



La Corona

La Corona is a fascinating short documentary that explores the lives of female contestants in a Colombian prison beauty pageant.

Five women, representing each cell block, compete to be crowned queen. There is no reward, no press tour, no fame, merely a plastic tiara and the admiration of your cellmates.

The first thing one forgets when watching a documentary like this is that these women are in prison for having committed serious crimes. The felonies are introduced after the women, so we are surprised each time to find that between these women are crimes of robbery, homicide and guerrilla activity, carrying sentences of up to 13 years.

The story plays out beautifully as the entire women's prison is united for these few days of pageantry. The contestants get to wear evening dresses, have hair and make-up stylists and keep themselves busy. The futility of life behind bars is so perfectly expressed in the interviews conducted with the women - all they want is something to take their minds off where they are.

It is simple to forget the gift of freedom. The ability to open a door on your own and walk around in fresh air. These points are emphasised throughout La Corona - these women have little to live for and the pageant gives them meaning.

It also becomes hard not to sympathise with the inmates - they are hardened criminals, but they suffer incomprehensibly by spending their lives in jail. It becomes easy to forget that they have been locked up for heinous crimes.

Directors Amanda Micheli and Isabel Vega manage to create a documentary that maintains interest from start to end, humanising the characters without ever being patronising. Their insight into the workings of a women's prison and the collaborative effort to bring about the pageant is extraordinary in detail and filming.

La Corona takes the simplistic, often mocked event of a beauty pageant and makes it a symbol of hope for women living without.

Posted by Sevana Ohandjanian
June 11, 2008 9:30 PM