

**UNIVERSAL CITIZEN FILMSRIPT**

**A Film by Peter Thompson**

*Three Mayan boys in capsized log canoe paddle it through blinding tropical light on Lake Peten Itza, Guatemala.*

Peter Thompson (V.O.): 1527.

Cortes leaves a sick horse with the Maya Indians, and it dies.

So they carve a stone horse to replace the dead one,

and paddle it to the sacred city of Tayasal

to be given to Cortes when he returns,

but the canoe capsizes and the stone horse sinks.

Fearing Cortes, they abandon Tayasal...

*Lake Peten Itza, noon.*

...and Tayasal, the last stronghold of the Mayan Empire is never again inhabited.

*Lake Peten Itza, afternoon.*

Cortes never returned.

The horse never surfaced.

*Lake Peten Itza, afternoon through evening.*

*Lake Peten Itza from swinging hammock. Sound of Arabian music.*

1979.

This story of Cortes' horse is told to me by a man swinging in a Cuban hammock, smoking a Turkish cigar and playing Arabian music on his Japanese tape recorder.

He is a Jew, born in Libya, and schooled in six countries.

*Reeds swaying in Lake Peten Itza.*

He was an inmate at Dachau.

It was freezing there.

There he dreamed of hot baths and swore he would live in the tropics if he survived.

*Universal Citizen paddling inner tube in Lake Peten Itza.*

Now he floats in Guatemala every afternoon.

*Woman standing into the wind on moving truck at dusk.*

And every evening he and a different woman drive into the jungle.

*Universal Citizen's truck driving into Taysal, morning.*

By morning he has returned alone near Tayasal where he picks up workers, and works with them on the sunroof of his house.

*360° camera pans on sunroof.*

I'm staying at the Universal Hotel and begin to think of him as a "Universal Citizen"--and then think of filming him on his sunroof with him changing languages with each turn and telling about his life in the country of the language he's speaking.

So I shoot these tests on his sunroof, and then ask if I can film him.

As his answer he tells me another story:

*BLACK. Sound of Arabian keening music.*

*Moon behind clouds.*

The same scratched voice, over and over.

I get up from my hammock.

The water's warm.

Then I'm surprised that I'm between both shores.

*Moon with dark clouds passing.*

I feel sand and smell cigar.

A white truck is parked at the water's edge.

--La musica! I shout.

A voice says:

--English or North American?

I tell him.

--From where? the voice says.

My hand points backward into the night.

--Ah, he says. The universe.

*BLACK. Sound of plane propellers.*

**TITLE: UNIVERSAL CITIZEN**

*Ariel views: Peten Jungle, Guatemala.*

*Plane flies into jungle, approaches airstrip.*

*Violent landing. Jungle roads.*

*Mary Dougherty riding on truck.*

*Mayan huts. Horses grazing.*

*Lake Peten Itza. Cries of jaguars, birds.*

*Children shout into the camera lens.*

When we get near Tayasal, Mary and I decide to stay.

We rent two hammocks at the Universal Hotel and watch Lake Peten Itza from the sunroof.

*Time lapse of Lake Peten Itza. Sound of wind.*

Over the weeks, three others climb to the sunroof:

The Universal Citizen, who brings us scratched Armenian records, and refuses to be filmed.

Raven, a prostitute from Haiti, who sees clients on the sunroof and refuses to be filmed.

And Maria, the adopted daughter of the Universal Hotel, who washes clothes on the sunroof and loves to be filmed.

*Mary's nude shadow on wall rising from hammock.*

Maria wakes us from siesta each afternoon, and wants to be filmed in a freshly washed dress.

*Maria stands on sunroof in pink dress with Guatemalan flag.*

*Maria sings (in Spanish):*

*"They are guilty, the reluctant fathers,*

*Who make love, and make children,*

*Then leave their children with no name.*

*I wish they would die,*

*The reluctant fathers.*

*I, too, am nobody's daughter.*

I ask--What do you call your song?

Maria says--Hija de Nadie--No One's Daughter.

*Jump cuts of Maria and second girl playing "Simon Says".*

Maria reminds us of one of our own daughters.

Maria is Mayan, and adopted.

Vanessa is Puerto Rican, and adopted.

They look like each other's sister.

*Jumpcuts of Vanessa on couch playing "Simon Says."*

When we get back to Chicago I show Vanessa her lookalike.

She wants to send a film of her own to Maria, so we make one.

The sound doesn't record, but we do send this film to Maria, in care of the Universal Citizen, because he owns a little hand-cranked projector for his Roadrunner cartoons.

*Vanessa falls, exhausted. Sound of insects violently beating wings..*

*Animal jaws eaten away by insects.*

*Mary running away through jungle and into Mayan ruins. Sound of vultures.*

*Camera pursues Mary up stone stairs.*

*Finds her at top. She, surprised, smiles.*

*Mary climbs down steep stone steps until she freezes at cry of jaguar.*

*BLACK. Lake Peten Itza, calm.*

The night I first met the Universal Citizen, my father's silver ring slipped off my finger and sank in Lake Peten Itza.

*Peter Thompson bursts through the surface of Lake Peten Itza.*

*BLACK. 360° pan of Lake Peten Itza, slow.*

He had had the ring made.

It was cast in seared black silver.

It was his only creative assertion.

*BLACK. 360° pan of Lake Peten Itza, faster.*

He lost it once in a men's room.

He returned to post a notice on the mirror saying how much he valued that ring.

A month later it was returned in the mail.

*BLACK. Fast, blurred 360° canoe turn on Lake Peten Itza. Sound of violently beating locust wings.*

This time, the ring never surfaced.

*Mayan man runs through rain with poncho over head. Sound of thunder.*

*Lake Peten and jungle in torrential rain. Sound of thunder.*

*Cathedral hidden by rain.*

*Time lapse of cathedral in clearing storm from morning to night. Sound of restaurant, marimba band, eating.*

Universal Citizen: Look. I have business with customs officers.

I took one out to dinner and rolled him in his chair--because he has no legs--and this customs officer tells me the story of the horse of Cortes, and we eat, and then he talks about horses. (pause) I think, ah.... So I bought him a horse and he signed all my papers like that and I said thank you very much! Poo!

Peter Thompson: You what?

UC: Eh! I love to bribe an officer of the law!

PT: No! Not that--you said he was crippled!

UC: Eh! He can't have women. He can't float on the water. He can have a horse.  
(*pause*) What he wanted was the proof of his powers, and that I gave to him.

PT: And what was it you got?

UC: I go over the border like it's not there. Between all the

powers. Between the fortress and the cathedral. Eh! I'm not seeable to him. That's my power. That's why you can't film me.

PT: Hmm. (*pause*) Well, how about his: how about my filming you when you're out floating on the lake, but from so far away that you can't really be seen. How about that?

UC: Why?

PT: Maybe Universal Citizens should always be filmed from so far away that you can't recognize them.

UC: Eh!

*Cathedral fades into night.*

*Man in street twirling toy airplane over his head, morning.*

It's time to leave Guatemala.

*Water reflections and Peter's shadow on wall.*

Maria wakes us one last time.

*Water reflections on wall. Empty hanger.*

We pack our clothes.

*Yellow coffee cup on blue Mayan tablecloth.*

Drink our last coffees.

*Green top spinning on floor.*

I loose my last bet with Maria.

*Parrot.*

We feed Don Fernando...

*Two parrots.*

..and Isabella...

*Mary walking down street.*

...and walk to Tayasal one last time.

*Mayan boy scouts march through city in goose-step*

*Mayan boys run through cemetery.*

*Mayan boy stands motionless with guitar in jungle .*

*Mayan woman with deer in Lake Peten.*

*Mayan man and woman in log canoe on lake.*

*Rainbow over jungle.*

109 in the shade.

*Senor Walter walking towards Mary.*

Senor Walter, the owner of the Universal Hotel, offers Mary a ride.

*Freeze-frames: Mary's face behind windowshield through clouds of insects seeming like stars. Sound of Armenian men's sacred chorus.*

I follow the dust tracks back to Mary at the Universal Hotel...

*Universal Citizen floating on Lake Peten.*

...and that afternoon film the Universal Citizen from far away.

*Mary walking across plaza towards fountain.*

In 1981, after trying to film a man and a woman I couldn't find, Mary and I walked through a plaza in another country.

I bet her that she couldn't walk to the white fountain with her eyes shut.

--Oh, that's simple, she said. It's right in front of me.

*Mary stumbles, walks out of frame to right.*

*Armenian men's chorus ends. Guatemalan Mayan women's chorus begins "Sancta Maria"..*

*CREDITS intercut with Guatemalan cemetery paintings.*

*CREDITS end.*

*Horse walking alone on path.*

1987.

The film of Vanessa is returned with a note which reads

--Senor Walter and Maria not here.

*Fountain: water jets from woman's nipples.*

*Sound of gunfire.*

--They moved a distance away. Their hotel burned.

*Fountain: Eros with arms torn off and water jetting out.*

*Two wild parrots fighting in tree.*

--War bad. As always, truly, your...

**TITLE: UNIVERSAL CITIZEN.** *Sound of explosive gunfire.*

...Universal Citizen.

**BLACK.** *Gunfire ends. Guatemalan women's chorus gradually fades, ending with the words "Oh, Maria!"*

END OF FILM

**UNIVERSAL CITIZEN**

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