Questioning Cinema

Waste Land

Director: Lucy Walker
Co-Directors: Karen Harley, João Jardim
Director of Photography: Dudu Miranga
Editor: Pedro Kos
Music: Moby
Produced by: Angus Aynsley
2010
99 min.

Vik Muniz: photographer and mixed media artist

Catadores:

Tião
(Sebastiao Carlos dos Santos)

Zumbi
(Jose Carlos da Silva Bala Lopes)

Suelem
(Suelem Pereira Dias)

Isis
(Isis Rodrigues Garros)

Irma
(Leide Laurentina da Silva)

Valter
(Valter dos Santos)

Magna
(Magna de Franca Santos)

Synopsis:
Follows Brooklyn-based artist Vik Muniz as he returns to his native Brazil to transform lives of trash pickers at the world's largest garbage dump, Jardim Gramacho, located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. These “catadores” harvest items to sell, reuse, or recycle. Muniz selected several catadores as subjects of his art. Muniz’s collaboration with these inspiring characters as they recreate photographic images of themselves out of garbage reveals both the dignity and despair of the catadores as they begin to re-imagine their lives. The documentary film team have great access to the entire process and “offer stirring evidence of the transformative power of art and the alchemy of the human spirit.”

Co-Sponsored by VCU Department of Photography and Film
Research Guide: [http://guides.library.vcu.edu/questioning_cinema](http://guides.library.vcu.edu/questioning_cinema)

Discussion Leaders:
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- Jesse Goldstein, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Sociology
- Michael Lease, Institute for Contemporary Art Interim Director of Facilities, Installation, and Exhibition Design and adjunct faculty, VCU Photography and Film
- Erin Stanforth, VCU Director of Sustainability
- Nell Chenault, Film and Performing Arts Research Librarian
- Martha Roseberry, Science and Engineering Research Librarian

Film Facts:

At the time of the film:
- Jardim Gramacho, “Gramacho Gardens,” was established in 1970. A squatter community of over 20,000 people developed around it.
- Jardim Gramacho received more trash daily than any other landfill in the world. 7,000 tons of garbage daily. 70% of Rio de Janeiro area trash went there.
- 3,000-5,000 people lived in the landfill. Around 15,000 people supported themselves with work related to the landfill and its recyclable materials. Some of the pickers Muniz met were third-generation catadores.
- The work of the catadores was often dangerous. They received no benefits. They were victims of dengue fever, respiratory ailments, and infections. Medical waste from all the hospitals in the area were discarded at the landfill. The landfill was unstable and filled with glass. Before filming, director Lucy Walker got so many vaccinations she could barely move her arm.
- Over a decade ago, it was discovered that Guanabara Bay was not safe because of contaminants leaching from the landfill. The city announced the landfill’s closing many times, but did not do so until 2012.
- When the film was nominated for Best Documentary Feature Oscar, Tião attended the Academy Awards as director Lucy Walker’s date.
- With Tião’s leadership, the Association of Recycling Pickers of Jardim Gramacho (ACAMJG) has created a “decentralized system of recycling collection in neighboring municipalities; the creation of a recycling center, enabling catadores to be contracted for their services, the creation of a medical clinic, and the construction of a daycare center and skills training center. ACAMJG leads a movement for greater professional recognition for the catador and support from the government and has joined with other movements across South America to hold the first international conference of catadores in São Paulo in November 2009.’
- There are 300 wells in Jardim Gramacho to extract methane generated by the trash. About 75 million cubic meters of methane gas will be collected over the next 15 years. Then, the landfill will be transformed into a park. A portion of methane sales will be used to rehabilitate the favelas around the landfill.
- Catadores participated as torch bearer relay and provided recycling services for the 2016 Olympics. Tião was one of the torch bearers for Olympics 2012.