LOGLINE

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## SYNOPSIS

Through shard-like glimpses of everyday life in post-Hurricane María Puerto Rico, LANDFALL is a cautionary tale for our times. Set against the backdrop of protests that toppled the US colony's governor in 2019, the film offers a prismatic portrait of collective trauma and resistance. While the devastation of María attracted a great deal of media coverage, the world has paid far less attention to the storm that preceded it: a 72-billion-dollar debt crisis crippling Puerto Rico well before the winds and waters hit. LANDFALL examines the kinship of these two storms—one environmental, the other economic—juxtaposing competing utopian visions of recovery. Featuring intimate encounters with Puerto Ricans as well as the newcomers flooding the island, LANDFALL reflects on a question of contemporary global relevance: when the world falls apart, who do we become?

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT FROM CECILIA ALDARONDO

I make deeply intimate, personal documentary films that telescope outward onto broader social and existential issues, including sexuality, bigotry, family and religion. Drawing on my training in the visual arts, I aim to bring a poetic sensibility to documentary film. Memory is also a central theme in my work, specifically the political stakes of who has the power to be remembered, and the shadow histories of the forgotten. As a Puerto Rican artist, I seek to tell complicated stories that defy expectations and combat ignorance about our culture, giving legitimacy to my heritage without resorting to stereotypes about Latinx experiences. I hope my work can enable people to let go of the things that hold them prisoner, find a measure of peace, and see themselves and the ones they love in a different light.

LANDFALL is an expression of the impotence, grief and rage that I have been carrying with me since Hurricane María hit Puerto Rico in 2017. My wheelchair-bound grandmother died six months after the storm, and I now count her as one of the thousands of unnecessary deaths that María caused. It is also a testament to crisis intimacy: as a result of the hurricane, this film became a deep collaboration between me, a diasporic Puerto Rican who grew up stateside, and Lale Namerrow Pastor, an island-raised Puerto Rican who has been living the crisis in a way I do not. One of the most important lessons Lale has taught me is the importance of listening to her experiences over and above my own. This ethos has informed our entire production, and the resulting film invites audiences to bear witness to the experiences of our protagonists.

My debut feature documentary, MEMORIES OF A PENITENT HEART (Tribeca 2016) charted the lost history of my uncle Miguel, a gay man who died of AIDS in the 1980s. That film's analog style reflected my archival search for the uncle I never knew. LANDFALL is by necessity very different in its scope and style. The ignorance about Puerto Rico is vast, and its crisis complex; a kaleidoscopic, sweeping approach demonstrates how María touches everything from luxury real estate, to cryptocurrency, to the colony's long history as a U.S. economic and military experiment.

Well before Hurricane María struck, Puerto Rico was teetering at a precipice: the debt crisis had already unleashed a wave of austerity, poverty and migration that María only intensified. Since that watershed event in September 2017, the colony has continued to be rocked by what Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBron have called 'aftershocks of disaster,' an ongoing state of emergency marked by crumbling infrastructure, botched aid, profit-seeking and government corruption. As Bonilla and LeBron put it, 'Aftershocks remind us that disasters are not singular events but ongoing processes.' This word—aftershock—could not be more apt to describe LANDFALL's witnessing of this pivotal moment in Puerto Rican history. As I write this, Puerto Rico is quite literally being rocked by yet another unexpected disaster, an ongoing series of earthquakes that have underscored just how fragile Puerto Rico continues to be.

With faith in government hitting rock-bottom, post-María Puerto Rico has become a fertile testing ground for a new kind of experiment: cryptocurrency. Lured by the most aggressive tax breaks for American citizens in the world, a band of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs descended on the island just a few months after María. Led by Brock Pierce, a former child actor turned Bitcoin celebrity, the crypto evangelists present themselves as philanthropists, not pirates. They host hackathons for youth, peddling recovery with promises of tech jobs, renewable energy, and New Age spirituality. Technology will liberate the world, they say. But behind their people-powered rhetoric is a darker vision, in which everything is privatized and entrepreneurs reign. In a world in which no one trusts the government anyway, why not do away with it? Chairman of the Ayn Rand Institute board Yaron Brook—another post-Hurricane transplant—puts it this way: “All you need is cops. Pretty much everything else could be privatized.”

The Puerto Rico depicted in LANDFALL is a microcosm of global relevance, a case study in disaster capitalism, and a laboratory for privatization, gentrification and the dismantling of social services. In Puerto Rico, we see the intense complicity of climate change and unbridled greed—even as blue tarps continue to dot the roofs of Puerto Rican homes and basic infrastructure remains vulnerable to another storm, beachfront homes are being built and speculators are buying up farmland. Promoted by the Puerto Rican government and the fiscal control board alike, this hyper-capitalist ideal is paving the way for a brave new world of luxury high-rises and gated communities juxtaposed against mass migration, closed schools, and slashed retirements. Puerto Rico is not merely at risk of losing its culture and people: it is a cautionary tale for our times.

LANDFALL surveys a complex landscape, presenting this pivotal moment to anyone wanting to understand Puerto Rico better; at the same time, it celebrates Puerto Ricans’ collective survival amidst 500 years of exploitation. Puerto Ricans have been consistently portrayed in the mainstream press as victims. In reality, Puerto Ricans are agents who have banded together and saved each other when no one else would. LANDFALL prioritizes a dignified image, treating Puerto Ricans as crisis experts, regardless of their class background or education level. LANDFALL is a collective portrait of a people who know they are being exploited, and who have taken extraordinary measures to fight for their sovereignty.

## FEATURED CHARACTERS AND STORYLINES

LANDFALL is structured as a travelogue, collecting stories across Puerto Rico. From the mountainous interior to the coastal glitz of San Juan, we encounter a cross-section of people working to recover from the storm in contrasting ways. Some examples include:

- Tato, a septuagenarian subsistence farmer who lost everything in the storm
- The Albinos, a family of luxury real estate agents peddling beachfront estates to the island's new investors
- Quinn, a self-styled guru and eco-entrepreneur from Texas in search of land on which to build a hyper-privatized city powered by cryptocurrency
- Elisa, who led a group of homeless Puerto Ricans to occupy an abandoned school and turn it into a community living experiment
- Yaron Brook, Chairman of the Board of the Ayn Rand Foundation, who sees Puerto Rico as model for a hyper-privatized society of the future
- Brock Pierce, a child actor turned cryptocurrency evangelist, and leading advocate for the 'new Puerto Rico'
- and, Ura and Neisha, a young couple fighting to remain in Vieques, an offshore municipality of unparalleled beauty, a former bombing range and testing ground for U.S. military

## FILMMAKERS BIOGRAPHIES

### CECILIA ALDARONDO

*Director, Producer*

Cecilia Aldarondo is a documentary director-producer from the Puerto Rican diaspora who makes films at the intersection of poetics and politics. Her feature documentary MEMORIES OF A PENITENT HEART (Tribeca 2016) had its World Premiere at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival and was broadcast on POV in 2017. She is a 2019 Guggenheim Fellow, a 2017 Women at Sundance Fellow, two-time MacDowell Colony Fellow, and recipient of a 2019 Bogliasco Foundation Residency. In 2019 she was named to DOC NYC's 40 Under 40 list and is one of Filmmaker Magazine's 25 New Faces of Independent Film for 2015. She teaches at Williams College.

### INES HOFMANN KANNA

*Producer*

Ines Hofmann Kanna is an independent producer with more than twenty years of experience. Her credits include Sonia Kennebeck's Emmy-nominated NATIONAL BIRD (Berlin 2016) and Kennebeck's most recent film, ENEMIES OF THE STATE (Tribeca 2020). She was also a consulting producer on Cecilia Aldarondo's award-winning debut MEMORIES OF A PENITENT HEART (Tribeca 2016). She began her career at Boston's PBS station, WGBH, and has filmed in places as close as Iowa and as far as Yemen and Saudi Arabia. She also worked as Supervising Producer for ITVS, where she guided more than thirty filmmakers from production to broadcast.

### LALE NAMERROW PASTOR

*Collaborator, Associate Producer*

Lale Namerrow Pastor is a Puerto Rican activist, DJ, and facilitator who integrates political art and organizing to collaborate with social justice organizations in Puerto Rico. Born and raised in San Juan, Namerrow attended New York Film Academy in 2012 and has a BFA in Photography from the University of Puerto Rico.

### TERRA JEAN LONG

*Editor*

Terra Jean Long is an independent filmmaker, editor and educator. She recently edited Samara Chadwick's feature documentary 1999 (Visions du Reel 2018), as well as THE QUIET ZONE (Hot Docs 2016) and AFTER THE LAST RIVER (CBC Doc Channel 2015). In her own films she creates tapestry like works that draw on personal narrative, history, and the space between the real and the imaginary. She holds a BFA in film from Concordia University and an MFA from York University. Her films have screened at festivals including the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam, Edinburgh International film festivals and the Images Festival in her home city Toronto.

## PABLO ALVAREZ-MESA

### *Cinematographer*

Pablo Alvarez-Mesa's films have played at international film festivals including Rotterdam, Sheffield, Hot Docs, Camden, Visions du Reel, and RIDM. His interest in documentary lies in the relationship between fact and fiction; between what is recalled and what is inevitably constructed. His films all touch in one way or another issues of displacement, history and collective memory.

## ANGÉLICA NEGRÓN

### *Composer*

Puerto Rican-born composer and multi-instrumentalist Angélica Negrón's music has been described as "wistfully idiosyncratic and contemplative" (WQXR/Q2) while The New York Times noted her "capacity to surprise." As the first composer-in-residence at the New York Botanical Garden, she composed an electronic soundscape and 100 voice chorus performed in the Thain Family Forest. Upcoming premieres include works for Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic (Project 19), Dallas Symphony Orchestra and National Symphony Orchestra (co-commissioned work for orchestra and organ), and San Francisco Girls Chorus. Recent film credits include Cecilia Aldarondo's MEMORIES OF A PENITENT HEART (Tribeca 2016) and Assia Boundaoui's THE FEELING OF BEING WATCHED (Tribeca 2018).

## CHARLOTTE COOK

### *Executive Producer*

Charlotte is a Co-Founder and Executive Producer of Field of Vision, a film unit that commissions filmmakers and artists to make short form, episodic and feature length creative visual journalism. Prior to Field of Vision, she was the Director of Programming at Hot Docs, North America's largest documentary festival. In addition to her work at Field of Vision, Charlotte is currently a programmer at CPH:DOX and recently produced the films Our New President (Sundance '18), The Gospel of Eureka (SXSW '18) and The Proposal (Tribeca '18).

## LAURA POITRAS

### *Executive Producer*

Laura Poitras is a filmmaker and journalist. Her film CITIZENFOUR won an Oscar for best documentary, as well as awards from BAFTA, Independent Spirit Awards, and the Directors Guild of America. The first film in her post-9/11 trilogy, MY COUNTRY, MY COUNTRY, was nominated for an Oscar. The second film, THE OATH, was nominated for two Emmys. Her reporting on NSA surveillance received the George Polk Award for National Security journalism, and shared in the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for public service. Her most recent film, RISK premiered at the Cannes film festival in May 2016. She recently exhibited her first solo museum show at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

## CREDITS

Produced and Directed by  
Cecilia Aldarondo

In collaboration with  
Lale Namerrow Pastor

Produced by  
Ines Hofmann Kanna

Edited by  
Terra Jean Long

Director of Photography  
Pablo Alvarez-Mesa

Camera  
Pablo Alvarez-Mesa  
Martin DiCicco

Music Composed by  
Angélica Negrón

Featuring (in order of appearance)

Lale Namerrow Pastor

Cecilia Aldarondo

Edgardo (Tato) Alvarado Alvarez

María Alvarado

Hiram Albino

Hiram Albino Jr.

Luis Bonet

Lara Medina

René Reyes

Ricardo Quiles

Raquela Delgado-Valentín

Stephanie Nieves

L'Orangelis Thomas

Quinn Eaker

Elisa Sanchez

Brock Pierce

Yaron Brook

Armando Santiago Pintado

Neisha Ramos Benjamin



Michael Urayoan Connelly Reyes  
Pablo Connelly  
Luis Vazquez O'Neill  
Carla Torres Trujillo  
Awilda Rodriguez Lora  
Marilyn Ortiz Laureano  
Luis E Bonnet Cuello

Supervising Producer for ITVS  
Michael Kinomoto

Executive Producers  
Charlotte Cook  
Laura Poitras

Executive Producer for ITVS  
Sally Jo Fifer

Executive Producers for POV  
Justine Nagan  
Chris White

Executive Producer for LPB  
Sandie Viquez Pedlow

FUNDING PROVIDED BY

Independent Television Service

Field Of Vision

Ford Foundation | JustFilms

POV

Latino Public Broadcasting

Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program  
with support from  
Open Society Foundations

International Documentary Association - Pare Lorentz Documentary Fund

Tribeca Film Institute – Gucci Tribeca Documentary Fund with support from Oath  
Foundation

National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures

WITH SUPPORT FROM

The John Solomon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation

The MacDowell Colony

The Bogliasco Foundation