

DEAD
WHEN
I GOT
HERE

TACIT FILMS, IKON & YLE PRESENT
A FILM BY MARK AITKEN

One of the finest examples of documentary filmmaking I've ever seen. SMHAFF

A masterpiece, epic and intimate. THE OBSERVER

Gripping and tender. THE LANCET



Director's statement

My previous film was about how fear inhibits and paralyses social cohesion in South Africa. I was drawn to Mexico and the area along its northern frontier. Was it possible that people there could transcend their fears when living under such extremes of violence and murder? The asylum I found in the desert offered striking and very uninhibited examples of people dealing with their fears, misfortunes and nightmares. It was a very different type of gated community and what had been described as an abstraction in the previous film was now a real experience writ large that I could document. 'Dead when I got here' is not so much a progression from the last film as an encounter with the nightmares alluded to previously.

Review in The Lancet, October 2015

Mexico is besieged by organised crime, drug cartels, corruption and violence. Juárez is a city on the Mexican border renowned for its disproportionately high murder rate, where deaths go unnoticed and there are no convictions for the crimes. It has all the makings of a futuristic horror film; a lawless city with no infrastructure to protect its citizens, but this is real and the time is now. Documentary maker Mark Aitken's film *Dead When I Got Here* is a gripping and tender account of Josué, a man who described himself as "already dead" when he was scraped off the streets and dumped at the asylum in Juárez.

But this is an asylum run by its own patients, with Josué, once a patient, now managing the place. He has no formal training, but he practises a type of psychiatric care that comprises compassion, empathy, and personal experience. As the police collect a body of a 23-year-old man (death is a common occurrence here), they comment on the arbitrary nature of such an institution, stating that it sheds a "bad light" on Mexico's public health programme, and Josué can only shrug. It certainly does, but as this film shows, there is no other place for these disenfranchised people. The asylum is their sanctuary; a refuge for those with mental health problems.

Jules Morgan, *The Lancet Psychiatry*

BOOK

ASYLUM FROM THE MADNESS -

THE MAKING OF THE FILM DEAD WHEN I GOT HERE BY MARK AITKEN

205 pp. book featuring a directors diary of the film production, stories about the people in the film and reflections on the experience of filming in a mental asylum run by its own patients. Includes colour photographs.

Available at www.deadwhenigothere.org