

SXSW film reviews

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'Los Trabajadores/The Workers'

As the opening images of Austin filmmaker Heather Courtney's deeply moving documentary flicker across the screen, we hear the insistent and monotonous sounds of manual labor: a pickax striking granite, hammers pounding nails into wood, shovels scooping up earth. The sound of Austin day laborers at work effectively becomes the soundtrack for this film that follows two workers in particular as they struggle to make money to support their families living in other countries.

Although "Los Trabajadores" focuses primarily on Ramon Castillo Aparicio of Mexico and Juan Ignacio Gutierrez of Nicaragua, its images also chronicle Austin's recent boom years and the problems its growth has produced. Speaking about the city's prosperity, Juan observes, "They say it's growing, but thanks to whom?"

Courtney's film examines a population that's been excluded from the very riches it helped to create. In the process, the documentary touches on the controversy surrounding the city's decision to relocate the day-labor site from its former downtown location to its present site on 51st Street. Interviews with City Council members, members of the local neighborhood association and other day laborers provide context for Ramon's and Juan's poignant experiences. -- Alison Macor

(Screens 6:15 p.m. Thursday at the Alamo.)

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