

CALLUM MCLENNAN

Brazilian-Chilean production *Mariana x BHP*, Basque drag story *Altxaliliak* and Peruvian-U.S. co-production *La increíble historia de una película que no hemos visto* took the top prizes at the 21st Lau Haizetara Documentary Co-Production Forum, part of the San Sebastián Festival.

Renan Flumian's *Mariana x BHP*, produced by Droma Productions and Quijote Films, won the Music Library & SFX Award for its legal-thriller take on the aftermath of Brazil's Mariana dam collapse. Maia Iribarne Olhagarai's *Altxaliliak*, from Doxa Producciones and Gastibeltza Filmak, scored the Euroregional Documentary Award with its portrait of four queer Basque performers reclaiming identity through drag. Meanwhile, Claudia Chávez Levano and Christine Mladic Janney's *La increíble historia de una película que no hemos visto*, produced by Amazona Producciones and Eleven Hands, took the EPE-Ibaia-Elkargi Award for retracing the life and censorship battles of pioneering Peruvian filmmaker Nora de Izcue.

From Afghan women wielding mobile phones against Taliban rule, to Gaza's first para-cycling team, and Iran's cosmetic industry paradox, urgent portraits of resilience and survival dominated pitches at the 21st Lau Haizetara Documentary Co-Production Forum, part of the San Sebastián Festival.

The projects were unveiled before a high-level panel of commissioning editors and distributors, including Mehdi Bekkar of Al Jazeera, Katie Bench of Dogwoof, Elsa Rodríguez Monje of Movistar Plus+ and representatives from Arte France, Rakuten, RTVE and the Sundance Institute.

"This is a forum where we want to give voices even to first-time filmmakers, which we think is really important," Silvia Hornos told Variety, pointing to the striking number of women-led stories this year.

*Fragments of Home*, directed by Roser Corella with Afghan co-director and protagonist Aziza Zahra Naeimi, is produced by Germany's Moving Mountains Films. The film gives rare inside access to women's daily life under the Taliban. Shot on Naeimi's own phone, it charts her fight to resist through a honey-making cooperative,

# Women, Struggle Take Center Stage at Festival's Lau Haizetara Forum



PABLO CIFUENTES

then her precarious four-year limbo in Pakistan while seeking safe asylum. "The mobile phone became the only open window to the outside world," Corella told the forum. Al Jazeera's Mehdi Bekkar praised the intimacy of the footage, calling it a "personal diary" perspective.

Produced by Belgium's Harald House and the U.K.'s Perfidious Productions, *Gaza, Sunbirds* is directed by journalist Flavia Cappellini. The project follows cyclist Alaa al-Dali, shot during Gaza's 2018 Great March of Return, who goes on to build a para-cycling team from fellow amputees. "We call ourselves Freebirds," the teaser began. After October 7, the riders delivered humanitarian aid by bike across the strip. Dali later left Gaza to chase Paralympic dreams abroad, even as his wife and children remained trapped. "I live in a playground and my children live in a war zone," he said of the pain of being stranded from his family in a safe country. Rakuten, with a strong track record in sports docs, signaled potential interest.



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From Brazil and Chile, *Mariana x BHP* is directed by Renan Flumian and produced by Droma Productions and Quijote Films. The legal thriller follows the aftermath of the 2015 Mariana dam collapse, which spilled 44 million cubic meters of toxic sludge and sparked one of the world's largest class actions, representing more than 700,000 people against mining group BHP in the U.K. "It's a

modern David vs Goliath," said Flumian, who has filmed with victims for six years. Producer Sergio Karmy warned that settlements made by BHP to public authorities in Brazil risk letting the company evade accountability.

French-Iranian director Afsaneh Salari's *Tehran, Autoimmune* is produced by France's YAMI2, Sweden's Sisyfos Film and Iran's Docmaniacs.

It explored contradictions of a society that veils women while fuelling one of the world's busiest cosmetic surgery industries. Following two rival surgeons — one a body shaper self-described as "the Michelangelo of Iran," the other a female rhinoplasty specialist — Salari uses the metaphor of an autoimmune disease to probe middle-class identity. "There's a brutal system that makes women's bodies invisible, and another that sells them capitalist beauty ideals," she said. Bruni Burres of the Sundance Institute highlighted its potential U.S. resonance in her feedback to the pitch.

Other notable pitches included *Live Till Death*, a Basque six-act patient-view story on cancer, produced by Humanistic, Arbela Films and Maelstrom Studios, that drew tears in the room; and *No Consent*, from La Kaseta Ideas Factory and 39films, confronting digital misogyny and non-consensual online videos.

For Movistar's Elsa Rodríguez Monje, what counted was simple: "We are not so concerned by slots. What counts is that the story is relevant to us."

## 21st LAUHAIZETARA DOCUMENTARY CO-PRODUCTION FORUM AWARDS

**Music Library & SFX Award**  
*Mariana x BHP* – Directed by Renan Flumian.  
Produced by Droma Productions, Quijote Films (Brazil, Chile)

## Euroregional Documentary Award

*Altxaliliak* – Directed by Maia Iribarne Olhagarai.  
Produced by Doxa Producciones, Gastibeltza Filmak (Spain, France)

## EPE-Ibaia-Elkargi Award

*La increíble historia de una película que no hemos visto* – Directed by Claudia Chávez Levano, Christine Mladic Janney.  
Produced by Amazona Producciones, Eleven Hands (Peru, U.S.)

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