

ATACAMA PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS



OFFICIAL SELECTION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT

(NOSTALGIA DE LA LUZ)



A FILM BY PATRICIO GUZMÁN

Press in Cannes
Alibi Communications
Brigitta Portier
C. 33 (0) 6 48 11 72 05
Unifrance - Village Panthiero
alibi-com@skynet.be

Pyramide International
CANNES OFFICE Riviera Stand F6
T. 33 (0) 4.92.99.32.01
yoann@pyramidefilms.com
lgarzon@pyramidefilms.com
PARIS OFFICE 5, rue du Chevalier de Saint George - 75008 PARIS
T. 33 (0) 1 42 96 02 20 - F. 33 (0) 1 40 20 05 51



OFFICIAL SELECTION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT

A FILM BY PATRICIO GUZMÁN
PRODUCED BY RENATE SACHSE

W W W . P Y R A M I D E F I L M S . C O M

Running time: 90 minutes



In Chile, at three thousand metres altitude, astronomers from all over the world gather together in the Atacama desert to observe the stars. The desert sky is so translucent that it allows them to see right to the boundaries of the universe.

It is also a place where the harsh heat of the sun keeps human remains intact: those of the mummies, explorers and miners. But also the remains of the dictatorship's political prisoners.

Whilst the astronomers examine the most distant galaxies in search of probable extraterrestrial life, at the foot of the observatories, women are digging through the desert soil in search of their disappeared relatives...

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS



THE ATACAMA DESERT The desert is a vast, timeless space that is made up of salt and wind. A fragment of planet Mars on planet Earth. Everything there is motionless. And yet this stretch of land is filled with mysterious traces of the past. There are still ruins of villages, two thousand years old. The trains abandoned in the sand by the 19th century miners have not moved. There are also some gigantic domes that look like fallen space vessels in which the astronomers live. All around there are human remains. When night falls, the Milky Way is so bright that it projects shadows onto the ground.

THE INVISIBLE PRESENT For an astronomer, the only real time is that which comes from the past. The light of the stars takes hundreds of thousands of years to reach us. That is why astronomers are always looking back, to the past. It's the same for historians, archaeologists, geologists, paleontologists and the women who search for their disappeared. They all have something in common: they observe the past in order to be able to better understand the present and future. In the face of the uncertain future, only the past can enlighten us.

INVISIBLE MEMORY Memory guarantees us life, as does the warmth of sunlight. Human beings would be nothing without memory -objects with no pulse- with no beginning and no future. After 18 years of dictatorship, Chile is once again experiencing democracy. But at what price... Many have lost their friends, relatives, houses, schools and universities. And others have lost their memory, perhaps forever.

SOME OF THE CHARACTERS

VICTORIA & VIOLETA

THE WOMEN WHO SEARCH FOR THEIR LOVED ONES

Pinochet's dictatorship killed their relatives and buried their corpses beneath the desert sand. Since then only some human bones have been found. They have now been turning over the desert earth for 28 years with their shovels: they have never given up on their search. They will continue until their very last breath. They are dignified and beautiful.

LAUTARO

THE EXPERIENCED ARCHAEOLOGIST

He knows the desert like the back of his hand. His eyes are those of a lynx and can guess what is hidden beneath the ground. He has found mummies that are a thousand years old, sleeping deep in the ground. He knows how to talk to them. Deeply affected by the tragedy of the disappeared, he passed on his digging experience to the women who look for their loved ones. He showed them how to observe each grain of sand to detect whether, under the surface, there might be a human body.

GASPAR

THE YOUNG ASTRONOMER

Gaspar was born after the coup d'État. He studied astronomy at university, during Pinochet's era. His grandfather taught him how to observe the stars and maths (without maths, you cannot reach the stars; it's a scientific law). Studying galaxies doesn't prevent him from opening his eyes to analyse his country's recent past. He is a great lover of humankind and stars.

MIGUEL

THE ARCHITECT OF MEMORY

He survived five concentration camps. He preserved in his memory all the prisons in which he was held prisoner and as soon as he was able to go into exile, he drew up, very precisely, the layout of each camp so that no Chilean will ever be able to say "I didn't know that existed".

LUÍS

THE AMATEUR ASTRONOMER

He learnt how to converse with the stars in a concentration camp. He is an impressive, talented, humble man capable of constructing astronomical instruments with his bare hands. He works silently against forgetting.

VALENTINA

THE DAUGHTER OF THE STARS

Although she's the daughter of disappeared parents, she seems the most carefree character in the film. Her serene take on the events goes further than ours. She was brought up by her grandparents who taught her to observe the sky. Astronomy has given her some answers that enable her to face up to her parents' disappearance.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN FREDERICK WISEMAN & PATRICIO GUZMAN

PARIS, MARCH 22ND 2010

Frederick Wiseman is a key figure in documentary cinema. For 40 years and through thirty films, he has dedicated himself to a critical study of the foundations of American society. A close friend of Patricio Guzman, whose work he has followed from its beginning, he asks him, as a friend, about his film *NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT*.

FRED I'm not going to explain the film. We can talk about the subject of the film, but we won't give any explanations.

PATRICIO We could talk about the desert.

FRED And also about the women and the respect that you feel for them. The films' metaphors are very powerful. I know that you don't like talking about this, but there are some metaphors that evoke the desert and others the women, these women who search in the ground, and the astronomers who search in the sky.

PATRICIO What interests you most? Archaeology or Astronomy?

FRED What interests me most is the metaphor. The relationship between the astronomers and the women in your film.

PATRICIO I think the metaphors emerged from the geographical symmetry. I love this part of Chile. I went there several times during Allende's era and hadn't been back since. But I had kept a very vivid memory of this place and its unusual contrasts.

On the one hand there are the more recent mines, and on the other the 19th century mines that have long been abandoned yet whose machinery

is still there. In Allende's time, the miners carried on using these steam engines that dated from 1924. They repaired them by making spare parts... But what astonished me most were the mummies: suddenly you would stumble across a fragment of human industry that transported you back to the last century, and just as suddenly you might come across antique mummies taking you back to the time of Christopher Columbus. The old machines project you back to the era of the industrial revolution, the mummies to a time much further into the past, and the telescopes further away still, millions of light years away!... I consequently believe that the very essence of the film comes from a series of metaphors that existed in the desert long before my arrival. The metaphors were already there, I merely filmed them.

FRED I don't agree. It is you who recognized the metaphor. It would not have existed if you hadn't recognized it and translated it into language.

PATRICIO Perhaps. But it's the women who inspired me to act on it. When I read in a newspaper that they were digging in the earth with their hands at the foot of the telescopes, I finally resolved to make this film, using a direct, straightforward language.

FRED And yet you didn't use the most straightforward method, which would have been to make an observational film.

PATRICIO The truth is that I didn't want to make a "description of the desert". I wanted to find new elements to speak once again of the past. This is how I came to concentrate on the astronomical observatories. I have been obsessed with astronomy since adolescence. It was my passion back then. Alas, I've always been rubbish at maths, hence I never dared take it up. But in the 50's and 60's I devoured all the literature I could find on astronomy. An Argentine journal (« Más Allá ») published all the classic books about it. The most exciting highlight for me was a visit to the observatory in Santiago. I told the chief astronomer over the telephone that all my class wanted to meet him. When I arrived with only two of my classmates, he was amazed: "What happened to the others...?" I lied to him, telling him that we had an exam the following day... That night remains an unforgettable experience. We observed the moon and a dazzling constellation: "The chest of diamonds". We used the telescope that is shown at the start of the film: the German "Hayde" telescope which dates from 1910.

FRED You also tackle the realm of archaeology...

PATRICIO My first girlfriend was an archaeologist. She was studying at the Natural History Museum, home of the whale skeleton that we also see in the film. She taught me how to classify the fossils and stones collected in the desert. She did some digs in the region where we shot the film. What most fascinated me however, was her story about discovering a mummy whilst working alongside Gustave Le Paige, an elderly Belgian priest and the most prominent figure in the fields of ethnology and archaeology in Chile at that time.

Maybe it is the fact that these memories live in me, that made the filming seem so simple to me. I felt as though I was going back to the prime of my youth. And these metaphors you spoke of earlier became obvious to me the moment I began filming. And yet, they didn't appear in the script. Or at least they were not evident. Perhaps this is why we had such trouble obtaining financial support.

FRED I can believe that!

PATRICIO For four years, I struggled to make this project happen. There were times when I felt discouraged, but the power of the subject was such that I had to follow it through to the end. In this project there was a tangle of leads that went in many directions and which echoed a whole

lot of questions that were gnawing at me. The film has many different takes: metaphysical, mystical or spiritual, astronomical, ethnographic, and political ... How to explain that human bones are the same as certain asteroids? How can we explain that the calcium that makes up our skeleton is the same calcium that is found in stars? How to explain that recently born stars are formed from our own atoms, when we are mortal? How do we say that Chile is the world's leading astronomical hub, whilst 60% of the assassinations committed by the dictatorship remain unresolved? How is it possible that Chilean astronomers observe stars that are millions of light-years away whilst in their schoolbooks children cannot read about the events that took place in Chile barely 30 years ago? How to explain that a vast amount of bodies buried by the military were unearthed and then thrown into the sea? How to show that the labour of a woman who rummages through the earth with her bare hands resembles that of the astronomers...?

FRED I like the things you've just spoken of because they don't in any way explain the film.

PATRICIO I don't want to explain it but to question it. In fact I am always questioning myself. And I wanted to open doors with this film, like

scientists when they ask themselves about the origins of life. What is more I am convinced that science provides an incredible thematic field for future documentary films. But I have the feeling that today certain ideas, certain analogies, certain concepts are called to question by the documentary film industry. It would seem that we cannot conceive unusual, atypical, innovative ideas: it is forbidden. We labour at the heart of an industry that is increasingly less tolerant and which pushes us to create stereotypes. It's like we're in a black hole.

FRED Chilean society also seems to be sinking into a state of near total darkness, because Chile portrays the image of its wealth through its stock exchange, whilst we know nothing of the problems of ordinary people.

PATRICIO Eight years ago, two Chilean observatories proved definitively that there was, at the heart of our galaxy, a black hole. A black hole that travels across the Chilean sky each night.

FRED Another metaphor.

PATRICIO The desert is full of them! I don't want to lead you into questionable territory but many people have seen UFO's in the desert, including pilots who

have been chased by flying saucers. But lets leave that aside since it is not our subject. I want to tell you a story that once again illustrates a metaphor. One of the archaeologists that I met on the shoot had wanted to build a cabin in the middle of the desert in order to be closer to his digs. The workers began to excavate, but in the first week they found something strange sticking out of the earth. They called the archaeologist who realised they were building the cabin directly above a tomb. They carried on digging and a mummy was revealed, with jewellery and an axe lying in the middle of its chest. It must have been an important figure, a chief. The archaeologist stopped the work and went away to think. One afternoon they approached the mummy and said to it: "We must come to an agreement. I think that from now on your true home will be in the museum we are going to take you to in order to study your family, your people and your culture. Then this place will be available for my cabin." Apparently after one week the mummy accepted. At the museum it became the principal item of study of a culture until then unknown. As for the archaeologist, he continues his dialogue with the mummy as sometimes, when he is in his cabin, the door opens or closes when there isn't the slightest breeze.

FRED What an extraordinary story!

PATRICIO GUZMÁN

SELECTIVE BIOGRAPHY

Patricio Guzmán was born in 1941 in Santiago de Chile. He studied at the Official Film School in Madrid where he specialized in documentary cinema. His work is regularly selected for and awarded prizes by international festivals. In 1973 he filmed **THE BATTLE OF CHILE**, a five-hour documentary about Allende's period of government and its fall. The American magazine **CINEASTE**, described it as "one of the 10 best political films in the world". After the coup d'état, Guzmán was arrested and spent two weeks in the Santiago National Stadium where he was threatened with simulated executions on several occasions. He left the country in 1973 and moved to Cuba, then Spain and France, where he made other films : **IN THE NAME OF GOD** (on liberation theology during the Chilean dictatorship), **THE SOUTHERN CROSS** (about popular religion in Latin America), **BARRIERS OF SOLITUDE** (about the historical memory of a small Mexican village) **OBSTINATE MEMORY** (about political amnesia in Chile), **THE PINOCHET CASE** (about Pinochet's trial in London and Santiago), « Madrid » (an intimate journey to the heart of the city), **SALVADOR ALLENDE** (a personal portrait). In 2005 he made **MY JULES VERNE**. Between 2006 and 2010, he developed **NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT** and five short films about astronomy and historical memory. He currently chairs the International Documentary Film Festival in Santiago Chile (**FIDOGS**) that he founded in 1997.

FILMOGRAPHY

SALVADOR ALLENDE

Official Selection Cannes Festival 2004

THE PINOCHET CASE

(EL CASO PINOCHET)

International Critics' week, Cannes Festival 2001
Grand Prix, Marseille Festival 2001
Golden Gate Award, San Francisco Film Festival 2002

CHILE, OBSTINATE MEMORY

(LA MEMORIA OBSTINADA)

Grand Prix, Florence Festival 1997
Grand Prix, Tel Aviv Festival 1999
Grand Prix, Yorkton Festival 1998
Golden Spike, San Francisco Festival 1998
Best Documentary, Hot Docs Festival 1998
Silver Dove Award, Leipzig Festival 1999

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

(LA CRUZ DEL SUR)

Grand Prix, Marseille Festival 1992
Grand Prix, Amiens Festival 1992
Time of History Award, Valladolid Festival 1992
Spirit of Freedom Award, Jerusalem Festival 1994

THE BATTLE OF CHILE

(LA BATALLA DE CHILE)

Grand Prix, Grenoble Festival 1975-1976
Grand Prix, Benalmadena Festival 1976
Grand Prix, Brussels Festival 1977
Jury Prize, Leipzig Festival 1977
Grand Prix, Havana Festival 1979
Directors' Fortnight Cannes Festival 1975-1976
Filmforum Berlin Festival 1975-1976-1979

CHILI SOME DATES

ASTRONOMY, POLITICS, HUMAN RIGHTS

1962 A team of American and European scientists explore the Atacama desert with a view to setting up astronomical observatories there.

1967 The first observatory is inaugurated on the heights of "Tololo". Soon afterwards it reveals the existence of the Antlia galaxy that will later enable the discovery of the age of the universe.

1969 Construction of the second observatory: "La Silla". First research on planets outside of the solar system: "Is there life anywhere else in the universe?".

In Santiago Chile, Salvador Allende stands for the presidential elections with a radical programme.

1970 Allende is elected with 36 % of the votes. He nationalises the copper, nitrate and other raw material mines that are in the desert. In Stockholm, Pablo Neruda receives the Nobel Prize. A third observatory "Las Campanas" is inaugurated in the Atacama desert.

1972 The revolutionary government splits Chilean society in two. One side approves of Allende's reforms, the other rejects them. The probability of a civil war takes hold of the country. Nixon and Kissinger put all their weight into the balance in order to sink the Chilean economy.

1973 Allende's coalition obtains 43,4 % of the votes at the legislative elections. The Right and the military's response is a coup d'Etat. Allende dies in the governmental palace. Backed by the government of the United States, Pinochet assumes power for the next 18 years.

In the desert mines, 75 political prisoners are executed (in Calama and in other villages).

1976 Far removed from political events, the most powerful optical instrument in the whole of the southern hemisphere is installed at the «Tololo» site.

1979 The women of Calama secretly initiate the search for the bodies of their loved ones.

1980 The dictatorship establishes a new political constitution dedicated to a neoliberal economy. The start of massive anti-Pinochet protests. The first death-toll of the dictatorship: 3 000 executed and disappeared, 35 000 tortured, 800 secret prisons, 3 500 civil servants in charge of repression. One million people living in exile.

1986 Pinochet escapes an assassination attempt organised by a left-wing armed group. Halley's comet travels through the Chilean sky. The Challenger space shuttle explodes during take-off.

1987 The women of Calama go public with their search. A group of archaeologists teach them how to dig. They live obsessed with the memory of their disappeared and cannot mourn them until the bodies are found.

1988 Pinochet's resounding defeat in the referendum organised to legitimise his government. He is forced to give up executive power two years later. He remains head of the army and proclaims himself "senator for life".

1990 Patricio Aylwin, of the Christian Democrat party, is elected first President of the political transition.

Near Calama a mass grave is discovered, in which are found only a few fragments of bones of the 26 disappeared. In Pisagua, on the coast, 19 intact bodies are unearthed.

The space telescope Hubble is launched into the cosmos.

1998 On the heights of "Páranal", the Very Large telescope VTL is put into action. It is equipped with a radioactive clock which enables it to measure the age of stars, and discovers the oldest star in the world, 13 200 million light years away (that is how many years it took for its light to reach us). At the same time, Pinochet is arrested in London under an international

warrant. He is accused of genocide, terrorism and torture. In the desert, near La Serena, 15 more bodies of the disappeared are exhumed.

1999 Pinochet returns to Santiago Chile after being detained for nearly 500 days in the United Kingdom.

2002 In the Atacama desert, the inauguration of the “Gémini” observatory at the summit of Mount Pachón. At the “Paranal” observatory the first photograph of an extrasolar planet is taken.

2003 “La Silla”’s HARPS telescope discovers 20 extrasolar planets (the exoplanets). The search for celestial bodies on which life might exist is accelerated.

2004 The women of Calama inaugurate a monument in memory of the 26 people shot. But, until the entire bodies are found, their mourning remains on hold...

2006 Michèle Bachelet, a socialist, is the first woman president of Chile.

Twenty five bank accounts in Pinochet’s name are discovered in the United States with 28 million dollars stolen from the Chilean Public Treasury. Pinochet dies in Santiago without having been brought to trial.

2007 At “La Silla”, an exoplanet resembling the Earth is discovered, Gliese 581 : water in liquid form is discovered, a sign of possible life form.

2008 The discovery of three bodies of the disappeared near Almagro, in the Atacama desert. A small group of women continue the search.

The “Paranal” and “La Silla” observatories confirm definitively the existence of the black hole situated at the centre of our galaxy. Each night, this black hole travels over Atacama.

2010 Sebastián Piñera, right wing candidate wins the presidential elections.

An earth quake (8,8 on the Richter scale) devastates southern Chile. One of the five strongest earthquakes ever registered.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

ATACAMA PRODUCTIONS presents a coproduction by: ATACAMA PRODUCTIONS, BLINKER FILMPRODUKTION & WDR, Germany, and CRONOMEDIA, Chile, with the contribution of FONDS SUD, SPANISH TELEVISION TVE, RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE, BROUILLON D'UN RÊVE, La SCAM and SUNDANCE FOUNDATION

Written and directed by PATRICIO GUZMÁN. Photography: KATELL DJIAN. Sound recording: FREDDY GONZÁLEZ. Original Music: MIRANDA & TOBAR.

Assistant director and producer, stills photographer: CRISTÓBAL VICENTE. Assistant director (pre-production): NICOLÁS LASNIBAT.

Editing: PATRICIO GUZMÁN and EMMANUELLE JOLY. Editing supervisor: EWA LENKIEWICZ. Astronomy Photographs: STÉPHANE GUISSARD.

Calibration and special effects: ÉRIC SALLERON. Sound editing and mixing: JACQUES QUINET. Literary Supervision: SONIA MOYERSOEN.

Executive Producer : VERÓNICA ROSSELOT. Producer and artistic consultant: RENATE SACHSE. Coproducers : MEIKE MARTENS, CRISTÓBAL VICENTE.

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