

Quotes & Reviews for “An Independent Portrait” a film by Jose Muniain

Jose Muniain’s “An Independent Portrait” is a small masterpiece of intersubjective creativity and genius. He films a painter who is painting the portrait of a filmmaker, Robert M. Young whose films gave human faces to people whose stories tell alternative tales about human existence. It may sound like vertigo but the film’s images, dialogue, pacing and energy makes at least one fact about art and humanity clear-our creativity really depends on interdependent communication at many levels of the eye, the brain and the heart.

Davíd Carrasco
Harvard University

I think An Independent Portrait is a great resource for film students and art students. It shows a real connection between art forms. It gives students a chance to see a range of Robert Young's work as a very important filmmaker who is not a Hollywood star while it takes them into the world of a prolific painter. Its a great benefit for students to see that the creative impulse is the primary thing.

Brady Lewis
Educational Director
Filmmakers

"An Independent Portrait" is a richly conceived documentary about filmmaker Robert M. Young, directed in Pittsburgh by Spanish native Jose Muniain. But more than that it's an exploration of spirit.

The hour-long film is set within the occasion of Young having his portrait painted by Felix de la Concha, also Spanish-born.

Rather than producing an exhaustive biographical compilation of dates and achievements, director Muniain searched for what

motivates and guides Young's creativity -- and by extension de la Concha's and, one suspects, his own. The result is a compelling psychological portrait constructed through clips from Young's films and reflective conversations between painter and filmmaker. But mostly this interior is revealed through the eyes of the painter as he burrows past Young's surface to his soul; through the filmmaker's own blue ponds, relentlessly seeking even when still; and through a third unseen pair, that of the director, whose poetic vision frames this inquiry.

The title suggests the depths probed and possible, with multiple readings of independent -- a classification each of these somewhat renegade artists has earned -- and portrait implied. It's a complexity worthy of its subject matter.

Mary Thomas
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Jose Muniain invited storied independent filmmaker Robert M. Young to talk about his half-century of work while sitting for his portrait in oils by local Spanish –born painter Félix de la Concha. Thus is the documentarian documented. It makes you want to see Young's work-from national Geographic wildlife specials to documentaries about U.S civil-rights movement an Italian slums, and fiction feature about Mexican immigrant. Young's generously excerpted work, de la Concha's canvas-in-progress and Muniain's imaginative editing combine in a package that's sensually pleasing and full of ideas. And you'll be surprised how well you fell you know both men when you watch de la Concha's pleasure at Young's reaction to the finish portrait.

Bill O'Driscoll
City Paper

Velazquez famously painted himself into his portrait of the Spanish royal family, Las Meninas. His point was that art not only "represents" reality, it also "makes" reality. The young Spanish

director, Jose Muniain takes up this gesture again in his film *An Independent Portrait*, which involves at once an interview with the noted filmmaker, Robert Young, and a reprise of scenes from his films; a documentary on the painting of Young's portrait by Felix de la Concha, a rising star in Spanish painting; a stunning musical score by Muniain's collaborator, Barrett Black ; and Muniain's own work as a filmmaker. The rich and complex interplay of perspectives makes this luminous, brilliantly produced film an extremely valuable pedagogic resource for classes on the nature of art and the relation between the artist and his subject in a variety of fields, including Spanish (Latin American Studies), film studies, and fine arts.

John Beverley
Professor
Hispanic Languages and Literatures
University of Pittsburgh

"In the play-within-the-play tradition, 'An Independent Portrait' eerily penetrates the dimensional shift that goes into creation. Film-maker Robert Young reminisces over his independent portrayals (shown in the movie), while oil portraitist Félix de la Concha depicts his face on a canvas. José Muniain observes the entire process from behind his camera, including the surprise Young gets when seeing himself through the eyes of a fellow artist. The viewer, in turn, has the privilege of watching it all develop -or is he too being observed? This Goedelesque aspect of the work is ideal for students to reflect on the nature of representation and its political consequences. A carefully crafted gem that has subtle philosophy spring out of deep aesthetics."

Juan Uriagereka
Professor of Linguistics
The University of Maryland