



# THE MOLE AGENT

A film by Maite Alberdi



**\*\*WORLD PREMIERE – WORLD DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION - 2020 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL\*\***

## **SCREENINGS**

*Saturday, 1/25 at 11:30 AM - The Egyptian - **Premiere***

*Sunday, 1/26 at 3:00 PM - Holiday Village 2 - **P&I***

*Monday, 1/27 at 9:00 PM - Broadway Centre 6, SLC - **Public 2***

*Tuesday, 1/28 at 2:30 PM - Park Ave - **Public 3***

*Thursday, 1/30 at 3:00 PM - The Library - **Public 4***

*Friday, 1/31 at 3:00 PM - Holiday Village 2 - **Public 5***

## **Press Contacts**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

When a family becomes concerned about their mother's well-being in a retirement home, private investigator Romulo hires Sergio, an 83 year-old man who becomes a new resident—and a mole inside the home, who struggles to balance his assignment with becoming increasingly involved in the lives of several residents.

## **A DISCUSSION WITH MAITE ALBERDI**

### **Why did you want to make this film? What led you to this story in particular?**

I decided to make this movie because I wanted to make a documentary about a private detective, a character usually reserved for fiction. I worked for a few months as an assistant to a private detective, and I realized that detectives worked cases where distrust was widespread in relationships. People want to investigate those around them more than ever before, and more private investigation agencies have started to open as a result.

What mainly caught my attention was that cases could be easily solved by talking, without the need of detectives or agents. I saw cases of parents investigating their children, siblings following each other, bosses investigating their employees, and cases at nursing homes. With this in mind, my intention with this documentary was to go beyond a report of results. I was not interested in what exactly happened in the outcome of each case. Instead, I wanted to ask why there were these investigations, why there is such distrust, and what is behind that lack of communication or disconnection. That was the journey that I wanted to experience as a director. The starting point was the investigation, but the end result was not meant to be the case itself, but the social understanding behind it.

### **Your films seem to have a similar through line, documenting a specific (and sometimes marginalized) group of people in their environment. What draws you towards a specific group?**

I think that from microworlds, one can learn about our larger society. I think that a documentary has to invite understanding, tolerance, and empathy -- these can be generated or changed through cinema and through the viewer's connection to everyday experiences. That is why I choose groups that are less mainstream -- because we do not typically see them in everyday life. It's documentaries that can bring us closer to those worlds that we do not know. I was interested in filming the elderly because they're a group that allows us to build both universal and individual stories. Universal because we can all relate to different aspects of the

story, and individual because the subjects whose stories are being told are being affected by their age difference and living unique experiences.

**How did you first hear about the investigation? Were you approached by the family conducting the investigation?**

First, I realized about the existence of detective cases inside nursing homes. When I was working at and observing detective agencies, this was a type of case that constantly appeared and repeated: people wanted to know how their relatives were inside nursing homes. This was the kind of case that interested me the most, because it allowed me to reflect not only on the nonsense of these investigations but also to explore and reflect on old age and what happens to people inside these places. From the detective we got this specific nursing home and realized this was the case we wanted to portrait.

**How many hours of material did you collect?**

300 hours of material in addition to the detective's spy equipment material were collected. Documentary is often a trade that is more about what is taken than what is left. The 299 hours that one leaves out of the film is like the sculptor's trade, which has a huge rock (which in this case would be reality) and you have to chisel the stone away until the figure appears.

**When you're speaking with Dalal, you say you were already filming in the retirement home and they knew you'd be focusing on a new resident. How were you able to film in the retirement home? Was anything off-limits?**

We spent a long time thinking about how to film this documentary. The production team got filming authorization inside the nursing home, saying that we wanted to make a documentary about the elderly and shoot absolutely everything that happened there -- the good and the bad with staff and residents. We also said that if a new resident arrived, we would be interested in focusing on them. They didn't know it was a spy movie, but we would record and show everything that happened there, and they were willing. We might think that things stopped happening because our camera was there, or that people behaved differently because we were there, but we were filming for 3 months. During all that time employees could "hide" a couple of weeks in front of the camera, but not for so long. The camera never lies! Besides, while the mole agent was living there, he was still undercover while our crew was leaving, and he saw the same as our camera.

**As documentary filmmakers, you have to observe your subjects and their surroundings. Did any of the residents or employees of the retirement home raise questions about your presence? Was your crew any bigger than who we saw in the detective's office?**

When making documentaries in which you observe, you live a long time in those spaces, and your first job is getting to know people, explaining to them how you're going to film, and telling them what you plan to do. We did that with all the workers and residents at the nursing home, and we cleared up any of their doubts beforehand. We started recording two weeks before Sergio entered, so people already knew us and understood what we were doing when the mole agent entered. Filming 3 months inside, they got used to the camera. After the first few weeks, one becomes part of the place. As the residents got used to the camera's presence, we learned the best methods to film them.

As it is necessary to be a little invasive, we had a smaller, 4-person crew -- anything larger would make it impossible for the residents to get used to. When the camera and crew left, they missed us, and we missed them!

**Can you describe your shooting technique / strategy for The Mole Agent? Was your crew shooting the whole time or did you use other methods?**

We accompanied Sergio with the camera most of the time -- we didn't film all the time and the camera was not constantly recording, but instead we waited for reality to unfold itself in front of us, and then we would record it. We mainly focused on the relationships that Sergio was establishing and what was going to happen to him because it was a reality that we had to know through his eyes, not ours. We filmed for 5 days a week from 12 pm to 8 pm, then the mole agent was left alone, and whatever he saw, he recorded it with his spy cameras.

It is important to say that I feel that my methods as a documentary filmmaker are similar to Romulo's. Somehow, the documentary's work resembles that of the private detective. When making a documentary, I first investigate how the characters and their environment behave. Trusting that reality is cyclical and repeats itself, I discover the behavioral patterns to imagine what could happen during filming and plan how to adapt. When I met Romulo, despite being a former policeman, I saw him as more like a sociologist. His work methodology was similar to my processes as a documentary filmmaker: he does field observation and follow-ups to find what he needs. He spends the day waiting to find his evidence, and I wait to have my scenes. Our trade is based on waiting. Romulo also has a character, his Infiltrated Mole, and awaits his results. In this project, we both share this character, The Agent, who experiences another life. The detective and the documentary filmmaker watch him live and figure out the story through his journey.

**What was the most challenging part of filming in a retirement home?**

Knowing how to film without too much eagerness. In the everyday of these places, there aren't always big things happening. Rather, the documentary is built of small moments. Then, there are other times of waiting where three days pass and we only film a simple conversation. Routines are established and we become accustomed to certain times of the day that go by more slowly -- life and filming are lived in another rhythm. We needed to be patient. The retirement home was also a space where we were surrounded by love and pain. We shared moments with many people who died and were already part of our lives, and that becomes a shared experience when making documentaries. The lives of others become our own lives; the pains of those spaces become our own pains.

### **Why was Sergio right for the job?**

Sergio was the right for the job because he had good health, good memory, and because he wanted to take the job, and there was no one to stop him. He had recently been widowed, and was looking for what to do next, how to break out of his routine and spark new joy. That was important to the detective -- that his mole did not regret taking the job or want to leave prematurely. He needed someone excited about the work.

As the director, I feel Sergio was right for the job because he was open to the experience, and he's an empathetic man. He was at a point in his life where he questioned his old age and what was next for him. He was open to this adventure and how fresh and sharp the work made him feel.

### **There's such a sweet espionage narrative throughout the film, was there a moment when you and / or Sergio were worried about being discovered? Were you ever worried Sergio would be found out when he would talk to Romulo on speaker phone out in the open?**

I was more conscious than Sergio that he could be found out. He forgot that he could be discovered many times. He was more concerned with obtaining and communicating the information to the detective than how to obtain it, unaware of whether he was being careless. In those situations, he was a very bad spy. I was worried about his lack of discretion when talking on the phone and sometimes directly asking for information from the nurses. I was constantly nervous, much more than he was. There's a scene in the movie where he asks a nurse about the medicine, tells Romulo what he did, and the detective yells at him. When he did that, I thought it was over! Luckily, they never discovered him.

### **There are wonderful moments of comedy throughout the film, what sticks out to you the most?**

Humor is based on the premise of contrast, and it is what I like most about the humor of the film. The premise of the film is a comedy! Sergio is the anti-spy, an old man who has to be a detective, and doesn't take to it immediately. This is a space where there are supposedly serious crimes to investigate, but in reality, it is a lovely nursing home. Apart from that, for me the characters were also a nice surprise, like Marta. I laughed at her scenes with Sergio, where it is almost the theater of the absurd!

### **What do you hope audiences take away and learn from *The Mole Agent*?**

I would like people who watch this movie to leave the movie theater wanting to call their parents or grandparents. It is an invitation to look within yourself and ask what you can do better.

### **What did Sergio teach you?**

Sergio teaches you not to judge, to be open to experiences, to create your own challenges, and not to set limits, even when you are 85 years old. He is willing to live a new life, meet new people, and listen. Sergio taught me to be open to experience without prejudice.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **MAITE ALBERDI - Director**

Maite Alberdi studied Film and Aesthetics at the Universidad Católica de Chile. She is a writer-director who has developed a highly particular style that achieves an intimate portrayal of the characters she works with through everyday stories in small-scale worlds.

Alberdi has written and directed three documentary feature films (*The Grown-Ups*, *Tea Time*, and *The Lifeguard*) and three documentary short films ("I'm Not from Here," "The Hairdressers," and "The Trapeze Artists").

In 2011, Alberdi premiered at IDFA her first and noted feature film, *The Lifeguard*. Through Micromundo, her production company, she directed her film *Tea Time* (funded by: ITVS, Berta Fund, Tribeca Film Institute, FFA, CORFO), which premiered at IDFA 2014, broadcasted during POV season in 2015. *Tea Time* has received the following awards: AWJF-EDA Best Female-Directed Documentary IDFA, and Best Documentary Award at: Miami International Film Festival, EIDF-EBS Korea, DocsBarcelona, FICCI Cartagena, FICG Guadalajara, SANFIC Santiago, among others. In 2016, Alberdi premiered her short film "I'm Not from Here," which won Best Short Film at Visions Du Reel 2016 and was given the Krakow Short Film Nomination for The European Film Awards

2016. In November 2016 she premiered her film *The Grown-Ups* in the official Feature Length Documentary Competition at IDFA.

Alberdi works as a documentary teacher at the Universidad Católica de Chile, and is co-writer of the book *Teorías del cine documental en Chile: 1957-1973*, or *Documentary Film Theories in Chile: 1957-1973*.

### **MARCELA SANTIBÁÑEZ - Producer**

Marcela Santibáñez is a Fulbright Scholar who studied film at the Universidad Católica de Chile. In the year 2014, she acquired her MFA in Film Producing at UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television.

Santibáñez created and produced the Television Show *Chile Suena*, which premiered on national TV in 2014 and was winner of the Chilean National TV Fund. She also worked in the marketing department at the distribution company "BF Distribution." From 2012-2014 Santibáñez resided in Los Angeles. During her stay, she interned at Participant Media and Tugg Inc., and was one of the producers of the Television Pilot *Doubleblind*, winner of the 2013 "Outstanding Student Program Television/New Media" Award. During her stay she also produced three short films, including "Age of the Moon," part of the upcoming James Franco omnibus, "Palo Alto: Killing Animals."

Upon her return to Chile, Santibáñez started working as Producer at Micromundo, director Maite Alberdi's production company. She was in charge of the Goya Awards campaign for the 2014 film *Tea Time*, and produced the documentary *Flow* from director Nicolás Molina, which premiered at Sheffield Doc Fest 2018. Since 2019, she has been the director of programming at FIDOCs, the Santiago International Documentary Film Festival, and is the producer of the upcoming feature *The Mole Agent*, which will premiere in the World Documentary Competition at The Sundance Film Festival 2020

### **JULIE GOLDMAN - Executive Producer**

Julie Goldman is an Oscar-nominated and Emmy Award-winning producer and executive producer of documentary features and series. She produced 2019 Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner and Oscar-shortlisted *One Child Nation*, released by Amazon Studios, and *Ringside*, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and won the Silver Hugo Award at the Chicago International Film Festival. She produced Oscar-nominated, Emmy Award winning films *Life, Animated* and *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail*, and Oscar-shortlisted films *God Loves Uganda*, *3 ½ Minutes*, *Ten Bullets*, *Buck and Sergio*, and executive produced Oscar shortlisted films *Weiner*, *Art and Craft*, and *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*. Julie also produced and executive produced Emmy Award-winning films *The Music of Strangers*, *Solitary*, *Best of Enemies*, the Emmy-nominated

series *Humans of New York*, and the Showtime series *Murder in the Bayou*. Julie received the Amazon Studios Sundance Institute Producer's Award and the Cinereach Producer's Award.

#### **CHRISTOPHER CLEMENTS - Executive Producer**

Christopher Clements is an Emmy Award-winning and Peabody Award-winning producer and partner at Motto Pictures. He produced Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner and Oscar-shortlisted *One Child Nation*, which was released by Amazon Studios, and *Ringside*, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and won the Silver Hugo Award at the Chicago International Film Festival. Chris executive produced Steve James' Emmy Award-winning and Oscar-nominated *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail*, *Weiner*, which won the U.S. Documentary Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and was shortlisted for the 2017 Academy Award, two Sundance 2018 premieres, *Inventing Tomorrow* and *The Cleaners*, and the Showtime series *Murder in the Bayou*. Chris co-produced *Life, Animated*, which was nominated for the 2017 Best Documentary Feature Academy Award and won three Emmys, including the award for Best Documentary in 2018. Christopher is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), the Producers Guild of America (PGA), British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), and the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS).

#### **CAROLYN HEPBURN - Executive Producer**

Carolyn Hepburn is an Emmy winning producer who joined Motto Pictures in 2010. She produced Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner and Oscar-shortlisted *One Child Nation*, which was released by Amazon Studios, and executive produced *Ringside*, which had its world premiere at the Berlin Film Festival and won the Silver Hugo Award at the Chicago International Film Festival. She produced the Emmy nominated and Oscar shortlisted *3 1/2 Minutes, Ten Bullets, Take Your Pills*, which premiered at SXSW and was acquired by Netflix, and *Take Back the Harbor*, which premiered on Discovery. She co-produced *Life, Animated*, which was nominated for the 2017 Best Documentary Feature Academy Award and won three Emmys, including the award for Best Documentary in 2018. She executive produced *Charm City*, shortlisted for the 2019 Academy Award, *Love, Gilda*, the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival Opening Night Film, *Weiner*, shortlisted for the 2017 Academy Award, *Art and Craft*, Emmy nominated and shortlisted for the 2015 Academy Award, and the new Showtime series *Murder in the Bayou*. Carolyn is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), the Producers Guild of America (PGA), British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), and the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS).

### **CREDITS**