

बाटो

BAATO



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

running time: 81 minutes

aspect ratio: 1.85:1

original format: HD

screening formats: DCP, Quicktime (ProRes 422), BluRay

original languages: Lhomi, Nepali, Nawa

subtitles: English

CREDITS

written & directed by

Kate Stryker & Lucas Millard

produced by

Lucas Millard

executive producer

Kesang Tseten

edited by

Eric Metzgar

camera & sound

Lucas Millard & Kate Stryker

original score composed by

Craig Chin

additional music by

Matthew Robert Cooper

sound design & foley

Andrey Netboy

additional editing by

Susan Peehl

re-recording mixer

Roger Stauss

this film was made possible through the support of

Bertha Foundation Film Fund

IFP Documentary Completion Labs

Fulbright Program Grant

SYNOPSIS

Mikma and her family collect medicinal herbs around their home nestled in the Himalaya of northeastern Nepal, before making an annual 300-kilometer migration, partly on foot and partly by ramshackle vehicle, to urban markets in the lowlands. The extension of the first road to (and through) their off-the-beaten-path village is fitfully underway, promising less walking and perhaps a less arduous life in some distant future. Road engineers take bribes to avoid destroying homes, while laborers produce gravel — breaking individual stones by hand with hammers. The herb collectors plot to avoid shakedowns by police and bus operators as they miraculously make their way to market.

This observant film is a deep dive into a way of life that is in the midst of a slow and chaotic, yet inexorable transition.

The stories presented in *Baato* (n. [Nepali] 1. path, trail 2. way 3. road) follow the route of a partially complete trans-national highway project that promises to transform this roadless Himalayan valley permanently, opening up a direct transport route between China & India. With the new road will come new challenges, new opportunities, and ultimately a new way of being to those who live along its path.

It serves as a document of a time and place - one that details life in the Himalayas before a new highway forever transforms this mountainous landscape.

The documentary is a visual feast that glimpses the effects of development and globalization from the perspective of those affected most directly – it is a journey through the heart of a changing Nepal.



CO-DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

On Roads

For better or worse, the world is changing before our eyes. These changes are becoming sharply defined in places that have historically been difficult to access. As technological advances carry us faster and faster towards a more connected and global future, sometimes a little perspective is needed to show us what we may be sacrificing in the face of progress. Our main goal is to root the audience in the world of the Nepalis that populate the film, providing an intimate and immersive character-driven narrative that points towards the larger issues at hand. We were motivated by our desire to give agency to the people represented in the film, as the voices of those that are directly affected by large scale infrastructure projects in the developing world largely go unheard.

This film preserves a piece of history in an area that is undergoing a massive sea-change, and will serve as a document of what life was like in eastern Nepal before the completion of the Koshi Highway. Co-director and producer Lucas Millard has a relationship with Nepal that has spanned three decades - beginning in the mid 1990's with a year abroad program as an anthropology student. When Millard revisited the area of his original college research in 2013 with partner Kate Stryker, new roads had already begun to become established in what was previously a roadless region, and with them many changes were already underfoot. This predicament became the seed that grew into 'Baato.' The longitudinal perspective that Lucas brings to this project, coupled with his familiarity with Nepali - the lingua franca of the country - granted the filmmakers direct access to the people and stories shared in this film. This is Kate's second documentary film in Nepal; her first project told the story of a young street artist in Kathmandu.

The inspiration for this feature documentary comes from the deep respect for a one-of-a-kind place that is undergoing a rapid transformation due to the expansion of this road network.

On Filming with Mikma

When we learned that villagers from Chyamtang (a village along the route of the coming highway that is close to the northern border of Nepal) spend two months of the year migrating south to sell medicinal plants, we knew that this was an important story to tell in our film. The nature of this migration, a tradition that has existed since the ancestors of the villagers first settled in the area from Tibet, is sure to be impacted by the opening of the highway. In the past, villagers walked in large groups for over a week to reach urban centers in the lowlands in order to sell these plants. With the coming roads, it is a real question as to whether or not this annual migration will continue.

We are not sure if we found Mikma or Mikma found us. We first encountered her during a harvest 'party' (which is the word that villagers use to describe the communal activity of reaping the grain they grow on terraced fields) and she immediately invited us to join her on her migration south later that winter. When we returned to Chyamtang months later, as villagers were readying to leave, it became apparent that her offer was sincere. Not long after, once we began filming Mikma, it dawned on us what an incredibly strong presence that she was. It was clear from the outset that Mikma was the leader of the group, which was more luck than intentional 'casting' on our part. Traveling with her and the group across hundreds of miles was both exhausting and invigorating. Incredibly strong in both character and physical strength, Mikma exuded a confidence and a good nature that easily translated to the screen. Mikma, like most others in her village, exhibited a strong sense of being that is surely connected to an even stronger sense place. As the ground literally shifts under her feet, it is hard not to wonder if this skill set will help her survive in the new world that is coming.

On Observational Cinema

Utilizing our backgrounds in cinematography, photography, and anthropology we aim to create a work that is visually compelling and emotionally engaging, as well intellectually fulfilling - by taking full advantage of the collaborative nature of filmmaking. We are equally influenced by the body of work of Frederick Wiseman (Aspen, In Jackson Heights), and the films of the late Michael Glawogger (Workingman's Death), as well as the documentaries coming out of the Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab (Sweetgrass, Manakamana), and the pioneers of the Direct Cinema movement in the US during the 1950's and 1960's (Salesman, Primary, Gimme Shelter).

Our aim is to present the issues facing this region in an open-ended way, providing a space for thought and reflection. While filming, we tried to minimize any attention placed on us as filmmakers in order to put the focus directly on the protagonists as they navigate their world. Of course, all of this is not to deny that filmmaking (and photography), is necessarily a relationship between the subject and the filmmaker - those in front of the camera will necessarily be influenced by those behind the camera, and vice versa. Some refer to this as a dance. We chose an equally intimate endeavor - a long walk.

Our observational camerawork is complemented by the use of environmental sounds recorded during filming that root the tone of the film - attention to the natural soundscapes help create a pace that mimics the sense of time inherent in the setting.



Lucas Millard | producer, co-director

Lucas Millard is an award-winning filmmaker and cinematographer based out of New York. Among the feature films Lucas has lensed are *The Happy Poet* (Venice Biennale 2010), *Kiki* (Sundance 2016), and *Well Groomed* (SXSW 2019). His work has aired on HBO, Showtime, Sundance Channel, BET, PBS, France5 and RSI (SwissTV). With a MFA in film production from the University of Texas at Austin, Millard teaches part time at Ramapo College and occasionally leads workshops in cinematography and filmmaking. Additionally, he produces documentary and animated content for clients that include the United Nations and TED-Ed. He lives in the Hudson Valley with his wife, daughter and two chickens, where he programs content for the Beacon Film Society.

**Kate Stryker | co-director**

Kate Stryker is interested in stories that explore the intersection of people and their natural and built environments. She has directed two short documentary portraits: *Roadside Gospel* (deadCenter 2007) and *Ananda* (Visionquest 2014, KIMFF 2014). *Baato* is her first feature film. By day, Stryker works as a research planner investigating topics of community development, housing, infrastructure, and sustainability. She holds a master's degree in education from NYU and a master's of urban planning from Hunter College.

Kesang Tseten | executive producer

Kesang Tseten's documentaries have been regularly screened in Nepal and in international film festivals such as the International Documentary Film Festival of Amsterdam, Leipzig International Documentary Festival, Yamagata, Thessaloniki, Krakow, Viennale, the Margaret Mead Film festival. *We Homes Chaps*, *On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath*, *We Corner People*, *Who will be a Gurkha* and his trilogy of films on Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf have won wide recognition. His most recent films are *The Riyalists* (2018/19) - a follow-up to his 2008 film *In Search of the Riyal* about Nepali migrant labor in the middle east, *Trembling Mountain* (2016) - about earthquake survivors of Langtang rebuilding their destroyed village, and *Hospital* (2016) - about a rural state-run hospital in one of Nepal's poorest districts. Tseten has been recipient of grants from Busan, IDFA, and the Sundance Institute for his films. He wrote the original screenplay for the feature *Mukundo* (English title: *Mask of Desire*), which was Nepal's entry to the Academy Awards in 2001, and *Karma*. Before filmmaking Tseten wrote, edited, and was associate editor of *Himal Magazine*. He is a graduate of Dr. Graham's School in India and Amherst College and Columbia University in the US.

Eric Daniel Metzgar | editor

Eric Daniel Metzgar is an Emmy Award winning filmmaker and Sundance Documentary Lab Fellow. He directed, shot and edited *Reporter* about New York Times journalist Nick Kristof, which premiered at Sundance, aired on HBO, and was nominated for an Emmy Award. He also directed, shot and edited *Life. Support. Music.*, which was broadcast on POV, and *The Chances of the World Changing*, which was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award and broadcast on POV. Metzgar also edited and produced *Crime + Punishment* (Emmy Winner, Sundance, Hulu), and edited *Give Up Tomorrow* (Emmy nominated, POV) and *Almost Sunrise* (Emmy nominated, POV).

Craig Chin | composer

Errant Space is a project of composer/sound artist Craig Chin. Its primary goal is the sonic manipulation of time and space through sound. He has provided soundtracks for films and games, as well as live scores for theatre and dance. Chin has also produced the monthly Errant Space Podcast for over four years, and curates the Second Wednesdays: Electronic/Experimental Music night at Quinn's in Beacon, NY.

Matthew Robert Cooper | additional music

Born in Tennessee and raised in Louisville, KY, Matthew Robert Cooper relocated to the Pacific NW and has since spent much of the past two decades holed up in his house transforming the vibrations in his brain into breathtaking compositions that range from fragile piano ballads to sprawling waves of elegant noise. In addition to his solo works (primarily for film and TV), he records as Eluvium, Martin Eden, and alongside Mark T. Smith (Explosions In The Sky) in the duo, Inventions. His other interests include science, nature, music, books, film, wine, and tea.



AWARDS

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