

TOO MUCH GLITTER FOR SUCH A SMALL WORLD



KARLA BAÑUELOS

ASSUR BAÑUELOS

ROCÍO ARANDA

ÓLIVER SALAS

VALENTINA SALCEDO

and KANI LAPUERTA

NINÑXS

A FILM BY **KANI LAPUERTA** WITH **KARLA BAÑUELOS**

A PRODUCTION FROM LA SANDÍA DIGITAL IN COPRODUCTION SPARROWS ON ROOFTOPS BAMBÚ AUDIOVISUAL MARTFILMS ZDF IN COLLABORATION WITH ARTE IN COLLABORATION WITH IDFABERTHA FUND
SUNDANCE INSTITUTE PERSPECTIVE FUND MOIN HAMBURG FONDO SEMILLAS SCRIPT AND DIRECTION KANI LAPUERTA EDITION YURI AMARAL DIRECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY QUETZALLI MALAGÓN SOUND DESIGN ELÓISA DÍEZ
SOUND MIX SUPERHEARO AUDIO PRODUCTION SULEICA PINEDA RODRÍGUEZ COPRODUCTION ANKE PETERSEN DIRK MANTHEY MARTHA OROZCO IMPACT PRODUCTION IMPACTA CINE LA SANDÍA DIGITAL

Mexico/ Germany / 2025 / 88 mins
Language: Spanish

NINXS

A Film by Kani Lapuerta

**INTERNATIONAL
PUBLICIST**

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SYNOPSIS

In the magical town of Tepoztlán, Mexico, fifteen-year-old Karla intimately, and unabashedly, guides audiences in her journey for self-discovery, as she navigates the joys and uncertainties of adolescence, alongside society's gender prejudices. Through Karla's exploration of her transgender identity, the film presents an empowering, yet sweet coming-of-age story about self-expression, resilience, and the complexities of growing up, that is as specific as it is universal.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Butch. This is the insult that I heard the most throughout my childhood, for not being a girl "as God intended."

Twelve years later I began to work as an educator. At that moment I also began my gender transition (I am a trans * man), and as the changes became more evident due to the effects of hormonal therapy, the hilarious reactions and questions of the children towards my changing gender expression were more explicit.

Throughout my experience as an activist and visible trans person, I was contacted many times to be a character in documentaries on the subject. I got tired of always being standing in front of the cameras just for being a trans person, while cisgender people talked about our lives, and I decided to get the tool back and start to tell the stories of our community.

Eight years ago, when Karla was only 7 years old, I discovered a box with cars in her room. I asked her if she ever played with the cars. As she dressed and undressed her dolls without hardly looking at me, she replied that she did not play with them, that they seemed boring because cars cannot be combed. With this spontaneous and hilarious reaction, Karla somehow pushed me to tell her story. I realized that if there's anyone in the world who guards that freedom of gender expression, it is children.

This film therefore implies a transition for both Karla and myself as a director, since this is my first feature film. Throughout this process, both myself and the film proposal have been transformed throughout the years.

The relationship we have with Karla and her family has become a family one, sharing many diverse moments of our lives in front and without cameras. The moment of Karla's life we have portrayed in this film symbolizes a transition on several levels; both physically and emotionally, from childhood to adolescence and in the search and construction of one's own identity, trying to preserve that fantasy and cheerful gaze that is so lacking in documentary narratives about trans * characters.

I believe Niñxs is the kind of film I would have loved to watch as a teenager and hope it resonates with them.





DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Kani Lapuerta is a trans filmmaker and researcher with a Master's degree in Documentary Film from the University School of Cinematic Studies at UNAM (Mexico). His work navigates projects and spaces that challenge hegemonies around gender, sexuality and embodiment, opening new possibilities for imagining through audiovisual storytelling.

In 2023, he wrote and directed *La UNAM sin Límites*, a dissident miniseries produced by UNAM and Procine CDMX, which sheds light on the sex-gender dissent narratives within the university major University in Mexico.

In 2021, he premiered *La Fuga*, a short documentary exploring masculinity and the prison experience. The film debuted at the Morelia International Film Festival and earned awards at several international festivals.

Kani also conducts filmmaking workshops in institutions and cultural centers across Mexico and abroad, sharing his passion for audiovisual language as a tool for creation and transformation.

FILMOGRAPHY

2025: *Niñxs*, 82 min

2023: *La UNAM sin Límites*, 5 episodes, 85 min

2021: *La Fuga*, 18 min



ARTISTIC APPROACH

Karla and I have been crafting this film for more than half of her life. A film that has been finding its path and getting lost along the way.

At the end of the path, we found ourselves with an 8 year documentary archive that, from the perspective of time and language management, was being redefined and reinterpreted.

From the writing of the "imaginary script", working devices with the characters we detonated the staging built up collectively during the shooting. We aimed to capture these stagings from a "documentary perspective", making them more than evident.

Two narrative lines unfold in this film:

- The Film, which is built through a documentary record in an observational tone of Karla's daily life over an eight-year period, Karla's stagings and her TIKTOKS.
- The Metafilm, that is, the process by which Karla and I are building this film and weaving her life story into it. To construct the metadocumentary moments in which Karla imagines her story together with me, we use two main resources:

1. The conversations between Karla and Kani take place in the "cocoon", which is the "headquarters" of the film. Here Karla and I "step out" of the film to show herself as part of the construction of it alongside me. In this dreamy and corny space, where everything we imagine can come true, we are "cooking" the documentary, spicing up and giving some flavor to this film.

2. The voice-over that comes from this cocoon, and travels to the rest of the material is a fundamental resource that narrates and weaves this film, allowing us to listen to Karla and better understand her inner world. Karla's voice drives us between times and narrative planes. It accompanies us at times throughout the film with the aim of re-signifying the archive and dealing with memory and Karla's own narrative.

Something that lets us move from one narrative strand to another and generate an organic story is the sound treatment we developed in this film. Sound is an invisible seam that interweaves (atmospherically and narratively) the Film and the Metafilm. Not only through the voice-over, but also through the evocative possibilities of the sounds that make us move from one space to another, together with the music that is a key element to connect with Karla's imagery.

The assembly in this film represented a major challenge due to the diversity of formats we worked with. The moments of fantasy and this magical world that Karla presents to us through humor, have a faster pace, more attached to Karla's and her generation's language. Here we aimed to connect with the stress and confusion of whatever means growing up. With this proposal we always wanted to connect with a young audience, ranging from 12 to 17 years, who can identify with Karla, beyond their felt gender .

We believe that this film, not only because of its subject matter, but also because of its aesthetic and narrative proposal, can connect with an audience that, like Karla, is in transition to adulthood searching for their own identity.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Your film follows the life of Karla for almost nine years. When did you decide to shoot, particularly with Karla, for this film?

I think Karla was around six years old when we first met. At that time I was involved in some activism movements with trans families and trans kids. When I first met her it was mind blowing. She was so free in expressing herself and her parents were just on board with it that I thought it was a dream. They didn't care if she was in a dress, climbing up a tree or she was doing whatever. It was a very beautiful image seeing a kid without all these prejudices regarding gender, which in the end are coming from an adult mind. They are putting all the same labels on people. Also from my own experience, I was thinking about what was going to happen to this kid in the future, once it enters the real world. At that moment, everything was quite easy because of her very lovely family. For me it was exactly that: a story of a gender-nonconforming child with a really nice, really supportive family. One that was not judging or afraid to let their child express themselves. We need to tell these stories because we do not have a lot of them. Most stories are based on suffering and terrible non supportive families.

In the film we can see how you are asking Karla repeatedly and clearly if she wants to be part of your film. How did you approach her parents - were they immediately on board?

I approached them by telling them what I just told you: we need this kind of story. I think this is beautiful and I would have loved to see this when I was a kid. I think many kids at Karla's age and many families will be very grateful to see this kind of example. That is probably the way I convinced them, and also I didn't tell them I was going to be following them for nine years. It was not the initial plan, either way. But yes, we made sure that Karla understood what was going on, too. We took her word as the word of an adult. This is her life, she knows what she can decide for it. We wanted to challenge adultcentrism, in a creative and playful way. Even when she was still a child, she had a conscience of her life, of her image, of her words. Of course there is always this dilemma that she is a kid and she might change her mind in any way.

However, even adults are changing their minds all the time or regretting decisions, so I think kids must have the chance to decide, regret, learn and have a voice. So for me, it was very important during all of the process to be clear and transparent with all of them.

'Niñxs' is your first feature film. Was this idea of portraying a life over a certain amount of years a concrete idea for your debut, or was it more out of the blue?

Before I met Karla, I didn't know anything about making a film. I wanted to make a documentary, because I had been a character for documentaries in a couple of projects. I did really bloom from that, my mind also saw the effect whenever there were screenings of these films and the conversations afterwards. It was so powerful to me, I decided that I wanted to make a film myself, but I have not studied it. I had no idea about how to make a documentary. I only knew a couple of people who I asked for help, for the camera, for advice, and in the middle of all of this, I started to study filmmaking. I got to know more people involved in the cinema industry and documentary field and with that, the project started to grow as well as the creative proposal.

However, in the beginning my work on the film was more intuitive, more from the heart and from the idea of just making an important and necessary film. Of making a tool for families and making up a story that we haven't seen before, a supportive family with a happy kid, that can narrate herself and imagine other possibilities than only being trans. Also seeing that this idea of the traditional conflict of being trans comes from outside, from society, not from the family itself. That is the real problem. Not being trans, but how it is perceived in our society.

You created something quite unique because your approach to making this film is to some degree, let's say, traditional. On the other hand, the film begins with both you and Karla commenting on every aspect of the film. You even start out by questioning - and also explaining - the meaning of the credits. Where did this idea come from?

It was very important for me to have Karla's voice in the film. I didn't want to make a documentary only on a character, I wanted to make it more co-participative, co-directed and in general more collaborative than a traditional directed film. Not like, the director arrives at the house of the protagonist and so on. That was not the idea. So I proposed Karla to work this way. It was difficult because she was very young, and I think also with time we started to be able to work this way more properly. Every time we had a shooting, we were talking about what we were going to shoot, how she felt about this shooting. Everything that I wanted to do, I always talked with her before and we either agreed or disagreed, she always proposed scenes. If there was something she didn't want, we never did it. So I wanted to do it this way, that's the way I believe we have to do things in life in general, in a consensual and cooperative way.

We rarely listen to the kids and to the teenagers. It is so often the adults' words about how the young ones are living, I thought it was important to involve Karla in the film narrative. So we worked on this collaborative script. It was very fun to write it for both of us. Karla writes very well and I think you can feel in the film that it is her own words that are guiding the viewer.

The film blends observational documentary with elements of imagination and creativity, this way we were able to jump from a more traditional approach, that could connect with a type of viewer, and then let ourselves imagine the life we want to have throughout the film. Something that, in fact, has always been forbidden for trans people. It is time for trans people to create trans images and imaginations. For far too long, we have been imagined by cisgender people—in documentary filmmaking and across all fields.

It is mentioned briefly in the film in the form of a conversation between the two of you: how your relationship throughout the years grew and changed. You followed Karla for several years which eventually created this really tight bond between the two of you. How did your relationship develop throughout the years, and how was it today?

Well, the film is like a kind of reality that represents a very small part of life. I mean, our relationship was and is like a very daily one. For example, when Karla was still very young and her parents used to work the weekend in the city, she was staying with me all the weekends. We were playing and spending time together in an organic way. We build up a family relationship, not only with Karla, but with all the family. The film was always there, but it was about ten percent of our relationship, we have been through many things together. We went to watch movies, we went to the park, and the theme of the film was always there. As I said before, I had to remind her of the importance of the film, what we were doing, and also the way we wanted the film to be, because from the beginning until now, the idea we had of the film has completely changed. Still, the essence has always been the same, to be able to make a film where we both feel comfortable and proud. We wanted to make something smaller. We wanted to make it faster. Also, both Karla and I have been growing together with the film. Our relationship goes beyond that project, but the film has always been present at the same time.

You planned a fast project and it turned out to be such a long journey. After all these years, when did you decide to stop filming then?

There were various factors that made us stop. One of them being simply us being very tired, or that we did not have more money left. The film has not been supported by any Mexican funds, all the financial resources came from outside. As the film was growing, it was simply getting more expensive. Also, Karla and her parents got very tired at the end, I was very tired, so was the crew. All of the crew members are friends and I am so grateful for their help. It has been a lot of years full of work.

I think one of the biggest challenges, that may also have taken longer to develop in the shooting, was capturing Karla's inner world. In this sense, we used a blend of intimate, observational cinematography and moments of imaginative, dreamlike visuals to reflect her emotional journey. The framing and lighting choices often mirrored her sense of vulnerability and self-discovery, while the playful use of color and texture tried to draw her personality and the surroundings in Tepoztlán. We collaborated closely with Karla, allowing her to influence the visual language—whether through selecting specific locations or incorporating elements she found meaningful. This approach not only made the film more authentic but also emphasized the collaborative process, ensuring that the film feels like a co-created reflection of her journey. We felt that we were closing the shooting with all the cocoon scenes, with the cards and the conversation between Karla and me. It's the space where the magic takes place, where the film “materializes”. This was the last shooting, we decided to end as we began, with magic and complicity.

How much material did you end up having after finishing shooting?

A lot, around 300 hours. We had around 50 shooting days and all of Karla's Tik Toks. In the beginning we wanted to integrate them more to the film. However, they ended up not being so present in it, but we do consider them as very important material that brings us closer to Karla, mostly during the pandemic. So yes, the editing part, I think, was the most intense, but also the most playful.

And yet the film ends with one of Karla's Tik Tok videos. She is performing a mastectomy in this very campy - well, TikTok-y - way. How come you decided to let your film end this way?

It was more of a political, or even ethical decision. I think trans images have been built up by non-trans people, mostly. This film is a reclaim of the right of imagining our own lives. Karla and I had this game of how we wanted to imagine our lives. During all the documentation, writing the scenes, the proposal, it was always this thought of how do we want to imagine our lives, to reclaim that space. We have the right to imagine what we want, and we have the right to narrate our lives, too. So we always wanted to put this in the center, also in this field. This game of Karla imagining her future is also a reclamation of trans women having a future. A Mexican trans teenager imagining a future, when in Latin America the life expectancy of a trans woman is 35 years, is a radical exercise of imagination.

You playfully dismiss the traditional genre of documentary at several points in your film. The film industry, however, loves to put them in a box. If it comes that far: how would you define 'Niñxs'?

I've been fighting for it not to be solely a trans film and not to convert it into another story about 'the' trans teenager. I do think it is a coming of age film, I think it is a film that talks about adolescents and the many things that go on in this period of life that we all have been through. In this case, it happens to be a trans protagonist that hopefully everyone can identify with. I want to turn around the narrative. Trans people, we've always had to identify with cis-characters and try to somehow make up ourselves with this reference, even if our experiences were far too far from the characters in films. So the ultimate goal is that with this film, teenagers, cisgender, trans or whatever, can identify with Karla. Independently of her being trans.

Still, when it comes to the boxes they put documentaries in, I think it's more like a strategic thing. Maybe I don't like it very much, but for me, the important thing is to make this film go to as many places as possible. Together with In Huerta, we are working on this communication guide about how to talk and not to talk about the film and trans involved films in general. Anywhere the film will travel, it will be accompanied with this guide, and anyone that wants to talk about the film should read the guide before. It consists of recommendations for respect for trans creators and characters. We want to maintain the ambience of care and respect we have built up for the protagonists, their stories and the community.

And following up on some stylistic ideas throughout the film: you built this cocoon for Karla and you, we see the two of you surrounded by this purple background, representing a kind of safer space. Why this beautiful shade of purple? It is gorgeous.

I think it was Karla's idea. We came up with the idea of the cocoon as this metaphor of the space where the "transition" happens, also thinking about adolescence as a big transition in life. We probably ended up with the purple color because in some way the two of us are just very corny. Although I think I am probably more corny than she is. We also imagined and looked at it as this warm, cozy space. We needed this to make it more comfortable for us to share our thoughts. At the same time, the idea was to take us and the audience out from a realistic space and put us into our dream space. We have the chance to do it, so let's make it the way we want with the resources we have.

Final question: the Tarot cards-themed credit scene had a lasting impact on me. Can you tell a little bit about this process, about this creative decision, also because we met Tarot in a few parts of the film.

We wanted to integrate the Tarot because it was this positive, playish device for Karla and me to talk about things. But also Tarot has always been part of my life, and I see it as a playful way to try to understand and solve problems, obstacles or doubts that come up in this life we live in. So in the film, it was like a kind of game, a game of magic. We wanted to integrate it because it was a way to play also with Karla, to imagine also what the future will be, what the past was and the present is. To play with the times. To understand that the future is not always in front and that the past can sometimes take the lead, as many non-occidental cultures believe. When I got this particular tarot deck, I contacted the artist who made them - Charlie Claire Burgess, a non-binary person from the US - and I informed them that we want to use their cards in the film, that we loved the deck. Charlie's reaction was very positive and they agreed. So we started to have a kind of relationship with them, I believe it to be a trans-cross-border connection. At the end we came up with the idea to use the cards as the visual identity of the credits. We pitched it to Charlie and they agreed to illustrate the credit cards. They wanted us to send them pictures of everyone and it turned into this beautiful collaboration. Yes, it was like a dream that came true out of the goodwill of people. Charlie was very generous in helping out with all the illustrations, just like many other collaborators who have been part of Niñxs, leaving a touch of their magic imprinted on the film and in our lives. We thought it was a good way to close with this idea of a game filled with magic and the potential of imagination.



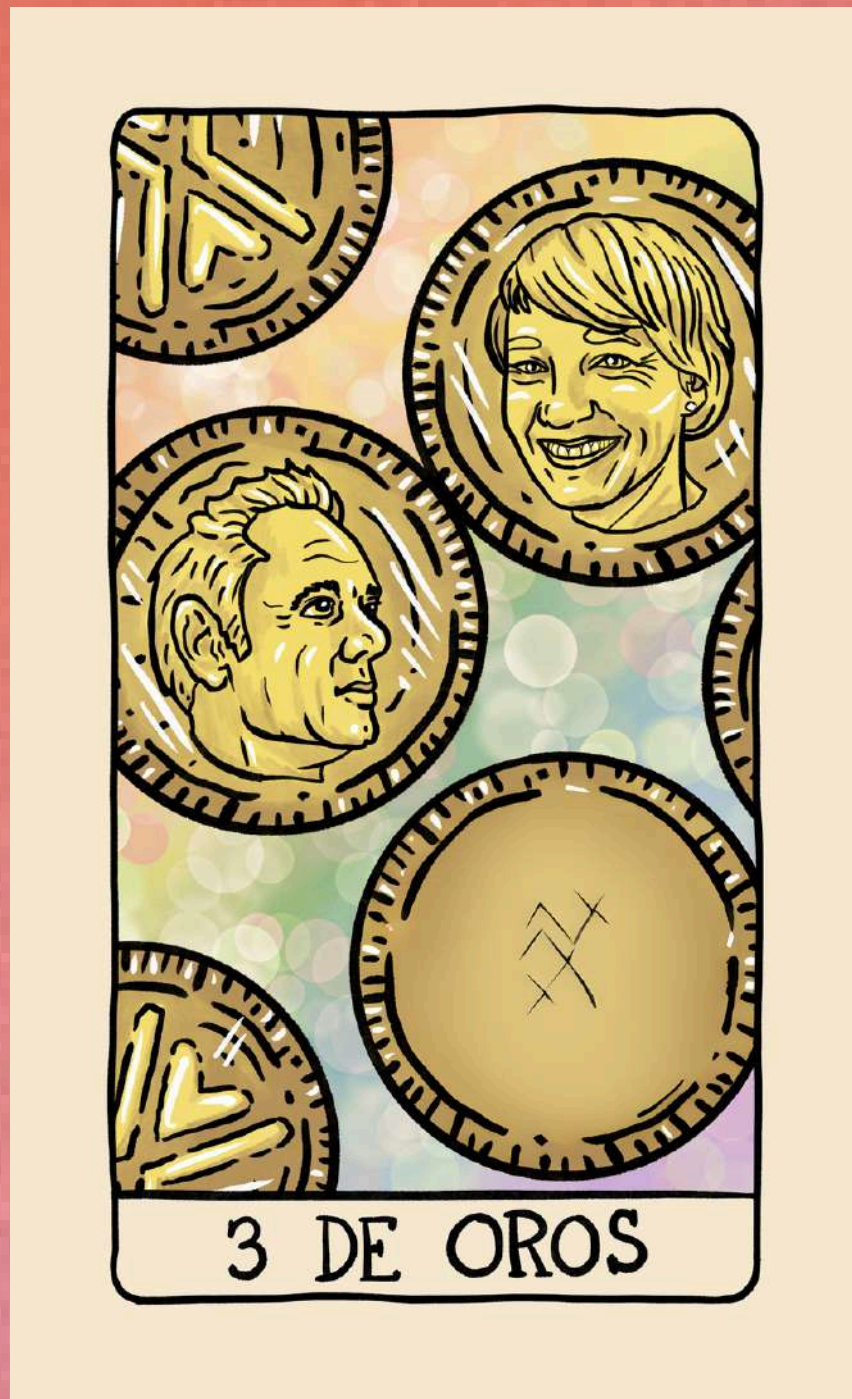
PRODUCER'S NOTES



Suleica Adriana Pineda Rodríguez

When Kani approached Sandía Digital with the proposal of Niñxs, it felt natural to me to say yes. His passion for the film, his conviction about the importance of telling the story of trans childhoods, and the need for role models convinced me to be part of this project from the very beginning. The way Kani proposes to narrate Karla's transition, understood as a universal process, deeply excites me. I'm confident that the film will not only attract young people but will also generate great empathy in the audience, regardless of their gender identity. The social impact it can have, especially in Mexico that is so often overlooked in these matters, is something I couldn't pass up.

Niñxs is a project that has grown and matured over time, thanks to the support of allies, workshops, and participation in key spaces like IDFA or Sundance. The closeness with Karla and her family, the unique setting of Tepoztlán, and the complicity between Kani and Karla make this project deeply intimate and authentic. Moreover, the film is complemented by an impact campaign that aims to change the narratives around trans childhoods. The fact that the film is receiving so much support from allies, including the trans community and activists, fills me with pride and reaffirms my commitment to this much-needed project.



Dirk Manthey & Anke Petersen

We've seen a few transgender stories recently, but never a coming of age story where you can feel the deep trusting relationship between the protagonist and the filmmaker, a filmmaker who follows his young protagonist for years to capture the journey of this metamorphosis. We believe Kani Lapuerta has a great potential as a screenwriter and director and he has been able to show his empathy, skills and talent in *Niñxs*.

With *Niñxs* as his documentary debut, Kani challenges himself. Having accompanied Karla for some time now, there is always the risk of losing his own voice or not finding it at all. However, with his unique point of view, we were sure that his approach to adding a positive humorous touch as well as his aesthetic and editorial ideas showed his determination as a screenwriter and director.

Niñxs is an impressive story that we are privileged to be a part of. We want to provide another facet to the lengthy debates of gender transitioning and trans youth experiences with this film. We see great potential to bring this film to young target groups in particular and to create awareness outside the LGBTQI+ community.

CREDITS

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Screening Format: DCP, ProRes, H264

Shooting Format: digital

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Sound: 5.1 & Stereo

Spoken language: Spanish

Subtitles: English, German, Spanish

Colour: Colour

CREW

Director: Kani Lapuerta

Screenplay: Kani Lapuerta

Main Producer: Suleica Pineda

Production Company: La Sandía Digital

Co-Producer: Martha Orozco / Martfilms

Co-Producers: Anke Petersen and Dirk Manthey /

Sparrows on Rooftops

Cinematographer: Quetzalli Malagón

Sound Design: Eloisa Diez

Sound Mix: Janis Grossmann-Alhambra

Editor: Yuri Amaral

Color Grading: Rocío Ortíz / Splendor Omnia

Composer: Boris Skalsky / Jonathan Noveron

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