

An Independent Portrait

A film by Jose Muniain

In **An Independent Portrait**, film director Robert Young sits for his first formal portrait with the Spanish painter Félix de la Concha. The action of the film takes place in an artist's studio in the Pittsburgh Hill District. As we watch de la Concha's painting unfold, Young discusses his career filming and living with subjects ranging from nomadic Eskimo tribes to Sicilian slum-dwellers, Angolan rebels to American civil rights revolutionaries. In the process the two artists discuss their calling. What drives people to do independent work? How do creative people find their subjects? How they are supported, thwarted and inspired by what goes on around them.

An Independent Portrait showcases clips of most of Robert Young's major work, including his Camera d'Or winning 1977 drama *Alambrista* at Cannes Film Festival and an extended sequence from *Cortile Cascino*, Young's unflinching 1962 documentary on daily life in a Sicilian slum. Banned from American television, *Cortile Cascino* has never been released in the United States and can still shock audiences today. In his discussion of an infant's death in the slum, Young touches on the limits of an artist's involvement in his subjects' most desperate circumstances.

As the film proceeds, the relationship between the two artists warms and deepens as they share details of their craft with each other. Felix de la Concha is shown in his best light as a detailed and meticulous painter of quiet, intense subjects. The film shows several paintings from de la Concha's 2000 exhibit "365 Views of the Cathedral of Learning." Every day, for an entire year, de la Concha painted a different view of a single building in Pittsburgh, often seeking out little-known, low-lying and neglected locations from which to capture just a corner or shadow of the famous Cathedral of Learning. His skills in quickly capturing extraordinary nuance are shown to fine effect his portrait of Robert Young. The film culminates as de la Concha completes his painting, and Robert Young sees his face for the first time through the eyes of another artist.

An Independent Portrait is an independent work in all of its details. First-time director and producer Jose Muniain strives to honor Robert Young's spirit of independent, high-quality creative work in every aspect of his film, from its original score by Barrett Black, a classically-trained, genre-defying cellist, to its location in a notorious, neglected, and secretly beautiful inner-city neighborhood.

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