

Long intrigued by the art and culture of ancient Egypt, documentary filmmaker Beatriz Seemann wanted to share her fascination with the land of the Pharaohs with audiences. Seemann and her crew braved searing heat, desert sands and threats of religious fundamentalists to gather shots of tomb paintings and other unique imagery for the documentary *The Ka of Egypt*.

Seemann explains, "Ka means soul. We wanted to have a mystical connection, illustrated by the soul of the temples and the soul of the people."

Seemann was an archaeology student associated with Mexico City's Museum of Anthropology, when she became enthralled with the dynasties of rulers and the monuments they built to themselves. Last year, she and a crew of young filmmakers arrived



Tonatiuh Martinez (far left) and Beatriz Seemann (front, center) pictured with locals.

Filmmakers capture insight into the soul of ancient Egypt

in Cairo before journeying to the pyramids. Seemann served as producer for the self-funded project, and Tonatiuh Martinez was director-cinematographer.

The crew shot an interview with famed Egyptologist, Dr. Zahi Hawass at the pyramids; then traveled to the desert location Bahariya to shoot the Golden Mummies and the latest discovery of Dr. Hawass, the tomb of governor Zed-khons-uef-ankh, which has been featured in *National Geographic*. The crew also filmed at such image-rich sites as Tel El-Amarna, the White Desert, Luxor, the tombs of Beni Hassan, and five temples.

They worked in temperatures in excess of 48° C (113° F), which concerned Seemann. "We were all very nervous because of how the heat might affect the film," she says. Precautions were taken. The crew traveled in a mini-bus that also served as a rolling refrigerator. "I told the driver to run his air conditioner all the time. We treated the exposed stock as if it was the most precious thing in the world—which it was to us." The documentary was recorded on Kodak Vision 320T film 7277 and Kodak Vision 250D film 7246.

As soon as a film magazine was exposed, the negative went right into a changing bag, which in turn was put in another dark bag to protect it and taken to the air-conditioned bus.

At the conclusion of a day's shooting, the crew returned quickly to the hotel and ran straight into an air-conditioned room with the film.

"When we returned to Mexico, I was very worried," Seemann admits. "I couldn't sleep for two or three days while the film was being processed, but every inch of stock was developed perfectly and came back fabulous."

Despite the difficult conditions, there was no question of the project not originating on film. "This is my second documentary," says Seemann, "and I really wanted to do something special. I knew film would give me

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the best visuals. I went with Super 16 to future proof the documentary. Unlike video, it doesn't fade, so we'll always have the best image."


The crew used an ARRIFLEX SR-2 Super 16 camera mounted with Zeiss prime lenses. The crew carried a small lighting package consisting of two 650-watt HMI lights. In many of the tombs and caves, Martinez faced



Seemann hopes The Ka of Egypt will give viewers a better understanding of the art, society and culture of Egypt.

time limits on how long he could shoot. In those situations, he used one light bounced off two reflectors.

"Although we had very little light to work with, the film was sensitive enough to pick up details in rare and beautiful paintings from the first culture in our world," she says. The *Ka of Egypt* will be broadcast as a series of three 45-minute programs on Mexican television.

"I am happy to have this opportunity to share many important discoveries about Egypt with my countrymen," Seemann says. "I hope that audiences will gain a better understanding of the art, society and culture of this remarkable civilization." 

Data File

The Ka of Egypt

Producer
Director/Cinematographer
Assistant Cameraman
Production Assistant
Sound

Beatriz Seemann
Tonatiuh Martinez
Francisco Vargas
Oliver Seemann
Eduardo Viladoms