

## The Echo [12A]

2023 Mexico/Germany 102 mins

UK released	<b>26 July 2024</b>
Director	<b>Tatiana Huezo</b>
Screenplay	<b>Tatiana Huezo</b>
Cinematography	<b>Ernesto Pardo</b>
Music	<b>Leonardo Heiblum ; Jacobo Lieberman</b>
Cast	<b>(As themselves) Montserrat Hernandez ; María de los Ángeles Pacheco Tapia ; Luz María Vázquez González</b>

Mexican-Salvadorian director Tatiana Huezo follows up on her *Un Certain Regard* Special Mention-winning *Prayers for the Stolen* with *The Echo*, another film about young girls growing up in difficult circumstances in a Mexican village. But this time around, it is an observational documentary, the girls are younger, and the setting is too remote for the drug cartels to care. Instead, the filmmaker immerses us in life in El Eco, where a large family is fighting the changing climate and interpersonal strife.

At first, we think our hero will be the teenage girl Montse, apparently the second-oldest child of the mother, whose name we never catch, and the father whom we barely see in the film. She is entrusted with caring for the elderly grandmother, but once the grandma dies, Montse slowly falls out of Huezo's focus, only to return with one of the picture's rare dramatic moments.

Meanwhile, we follow some younger kids and mostly stay with the girls. They all have to grow up too soon, as there are sheep, geese and corn to be taken care of. They also go to school, which provides for some intimate observations, such as the lovely little Paz Ma holding a "class" for her dolls and stuffed toys.

There are no time markers in the film, but we are clearly witnessing several seasons. When torrential rain hits the village, they have to save a sheep from

drowning and walk in knee-deep mud. When a sudden frost strikes, their corn is destroyed, and they go off gathering wood to warm themselves up. But the point of the film is not what is happening, but rather what is. Huezo is a talented and experienced filmmaker who is able to extract the essence from the smallest things. The geographical setting is harsh but also beautiful, and the changing seasons provide for an excellent backdrop for DoP Ernesto Pardo's intense cinematography. It is at its most effective, however, when his camera comes inside the house and picks up on small moments, or focuses on skin or eyes. Lena Esquenazi's sound design, both expansive and detailed, is more dominant than Leonardo Heiblum and Jacobo Lieberman's sparse score, in which strings quietly squeak and squeal, rather than sing. Due to its setting, decidedly unexciting proceedings and the director's aesthetics, it feels like a "slow cinema" film, but the editing by Huezo and Lucrecia Gutiérrez is in fact quite fast. We often get just the results of the protagonists' decisions through elliptical storytelling, even if the key narrative points are developed sparingly but clearly. A small event becomes big, and the viewer often finds themselves unexpectedly moved.

True to its title, *The Echo* is about the background, about leftovers, and things left unsaid and never done. It could literally refer to echoes of parenting or growing up, but there is much more than that. In this remote Mexican village, myths are still alive, and it's not just animals but also plants that have souls. It is a beautiful film that manages to be simultaneously restrained and immersive, poetic and earthy.

**Vladan Petkovic**, *Cineuropa*, 17 February 2023 (abridged)

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### Coming soon....

Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September: *The Conversation* (12A)

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September: *Ama Gloria* (12)

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