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## I AM CUBA

Directed by Mikhail Kalatozov  
Milestone, September 16 through 29  
Film Forum

## I AM CUBA: THE SIBERIAN MAMMOTH

Directed by Vicente Ferraz  
Cinema Tropical, September 16 through 29  
Film Forum

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### Cinema vertigo: Radical film's secrets revealed

Ten years after its belated U.S. release, it seems as if Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba* (1964) has always been with us, always staking out its tiny, idiosyncratic turf as Communist agitprop's

most unrestrained diva hymn and one of the most visually titanic works in the century of movies. Famously, superhuman cinematographic stunt work and unearthly infrared-stock exposures mate with an unfettered revolutionary outrage—abstractly detailing life before and during Castro's rebel war—and the resulting assault is so epicly impassioned it's less about Cuba per se than the fusillade of movement, shadow, light, vertigo, and landscape on the viewer's tender optic nerves.

As we learn from *Siberian Mammoth*, the new doc co-playing with Kalatozov's masterpiece, this rare co-production between Mosfilm and Castro's new state-run ICAIC proved too languid for Cubans and too exotic for Russians. It bombed and vanished, unseen in the West and forgotten by virtually everyone except the surviving cast and crew before it appeared in a Kalatozov sidebar at the 1992 Telluride Film Festival and was then officially released by Milestone three years later. Vicente Ferraz's addictive chronicle, revisiting iconic personae and titled after a line in J. Hoberman's *I Am Cuba* review, also tells us too much about how the film achieved its transcendent grandeur, at the hands of DP Sergei Urusevsky and in the lingering vapors of the 1962 missile crisis—imported cranes, suspended cameras, chemical infusions, camera operator relay races, and a shooting period that lasted almost two years, lengthened by days spent waiting for “interesting” clouds. It's all fascinating, but must Kalatozov's careening angel of cinema be laid bare? MICHAEL ATKINSON