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From Mayflower Hill to a Global Stage: 'The Maribor Uprisings', a documentary by Maple Razsa and Milton Guillén '15, is attracting international audiences and acclaim

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FROM MAYFLOWER HILL TO A GLOBAL STAGE

The Maribor Uprisings, a documentary by Maple Razsa and Milton Guillén '15, is attracting international audiences and acclaim

By David McKay Wilson '76

At the U.S. premier of their film *The Maribor Uprisings*, Milton Guillén '15 and Maple Razsa, associate professor of global studies, stood before an audience of 125 in an outdoor courtyard in downtown Brooklyn, inviting them to participate in that evening's showing.

The enthusiastic filmgoers did just that—just as crowds have done at film festivals in Copenhagen, Toronto, Cape Town, Maribor (the city in Slovenia where the protests took place), and other locations around the world.

“It’s a story about collective protest movements and how to respond to repression by the police,” said Razsa, whose scholarly research has focused on political activism in Eastern Europe since the fall of the Soviet Union. “It’s something the audience has to grapple with, too.”

Audiences have responded and documentary juries have, too, inviting the Colby pair to do more screenings, including a festival in South Korea in September. The documentary drew praise at leading film festivals in Denmark, Romania, South Africa, and Canada. Recently, *Maribor Uprisings* notched a major national award as it was named best documentary feature by the Society for Visual Anthropology.

In New York, organizers of Rooftops Films festival proclaimed *The Maribor Uprisings* “an important piece of documentary filmmaking—one that manages to be informative, evocative and always engaging.”

And it all started as a project on Mayflower Hill.



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—Associate Professor
of Global Studies
Maple Razsa

Opposite, Associate Professor of Global Studies Maple Razsa, right, and Milton Guillén '15 take questions from the audience at a showing of their film, The Maribor Uprisings, at Rooftops Films festival in New York in June.

The film's allure is that the audience, at crucial points during the film, collectively decides how the drama will unfold. Will the protestors in Maribor, Slovenia, confront the riot police in Freedom Square, or will they hang back? Do they want to follow the protestors rolling a hay bale into the maelstrom? Will the audience learn the background of one of the rock-throwing demonstrators?

"It's a new form of film—a participatory documentary, where the audience makes decisions," Razsa said.

The partnership began when Guillén was a student majoring in anthropology and Razsa his honors thesis advisor. Guillén, a native of Nicaragua, began collaborating with Razsa during his junior year when the tech-savvy student helped the professor develop an online version of his project *Bastards of Utopia* about leftist radicals in Croatia.

Their relationship deepened when Guillén did an independent study in film. Then they traveled together to Slovenia during the summer between Guillén's junior and senior year to research the Maribor protests. Guillén went back during Jan Plan senior year and did an artist residency.

"On a personal level, Maple was always there for me," said Guillén, who, after working in film production in New York City, returned to Colby in 2016 as a photographer and video journalist. "Intellectually, he has showed me such trust, and the confidence to realize what I could bring to his project from a cinematic point of view."

Razsa said he was immediately impressed by Guillén's skills in the digital realm as well as his ability to connect with his subjects in the field.

"As an anthropologist, you don't casually invite someone to your field site; it's sensitive," Razsa said. "Milton convinced me of his maturity, and I introduced

him to my activist collaborators there. Though he was relatively young, he built really good relationships, and from his thesis project we decided to work together on something much more ambitious."

That project was *The Maribor Uprisings*, which melds on-scene footage of the protests with exploration of the event and its aftermath. "Milton brought great energy and devotion to the project," Razsa said. "He shot the vast majority of the interviews and city portraiture. He helped organize and edit the immense amount of footage we had, and he came up with creative ideas about the story lines."

In Brooklyn in June the audience voted overwhelmingly to see the 2012 confrontation between the demonstrators and the police, which was filmed by Slovenians in the streets during the uprising. Viewers in the Brooklyn audience also raised their hands to learn more about one of the protestors.

The documentary, edited by renowned film editor Mary Lampson, of Winthrop, Maine, reveals the street battles between rock-throwing protestors and the police in riot gear, firing canisters of tear gas to disperse the demonstration.

Over its numerous showings, certain trends have emerged, Razsa and Guillén say. The audiences in most showings have opted for confrontation. Some Black Lives Matter activists have backed the option to retreat and regroup, suspecting (correctly, in the Maribor case) that a confrontation with police will not end well for protestors.

For Guillén making the film was a chance to use his scholarship for a project in which he believed. "Film is a way to animate anthropology," he said. "It is a way for me to be an active ethnographer by using cinema."