

PRACTITIONER TALKS

4. Film Preservation, Archives, and Film Festivals in Latin America

Juana Suárez

Abstract: This chapter focuses on the status of archives and archival materials related to Latin American film festivals; the specific programming of film restoration in those events, and specific festivals devoted to film restorations. It addresses both the existence of physical and digital archives and access to collections and the history of festivals. By providing some examples of what has been done, and suggesting actions, the author advocates for the understanding of film festivals' memory as an integral part of the history of film in the region as well as for an understanding of the role preservation plays in cinematic ecosystems.

Keywords: memory, film programming, film curating, audiovisual heritage, cultural legacy

Multiple paradigms potentially enable a discussion about the relationship between Latin American film archives to film festivals. Here, I focus on two such paradigms. In the case of the first one, I consider how issues related to film preservation and archives figure into festivals' programming and curatorial activities in Latin America, and if and how film festivals have curated their archives. Such an undertaking by festivals would facilitate organized and accessible archives over time. With the second paradigm, I address the existence of festivals and muestras/mostras (showcases) devoted exclusively to feature preservations, which, in turn, raises awareness of the crucial need to save and preserve audiovisual heritage and the cultural legacy of festivals.

In the first case, major film festivals such as the Morelia International Film Festival, the Guadalajara International Film Festival, the International Film Festival UNAM (FICUNAM) in Mexico City, the Buenos Aires International Film of Independent Cinema (BAFICI), the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema (Havana), the Cartagena de Indias International Film Festival (FICCI), the São Paulo Film Festival, and the Mar del Plata International Film Festival (Argentina) all have recently showcased digital restorations of Latin American films, many of which have been iconic productions. Due to limits of space, I will refrain from providing a historical overview of film to film restoration which preceded the possibility of transferring with telecines or, more recently, via film scanning. Questions of preservation figure in these festivals not simply by incorporating restored film into the programming. Celebratory events, such as retrospectives, lifetime awards, homages to specific directors and their legacies, milestones of specific films, and celebrations that invoke historical trajectories often demand archival excavation that goes beyond merely locating high-quality screening copies.

The attention to film festivals in the region has historically been placed on FIAPF accredited film festivals such as Mar del Plata International Film Festival and the Cartagena de Indias International Film Festival. However, several festivals and *muestras* have expanded in recent years to secondary and tertiary cities in different countries. These expansions highlight regional histories and how national and local festivals, which at times are devoted to specific film genres, have contributed to the development of national cinemas. In addition, there is an increasing number of festivals related to production, representation, and topics germane to specific communities and contemporary issues, such as indigenous media, human rights, Afro-descendant groups, LGBTQ communities, and environmental issues. Documentaries frequently have served as a basis for numerous niche festivals of the likes of Muestra Internacional de Cine Documental de Bogotá (MIDBO), DocMontevideo, DocBuenosAires, È Tudo Verdade Festival Internacional de Documentários in São Paulo, FIDOCs in Chile, and Festival EDOC in Ecuador. The creation of documentary festivals derives, at times, from a perception that documentaries are not sufficiently valued by large festivals, despite the genre's centrality in Latin American film histories. Moreover, the growth in documentary film festivals also responds to the increasing production of documentaries and the need to foster an academic and public environment that permits discussions specific to documentary filmmaking. Regardless of the reason for the creation of documentary film festivals, multiple issues related to

archives—for instance, archival production and found footage—operate as *documentation* and, thus, mesh with select forms of documentary filmmaking.

These different scenarios invite us to consider the role that preservation plays in these festivals not only as spaces to showcase restored films, but also to call attention to versions of restored films, and, more importantly, to host conversations on the current status of Latin American film archives and film preservation. Such conversations broach issues related but not limited to the physical infrastructure of institutions managing audiovisual legacies, their administrative practices, and their ability to provide access to materials. The above-mentioned celebratory activities at a film festival necessitate services from an archive, services which inevitably are not only about the films. Archival activities involve the location of paper, ephemera, and memorabilia, such as lobby cards, posters, scripts, costumes, magazines, newspaper clips, scholarly production, and even cameras and other equipment. The history of film festivals themselves and their documentation (programs, advertisements, publications, and similar media) is pivotal to the work of programmers, curators, film historians, academics, researchers, artists, and workers from many fields. In turn, a cardinal question is how well maintained, organized, and accessible is the information about festivals.

Much of the research for this chapter has been done at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic prevented traveling to centers of documentation, cinematheques, and headquarters of festivals to determine what the physical collections are about and what kind of conservation and preservation policies and practices are in place. In digital times, however, one would expect that an internet search would hint at information on how to locate the archives of Latin American film festivals. Any comparison with festivals in European or North American countries is not only unfair and colonial but detrimental if one considers the differences in budgets as well as Eurocentrism and its equivalents. Nevertheless, the attempt to locate online information about any film festival archive shows the negligence that is endemic to many of them. With few exceptions, the inattentiveness to film festival archives seems to affect many festivals worldwide. In some cases, many issues of copyright and permission to release images prevent institutions from creating robust film festival archives if these procedures have not been contemplated in the process of organizing events. Some other institutions, such as the Festival de Cannes, are very practical and provide general guidance about materials available for online consultation and direct users to the Cinémathèque française, the institution entrusted with

the materials.¹ Given that such an arrangement does not take extraordinary quantities of digital space, this is a practice that could be implemented by many festivals if materials are housed at a specific institution and they are not ready to provide access as impressive as organizations such as the Toronto International Film Festival are able to.² It is impossible to ignore that many recent and nascent efforts on the part of film festivals in Latin America have been foiled by the inability to afford a website. Still, film festivals depend heavily on social media for advertisement and dissemination of their activities, which provide a basis for training in archiving social media and other ephemerality as a practice.

To establish how Latin American film festivals have been archived, we can refer to select festivals that have an internet presence. Festivals such as Mar del Plata feature extensive materials on their website in the section “Ediciones Anteriores” (Former Editions). This endeavor dates back to the “Primer Festival de Cine Argentino” in 1948, with a temporal gap to 1954, which explains the form of the current festival. Each year’s section is illustrated by that year’s poster or the *Gaceta* (program book) and some edited clips of images of the festival featuring important international guests and main events. Not specific to a single section in the Mar del Plata’s website but rather accessed centrally in this section via combined searches, it is also possible to locate books and other publications related to the festival. Overall, there is an effort to provide an archival dimension to the festival and attest to its chronology.

The International Festival of New Latin American Cinema’s website features a section called “archivos” and a search engine with subsections, such as “scripts, posters, catalogs, awards, jury members, publications” and other content. This project, however, only encompasses the festival’s thirty-seventh to forty-second editions from 2014 to 2020. The festival was created in 1979. Given the festival’s historical importance, this is a project worth completing, yet demands substantial archival archaeology as well

¹ See the site of the Festival of Cannes which summarizes available holdings online and offers a significant list of references on writing about the festival and directs users to the Cinémathèque française: <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/the-festival/the-history-of-the-festival/> Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

² The library of the Toronto International Film Festival is a state-of-the-art project that not only compiles the history and materials related to the festival but also offers a complete catalog and numerous opportunities to manipulate the search engine. See <https://tiff.net/library> Last Accessed October 3, 2024. It goes without saying that the Toronto Film Festival’s digital infrastructure is an expensive project that requires financial investment, technological development, and human capital. Yet, such investment signals the way in which the memory of festivals remains as significant as their other activities.

as human, physical, and digital resources. Similar to the case of Mar del Plata, copies of publications and books produced under the rubric of the festival are present, and a more concerted effort could transform the site into a valuable digital resource.

The “Sobre el festival” (About the Festival) of BAFICI also features an “Ediciones anteriores” section that documents the festival from its beginning in 2009. The content is non-standard from year to year and, in lieu of a curated repository, the website sections document important news, galas, programming, special guests, and similar highlights. The site is hosted on the website of the city of “Buenos Aires Ciudad” along with other cultural venues and initiatives of the municipal government. The contents’ density often appears abridged and is related to the allocation of digital resources from the city to each cultural institution.

A final example is the website of Festival Internacional de Cine de Cartagena (FICCI), whose “Memoria FICCI” section contains the collection of materials from the fifty-fourth to the fifty-eighth editions (the Festival celebrated its sixty-first edition in 2022). The inconsistency of the archival project seems to be, in part, a consequence of the political erosion that the festival has endured since 2018 when the festival board requested that Diana Bustamante resign her position as artistic director, after a stellar job in programming and in the renovation of the festival’s spirit following the work of her predecessor, Monika Wagenberg. At the moment of her dismissal, Bustamante was contemplating the organization of the festival’s archive. FICCI is just one example of festivals in dire need of intervention since materials from former years are suffering from deterioration due to exposure to tropical weather, lack of physical infrastructure for archival holdings, and access. Prior to the work of Bustamante and Wagenberg, the festival was directed by Víctor Nieto for forty-eight years. As in any other long-standing festival in the region, there is an intellectual history, a history of cinephilia, and a history of programming that needs to be documented. Moreover, one needs to consider that during Nieto’s long tenure, FICCI was closely associated with Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, his political and intellectual circles, and his legacy to cinema. Before the proliferation of showcases and festivals in that country, and before the current mobility of Colombian cinema in transnational spaces, FICCI was a pivotal point of reference for filmmaking not only for the country but for its global networking. Wagenberg and Bustamante added a more contemporary edge to the festival, vindicated the role of youth in the cinematic transformations of the Colombian industry, and imprinted a necessary distance from magical realism and Macondian auras. Documenting this legacy is also important

because it speaks of women's contributions to the cultural agendas of the country.

The four festivals documented do not follow standard classifications and subsections, and the main content—when available—is related to the general catalog, the programming in local neighborhoods, and a smattering of YouTube videos, often with a channel affiliated with and carrying the name of each festival. While this is an important tool, one must keep in mind that although associated with archival functions, YouTube is not an archive, but an online sharing and social media platform subjected to all the vulnerabilities of web services, digital objects, and the company's terms of agreement. It would be useful to determine arrangements for the backup of the videos uploaded, how are they organized, and, in general, who is tasked with the responsibility of archiving materials for each festival. Because social media, digital platforms, and digital content are inexorably the future of documenting film festivals, policies about what to save, how to save, and guidelines for digital preservation become imperative for all festivals. In the digital sea, it would be impossible to save everything. A lot of material becomes ephemeral in the era of Tik-Tok, Instagram, and live broadcasting. However, important conversations, masterclasses, and other exchanges are also taking place, and they should be saved for posterity. Effective and consistent digital preservation policies, as well as actions to start saving the analog assets of these festivals, are essential to safeguarding these chapters of Latin American cinematic history, their local/global edges, and the way they have shaped taste and influenced cinephiles through the years.

In returning to the second paradigm, the focus shifts to film festivals solely devoted to film preservation, of which there are few in the region. To date, the largest and oldest of such events is the Festival International de Cine Recobrado in Valparaíso, Chile. The festival started in 1997 and features mostly Latin American cinema but includes some foreign film restorations. The festival is invested in screening films in sixteen millimeters and thirty-five millimeters, given the name of the festival "recobrado" (recuperated), not necessarily implying restoration. As such, the festival emphasizes the notions of "reconstructed" and "remastered" cinema and its mission statement establishes the festival as a "resistance to the new multimedia landscape." The administration is run by Corporación Cultural M. Graham, a subsidiary of the Chilean Ministry of Culture.³

³ See the site for Festival de Cine Recobrado: <https://www.cinerecobrado.cl/>. Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

The Mostra de Cinema de Ouro Preto (CineOP) began in 1980 as an initiative of the Casa de Cinema de Porto Alegre in collaboration with collective groups such as Mel de Abelha and Corcica Cooperativa dos Realizadores de Rio de Janeiro. Since 2006, the Mostra allocates a substantial segment of its program to showcasing recent Brazilian restorations and to conversations about film preservation in that country. The festival's promotional slogan expressly states its commitment to the field: "tratar o cinema como patrimônio cultural" (treating cinema as cultural patrimony). The participation of the private sector has also bolstered the sustainability of the event over the years: Universo Produção is the company currently in charge of planning the festival. The festival partners with the Brazilian Association of Audiovisual Preservation (ABPA), by providing space for the annual meeting of the association and its corresponding board and business meetings. The Encontro de Arquivos (Meeting of the Archives) creates a space to discuss the regional politics of preservation, digital challenges, and new pathways in light of political changes. According to an article in *Agência Brasil* that discusses the context of the first online version in 2020, Cinema Ouro Preto had hosted fifteen editions of the Encontro Nacional de Arquivos e Acervos Audiovisuais.⁴ In 2011, a Preservation Award was added to celebrate achievements in the field. The tenth anniversary of the inclusion of preservation yielded a publication with a range of activities and achievements over a decade. In 2016, the Mostra was the forum for the launch of the Brazilian National Preservation Plan. In sum, it is a celebratory, pedagogical, and cultural summit.

Although it is not possible to locate an organized online archive of the Mostra, the website lists a summary of the fifteen editions of CineOP. Some entries are more comprehensive than others, and some of them highlight special tributes. The first one, for example, honored the legacy of Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Salvador Trópia, and Adão Soares Gomes. A collective effort could yield reconstruction work of the archive in order to ensure that the important work done by this mostra is saved for prosperity. Different documents and programs are posted in a dispersed fashion in the Issuu publishing platform, and they are a significant step towards the creation of a repository.

Since 2016, the MAMUT Festival de Memoria Audiovisual in Medellín (Colombia) has been providing a space for an event described as a "punto

⁴ This is according to Raquel Hallak's statement in an interview in <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2020-08/mostra-de-cinema-de-ouro-preto-sera-virtual-pela-primeira-vez>. Last Accessed October 3, 2024. Hallak is the CEO of Universo Produção e Coordenadora Geral da Mostra de Cinema de Tiradentes, CineOP e Cine Belo Horizonte.

de encuentro y debate sobre el uso y la preservación de las imágenes de archivo y sobre el uso del cine” (a meeting point and debate about the use and preservation of archival images and the uses of cinema).⁵ MAMUT has also been an academic space, and it has devoted considerable attention to the inclusion of home movies. Moreover, the festival has oriented the discussion and conversation about archives to prioritize topics within the political agenda of the country, such as territorial disputes, biodiversity, and the displacement of Afro-descendant and indigenous communities. The website hosts very granular information for the latest edition but it does not feature an archive of former editions. If available as an archive or digital repository, the diversity of activities and the wide array of uses of archival materials that MAMUT programmes would make it a valuable resource for new initiatives across the region.

In 2021, Filmoteca UNAM celebrated the fourth edition of Arcadia Muestra Internacional de Cine Rescatado y Restaurado. Its mission statement states that its goal is to promote the Mexican cinematic legacy, and the first version of the muestra was programmed in tandem with the celebration of the 1971 Student Movement. Although the pandemic determined that the event was held online twice, the expectation is for Arcadia to take place in person and to maintain its original spirit by featuring Mexican cinema, cine-conciertos, talks, round tables, exhibits, and special activities. The current plan is to host the activity every eighteen months.

Another important preservation event is the Festival de Cine Silente México in Puebla which celebrated its seventh version in 2022. While silent cinema festivals are very important given the possibility of reviving specific films from a specific period, and of raising awareness of preservation, there is considerable work to perform to educate audiences that preservation does not relate only to “old and classical films.” The field of moving image preservation extends to analog films in small gauge, production in magnetic media, films that might have survived because they were transferred to optical media such as DVDs, and born-digital productions. Films’ survival might have been enabled by scanning and digital restoration but the process of saving digitized content does not stop there. Professionals in the preservation field are keenly aware of these issues and understand the complexity of digital preservation. However, this information often surprises common spectators, film buffs, festival goers, and even filmmakers and creators. It is worth noting as well that in the past VHS tapes and DVDs were preferred

⁵ See website of Mamut Memoria Audiovisual: <https://mamutfestival.co/>. Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

carrier formats for festival screeners; chances are many films only survive in those formats. Such conditions reiterate the importance of film festival archives, and, in this particular case, the maintenance of inventories of materials that were never returned, and submission/return logs if they were created.⁶ Along those lines, one can only imagine the number of sixteen millimeter and thirty-five millimeter film copies that might survive in vaults holding festival materials and the possibility that some of those copies might be a unique surviving version of a film.

Returning to festivals devoted to film preservation, a number of retrospectives and programs take place in local institutions such as *filmotecas*, cinematheques, and audiovisual centers. Cinemateca de Bogotá (formerly Cinemateca Distrital) scheduled a series called Restaurados for three consecutive years (2019–21), which will eventually become a biannual event. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the online version of Restaurados benefited from the robust network of archivists associated with the New York University Audiovisual Preservation Exchange (APEX) editions in Latin America, and archivists working under the auspices of other independent initiatives. Most screenings were preceded or followed by thorough contextualizations of the production of the films, history of the filmmakers, producers, cast and crew, and conversations about technical procedures related to the preservation process, which broached the topic of how fundraising and international collaborations are necessary to save just one film.

I draw attention to this comprehensive mode of presentation that accompanied films at Restaurados because, ideally, it enables more effective lobbying for audiovisual preservation. The mode of presentation is also a productive way to educate new audiences who might not be aware of how analog cinema used to work. At most film festivals, restorations are programmed in very isolated ways and often overlook the work of archivists and film preservationists who are invariably eager to inform and share with audiences. Moreover, collaborative efforts to preserve films should be highlighted, since they usually entail incredible perseverance and coordination. All the efforts are laudable, which range from the support of The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project to save iconic and canonic Latin American films to independent efforts to safeguard a diverse selection of films.

6 At different occasions, I have had the opportunity to see the holdings of Bogoshorts, the film festival devoted to short films in Bogotá and the holdings of the Rio de Janeiro International Short Film Festival- Curta cinema; in both cases the number of unclassified screeners in DVD is daunting. Optical media, as any other type of media, is subject to decay in the form of data rot, delamination, and other forms, as well as subject to obsolescence.

The work of the Film Foundation's World Cinema Project is nothing less than remarkable. The restoration credits attest not only to their efforts but also to the significant negotiation and fundraising that has to take place in order to realize a single project. The following examples are illustrative of this point: *Limite* (Dir. Mario Peixoto, Brazil, 1931; restored in 2010 by the Cinemateca Brasileira and the Cineteca di Bologna/L'Immagine Ritrovata Laboratory); *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Cuba, 1968; restored in 2017 by the Cineteca di Bologna/L'Immagine Ritrovata Laboratory in association with Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos ICAIC and financed by The Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation); *Enamorada* (Dir. Emilio Fernández, México, 1946; restored by UCLA Film & Television Archive in collaboration with Fundación Televisa AC and Filmoteca UNAM); and *Lucía* (Dir. Humberto Solás, Cuba, 1968; restored by Cineteca di Bologna in association with ICAIC at L'Immagine Ritrovata Laboratory, funded also by Turner Classic Movies). These projects evidence a tremendous effort of transnational negotiation that is no different from other film initiatives in the industry. Consider, for instance, efforts like the one spearheaded by Viviana García-Besné and her project Permanencia Voluntaria that has given a second run to many of the films produced by Cinematográfica Calderón. Permanencia's endeavors include Mexican *fichera* and *cabaretera* films such as *Victimas del pecado/Victims of sin* (1951), starring Ninón Sevilla, and iconic B-Series films of El Santo as well as films such as *Sombra verde/Untouched* (Dir. Roberto Galvadón 1954), a film that inspires a reexamination of the Mexican cinematic canon.⁷

No less important are initiatives led by national and regional film archives. Filmmakers have, at times, ardently devoted their own energies and time to the stewarding and preservation of their work. For instance, Martha Rodríguez, particularly the films she made with the late Jorge Silva, are now available in digital restoration and include *Chircales* (1968; restored by Arsenal in Germany). Equally important is the restoration of

⁷ Permanencia Voluntaria is a counter archive that has received significant international attention and support, mostly for the restoration of films. Yet, the daily demands to maintain the project are multiple and expensive. The project has been supported by institutions such as the UCLA Film & Television Archive, which at the moment stewards their collection of nitrates. Permanencia's most notable projects include providing a restored copy of *El Santo contra el cerebro del mal* for the film's premiere at the 68th Berlinale in 2018. The film was also screened at the 2019 TCM Classic Film Festival and at a retrospective in San Francisco in 2022. *Perdida*, a 2009 documentary by Viviana García-Besné, describes the story of these films. More specifically, *Perdida* traces the history of Calderón Cinematografía and explains the familial affect that led the filmmaker to rescue these films.

the films of the late Colombian filmmaker Luis Ospina who was always concerned and devoted not only to his own materials but also to the work of his contemporaries Carlos Mayolo and Andrés Caicedo. Ospina was always attentive to the future of his work and cared for the archival value of films and other archival assets of the times of *Caliwood* as well as other periods of his filmmaking.

As pointed out, many Latin American restorations have relied on collaboration among one or more countries: L'Immagine Ritrovata, UCLA Film & Television Archive, Cinemateca Portuguesa, Filmoteca de Cataluña, the Vulnerable Media Lab in Canada, and Arsenal have all been pivotal to many of these restoration projects. Given that these entities reside in different countries, the work of film restoration underscores and reiterates the transnational nature of Latin American film history and how film preservation fits into the ecosystem of film industries and festivals.

The efforts of these institutions and individuals should figure in the larger conversation about film preservation, archives, and all types of film festivals in Latin America. The latter are spaces where considerable advocacy can happen. The need to remind readers (and spectators) why preservation matters might appear abstract. However, it is crucial to emphasize that preservation is about the memory of communities, and the memories of countries. Moreover, preservation is about the history of communities, countries, and the world, and film and media history, and the history of technology that has become available to a country at a specific time owing to transnational connections. Put another way, film preservation matters because it is about education, exhibition, and access. The question of access is at the core of what archivists and film preservationists do. Yet, providing access requires much effort in Latin American archives, whose challenges can't be reduced to financial hardships and technical limitations. A number of challenges to accessing materials also stem from antiquated administrative models where the archive is understood as a cryptic sarcophagus for a select few. Obsolete bureaucratic practices reiterate the need to advocate for more transparent, inclusive, and shared practices in archival institutions.

Film festivals draw producers, directors, stars, celebrities, crew members, film enthusiasts, programmers, curators, distributors, academics, historians, cultural administrators, secretaries of culture, private and public administrators of film and cultural institutions, students, and many other individuals who are invested and interested in the creation of images as well as in the future of their creations and the legacies of the past. Film festivals themselves also produce history, images, master classes, and, in general, film history that should be added to the annals of Latin American

filmmaking. The chance to provide access to that media in the future should be at the core of festivals.

Film festivals, moreover, are a place of visibility where advocacy should be paramount. Festivals provide space where audiences can discuss how political crises endanger and threaten audiovisual legacies, as has been the case with the recent crisis of the Cinemateca Brasileira and Centro Técnico do Audiovisual in Brazil, which is ineluctably linked to the erosion of cultural policies during Jair Bolsonaro's presidential term. One should also wonder about the status of film archives in countries where access has become increasingly difficult, such as Venezuela. Festivals can also serve as think tanks where collaborations begin and conversations extend to the history of the legacy of non-dominant industries and Latin America. Festivals can also be spaces of celebration of what is saved and preserved as well as those minor but nevertheless important victories archival institutions can afford: acquiring a scanner, acquiring collections of important filmmakers, getting national or international support for international preservation projects, being able to update vaults and facilities, training technicians and staff, extending preservation discussion to new visual art forms and iterations, and finding films thought to be lost.

In general, archives in Latin America face multiple obstacles. They are challenged by unresolved issues of the past. In addition, archives are taxed by numerous difficulties, such as becoming sustainable and independent around technology; training staff and administrators on a regular basis, since technologies change frequently in the move towards green and environmentally friendly practices, among other issues. Discussions about archives should happen within the larger film ecosystem and as part of the infrastructure of every national film industry. The concern for decolonizing archives, securing sustainable institutions, and making sure budgets are allocated should be part of the overarching conversation within the film industry. Such a conversation should not be a separate chapter nor an occasional conversation, but a central topic to ensure that the work of our creators remains available for posterity, not as ashes of the past.