



**RAMIREZ, JUAN ALEJANDRO.** (Peru. 1958- .) Emerging from the period in the early 1990s when many excellent Peruvian short films were made with the support of the government, Juan Alejandro Ramirez missed out on these opportunities because of living in New York City . . . but he has somehow managed to keep making powerful **experimental** documentaries on his homeland's problems, continually traveling back to Peru. He was born in Arequipa and studied Anthropology at university in Lima, before traveling to the United States to do postgraduate work as a Fulbright scholar.

. . . Ramirez, was an avid photographer and he made his first film, *Made by Hand* about a New York artist, in 1990. His second film, *Todo y Nada* (*All and Nothing*, 1993), was his first Peruvian subject film, on the experiences of Peruvian emigrants living in Europe, Africa, and North America. After *Me Dicen Yovo* (*I'm a Yovo*, 1995) and *Muy Lejos de Aqui* (*Faraway from Here*, 1999), diary films on his two-month stay in Benin, West Africa, and his travels in Peru and India, respectively, Ramirez made his first really important film, *Solo un Cargador* (*Porter*, 2003), which was shown at 170 film festivals worldwide, including Rotterdam, Sundance, Fribourg, and New Directors / New Films (New York City), and won awards in 12 of them. Ramirez never refers to his films strictly as "**documentary films**," preferring the terms "poetic," or "essay" films. Indeed, *Porter*, a fictionalized reconstruction of one indigenous, Andean man, a *cargador* who carries (white) climber's supplies and baggage up mountains, is remarkable in that it actually gives the man his own, meditative voice. Unlike most "anthropological" or **ethnographic films**, this one turns the object of the camera's gaze into the true subject of the film, as if the porter is the author of the film.

His next film, *Alguna Tristeza* (*Some Kind of Sadness*, 2006), is even more experimental, a tapestry of seemingly unconnected vignettes beginning with an extraordinary event at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, where the victory of the Peruvian football team over the great Austrian squad (by a score of 2-1) was declared void! The film mixes the personal with the political and the historical, going from a portrait of an optimistic Peruvian taxi driver to that of three waiters on a train to that of an alienated outsider living in the Amazonian forest region. *Some Kind of Sadness* was also shown at numerous film festivals and won awards at nine of them, including the prestigious *Cinema du Reel* in France. His most recent films, *Diario del Fin* (*Diary of the End*, 2009), focused on a Peruvian woman looking back over her difficult life and *Nadie Especial* (*Nobody Special*, 2013), on three very different Peruvian **women**, continue Ramirez's poetic analyses of Peru's downtrodden but resilient citizens. Most of his films stretch the boundaries of documentary and fiction with their re-created scenes, evocative voices, and imaginative editing, and none is longer than an hour in length. Although he refuses to be conventional or commercial, Juan Alejandro Ramirez continues to make films and get them shown . . .