

# ***La Libertad (2017): A Sensory Review***

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The hands tell the story. Knuckles and palms knead bread to be pressed methodically over and over, just as hands weave colourful thread around the loom and pluck bright orange flower petals from their stems. Hands do the talking as food is prepared on a deep, flat dish, red coals glowing hot underneath. For the first few minutes, we see no faces, hear no voices.

Birds chirp, a steady chorus that underscores the motions happening onscreen. Hazy, gentle shots are cut together. Everything slows, takes its time. In one shot, rain falls, hard and heavy — we watch the pavement glisten as the water begins to pool on smooth cobblestones. In another, a woman braids her hair. Thick strands, textured and heavy, weave together. Later, we are shown hands stitching delicately, women using tiny silver needles to thread patterns onto stark white fabric. Everything feels tangible, almost porous.

This film is moving, intimate. As a viewer, it feels humbling to be given a glimpse into the world we see onscreen. It is hard not to feel warm from the peaceful sensory landscape which is created over thirty short minutes. Not only do we get to see this world, we get to *feel* it too.



Screenshots from *La Libertad* (2017)

The filmmaker hovers behind her camera, nearby but not invasive, observing with tactful attention to detail. Shots are held, sustained. We sit with the filmmaker as she looks on, questioning as she does, learning alongside her.

We drift through three different sites. We start in the homes of the Navarro women, before moving to a gallery space, where the woven tapestries hang from high ceilings, bright and beautiful, as patrons mill around, taking it in. Finally, we visit a weaving workshop with red tiled floors and grey brick walls. In this space, the women work fast on the looms, thread transitioning effortlessly between hands. There is chatter, but a quiet focus on the work. The room pulses. Each space holds a different energy, a new pace and rhythm for engaging with the same creative practice.

This is an astute exploration of tradition, womanhood and what it means to feel liberated — how it is embodied and articulated. How it exists inside the language and actions of these individuals. The film is deeply corporeal, grounded in the body, in movement and stillness, juxtaposing the two to create a rhythm to the work, similar to the rhythmic work of the woman as they weave or cook or stitch.



Screenshots from *La Libertad* (2017)

When subjects speak, they speak in free-flowing Spanish, which is subtitled below. We never hear the filmmaker speak — all we hear are the thoughtful and tumbling answers to questions we presume she has asked. A shot holds on a woman, her face angled away from the camera, focusing on the work in front of her. An unspoken question: why did she never get married? Calmly, cheerfully, she says: “I like my freedom very much. You could say that I love my freedom. And when you marry, I think... that you’re not free anymore.”

*This piece responds to Laura Huertas-Millán’s 2017 ethnographic short film, *La Libertad*. More details about the film can be found [here](#).*