

NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT

(Nostalgia de la luz)

a film by

Patricio Guzmán



European Film Academy Documentary of the Year

Chile/ France / Spain/ Germany 2010 / 90 mins / Spanish with English subtitles /
Certificate tbc

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SYNOPSIS

Chile's Atacama Desert is the driest place on earth. Atop its mountains, astronomers from all over the world gather to observe the stars. The sky is so translucent that it allows them to see right to the boundaries of the universe.

The Atacama Desert is also a place where the harsh heat of the sun keeps human remains intact: those of Pre-Columbian mummies; 19th century explorers and miners; and the remains of political prisoners, "disappeared" by the Chilean army after the military coup of September 11, 1973.

So while astronomers examine the most distant and oldest galaxies, at the foot of the mountains, women, surviving relatives of the disappeared whose bodies were dumped here, search, even after twenty-five years, for the remains of their loved ones, to reclaim their families' histories.

Gradually the celestial quest of the astronomers and the earthly one of the Chilean women come together.

Notes from Patricio Guzmán

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, palaeontologists 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.

Featured in the film:

Victoria and Violeta, the women searching for their loved ones

Pinochet's dictatorship killed their relatives and buried their corpses beneath the desert sand. Since then, only occasionally have human bones been recovered. Victoria and Violeta have now been digging in the desert earth for 28 years with their shovels: they are determined to continue until they draw their last breaths.

Lautaro, the experienced archaeologist

He knows the desert like the back of his hand. He has found mummies that are a thousand years old, sleeping deep in the earth. Deeply affected by the tragedy of the disappeared, he passes on his knowledge of the earth to the women who look for their loved ones, and taught them to detect clues as to whether, beneath the surface, bones might lie.

Gaspar, the young astronomer

He was born after the Chilean coup. He studied astronomy in college, during Pinochet's reign. His grandfather taught him to observe the stars. As he studies the galaxies, he also studies his country's recent past. He is a great lover of stars and humankind.

Luís, the amateur astronomer

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

Miguel, the architect of memory

He survived five concentration camps. He preserved in his memory the layouts of all the prisons in which he was held prisoner. Upon reaching freedom, he drew, with astounding precision, the layout of each camp, thus bearing documenting his experiences.

Valentina, the daughter of the stars

The daughter of disappeared parents, 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 as she plans her life, family, and future.

More details and downloads at www.newwavefilms.co.uk

CREW

Writer and Director	Patricio Guzmán
Photography and Camera	Katell Djian
Sound Recording	Freddy González
Original Music	Miranda y Tobar
Producer	Renate Sachse
Assisted by	Adrien Oumhani
Co-produced by	Meike Martens
	Cristóbal Vicente
Editing	Patricio Guzmán and Emmanuelle Joly
Editorial supervisor	Ewa Lenkiewicz
Video editing, online, effects	Éric Salleron
Sound editing and mix	Damien Defays and J. Jacques Quinet
Sound mix	Jean-Jacques Quinet
Astronomical photography	Stéphane Guisard
Artistic consultant	Renate Sachse
Collaborator, commentary text	Sonia Moyersoén
Narration (voice)	Patricio Guzmán
Production manager	Verónica Rosselot

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DTS Dolby Digital

Chile/France/Spain/Germany – 90 minutes- 2010



PATRICIO GUZMÁN



Patricio Guzmán was born in 1941 in Santiago, Chile. As an adolescent, inspired by the work of Chris Marker, Frederic Rossif and Louis Malle, he was drawn to documentary. He studied filmmaking at the Film Institute at the Catholic University of Chile and at the Official School of Film in Madrid, where he earned his degree in Film Direction in 1970.

Guzmán returned to Chile in 1971, and directed his first documentary, **The First Year**, which covered the first 12 months of Salvador Allende's government. The film was released in commercial theatres that very year. Chris Marker, impressed by the film, offered to help get it seen in France. Two years later, Marker again provided invaluable assistance again when he donated the raw stock necessary to commence filming **The Battle of Chile**, Guzmán's 4½ hour documentary trilogy about Allende's final year. Filming on this project continued until the very day of the coup d'etat.

The day of the coup, Guzmán was imprisoned in Chile's National Stadium, where he remained for 15 days. After regaining his freedom, he left for Europe with his footage. Eventually, the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) offered to support the editing and postproduction. Guzmán flew to Havana and finished the film a few years later.

The Battle of Chile won 6 Prizes in Europe and Latin America. It was shown in all around the world. Cineaste Magazine declared it as "One of the ten best political films in the world."

Guzmán continued to make documentaries, many focusing on Chilean concerns. In 1987 he made **In God's Name** (Grand Prix, Florence '87) about the Catholic Church's fight for human rights in Chile. From 1990 to 1992 he worked on **The Southern Cross** (Grand Prix, Marseilles '92) about the theology of liberation and popular religion in Latin America. In 1995, **Pueblo en Vila** focused on the historical memory of a Mexican village. In 1997, **Chile, Obstinate Memory** looked into collective political amnesia in Chile. 1999 brought **Robinson Crusoe Island** about the remote Chilean island of the same name. In 2001, **The Pinochet Case** examined the case brought against General Augusto Pinochet (Grand Prix, Marseilles '01). In 2002, he completed **Madrid**, a look at Spain's capital. Guzmán's acclaimed, award-winning film **Salvador Allende** (2006) tells Allende's story, from his youth in Valparaíso and his early presidential campaigns, to his bold nationalist reforms and his death during the violent rightist coup of September 11, 1973.

Nostalgia for the Light (2010), won the Best Documentary (Prix ARTE) at the European Film Academy Awards. It was voted as one of the Top Ten Best Films of 2010 by Sight & Sound.

Patricio Guzmán currently chairs the International Documentary Film Festival (FIDOCs) in Santiago, Chile, which he founded in 1997. He lives in Paris with Renate Sachse, who collaborates on the scripts for his films.

Filmography

2010	Nostalgia for the Light
2005	My Jules Verne
2004	Salvador Allende
2001	The Pinochet Case
1999	Isla de Robinson Crusoe
1997	Chile, Obstinate Memory
1995	Pueblo en Vilo
1992	The Southern Cross
1986-87	In the Name of God
1985	Pre-Columbian Mexico (5 x 30').
1973-79	The Battle of Chile I, II, III
1971	The First Year

An interview with Patricio Guzmán by Frederick Wiseman

March 22, 2010 : Patricio Guzmán interviewed in Paris by his friend and colleague Frederick Wiseman on his career, the nature of documentary filmmaking, and Nostalgia for the Light.

FREDERICK WISEMAN: What interests me most is the metaphor and relationship between the astronomers and the women in your film.

PATRICIO GUZMÁN: The essence of the film lies in a series of metaphors and contrasts that existed in the desert long before my arrival. The metaphors were already there; I merely filmed them. I love this part of Chile; I was there during Allende's era, and maintained a very vivid memory of the region and its unusual contrasts. There are the recent mines as well as 19th-century mines that have long been abandoned, yet whose machinery is still there. In Allende's time, the miners continued using these steam engines that dated from 1924. 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. Just as suddenly you might come across antique mummies taking you back to the time of Christopher Columbus. The old machines are reminiscent of 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!

WISEMAN: I don't agree: you're the one who recognized the metaphor. It would not have existed if you hadn't translated it into language.

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

WISEMAN: And yet you didn't use the most straightforward method, which would have been to make a purely observational film.

GUZMÁN: The truth is that I didn't want to simply document 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 bad at maths, so I never dared take it up seriously. But in the 50's and 60's I devoured all the literature I could find on astronomy. An Argentine journal, *Más Allá*, published a series of classic books about it. One of the most exciting moments of adolescence for me was a visit to the observatory in Santiago. I told the chief astronomer over the telephone that my class wanted to meet him. When I arrived with only two of my classmates, he asked, "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 called The Chest of Diamonds. We used the rare telescope shown at the start of the film: the German 'Hayde,' from 1910.

WISEMAN: You also incorporate archaeology into *Nostalgia for the Light*.

GUZMÁN: My first girlfriend was an archaeologist. She was studying at a Natural History Museum, home to 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 even went on some digs in the region where we shot the film. What most fascinated me however, was her story about discovering a mummy while working alongside Gustave Le Paige, an elderly Belgian priest and one of the most prominent figures in the fields of ethnology and archaeology in Chile at that time.

These memories are very much alive for me, which may be why the filming felt so simple and natural to me. I was going back to the realms of my youth. The metaphors you spoke of earlier became obvious to me the moment I began filming. And yet, they didn't appear in the script... perhaps that's why we had trouble obtaining financial support!

WISEMAN: I can believe that!

GUZMÁN: For four years, I struggled to make this project happen. There were times when I felt discouraged, but the subject was so powerful that I had to follow it through to the end. I had a tangle of leads that went in many directions and which echoed questions that were gnawing at me. The film has many different angles: metaphysical, mystical or spiritual, astronomical, ethnographic, and political. How to explain that human bones are the same as certain asteroids? How to explain that the calcium that makes up our skeleton is the same calcium found in stars? How to explain that new stars are formed from our own atoms when we die? How to explain that Chile is the world's leading

astronomical hub, even as 60% of the assassinations committed by the dictatorship remain unsolved? How is it possible that Chilean astronomers observe stars that are millions of light-years away, while children can't even read in their schoolbooks about the events that took place in barely 30 years ago? How to explain why a vast number 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 an astronomer?

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

GUZMÁN: I don't want to explain but to question. In fact, I am always questioning. I wanted to open doors with this film, the way that scientists do when they question the origins of life. What's more, I am convinced that science can provide an incredible thematic field for documentary films. But I have the feeling that today, certain ideas, analogies, and concepts are called to question by the documentary film industry. We are discouraged from creating unusual, atypical, innovative work. 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.

WISEMAN: Another metaphor. Chilean society also seems to be sinking into a state of near total darkness, because Chile portrays the image of its wealth, while we know nothing of the problems of ordinary people.

GUZMÁN: 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. One of the archaeologists that I met on the shoot 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. A mummy was revealed, with jewellery and an axe lying in the middle of its chest. The archaeologist 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.

WISEMAN: What an extraordinary story!

GUZMÁN: The desert is full of them.

Chile: some dates, astronomical and political

1962 A US and European scientific team explore the Atacama desert in order to install astronomical observatories.

1967 The first observatory "Tololo" is finished.

1969 Construction of the second observatory: "La Silla". The start of the search for planets beyond the solar system. In Santiago, Salvador Allende presents himself as a presidential candidate on a radical programme.

1970 Allende is elected with 36 % of the votes. He nationalises the mines. In Stockholm, Pablo Neruda received the Nobel Prize. A third observatory "Las Campanas" is commissioned in the Atacama desert.

1972 As a consequence of the revolutionary government, Chilean society is split in two. One half approves of Allende's reforms, the other half rejects them. The spectre of civil war stalks the country. Nixon and Kissinger use their influence to try and wreck the Chilean economy.

1973 In parliamentary elections, Allende's coalition obtains 43 % of the votes. The right and the army responds with a coup d'Etat. Allende dies. Supported by the US, General Pinochet is installed in power for 18 years.

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

1976 Far from these events, on the Tololo site, the best telescope in the Southern hemisphere is installed.

1979 The women of Calama start a secret search for the bodies of their loved ones.

1980 The dictatorship puts in place a new constitution and a neo-liberal economic policy. The start of large anti-Pinochet protests. The first reckoning of the dictatorship: 3,000 executed and disappeared, 35,000 tortured, 800 secret prisons, 3,500 officials to deal with the repression. 1 million exiles.

1986 Pinochet escapes an assassination attempt organised by an armed group of the left. Halley's comet passes through the Chilean sky. The space shuttle Challenger blows up after launching.

1987 The women of Calama come out from their secrecy. A group of archaeologists show them the art of digging. They live obsessed with the memory of the disappeared, and cannot mourn properly until the bodies have been found.

1988 Resounding defeat of Pinochet after a plebiscite organised to legitimise his government. He is obliged to give up power two years later. He remains head of the army and proclaims himself "Senator for Life".

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

Near Calama, the discovery of a common grave in which are found the bone fragments of 26 disappeared people. In Pisagua, nearby, 19 whole bodies are exhumed.

The Hubble space telescope is launched.

1998 At Páranal, the Very Large Telescope (VLT) starts to work. It is equipped with a radioactive clock which allows the measurement the age of the stars and the discovery of the oldest star in the Universe at a distance of 13,200 million light years from Earth. At the same moment, Pinochet is arrested in London on an international warrant. He is accused of genocide, terrorism and torture. In the desert, near La Serena, the exhumation of 15 new disappeared bodies.

1999 Pinochet returns to Santiago after 500 days of detention in the UK.

2002 In the Atacama desert, at the top of Mount Pachón, the commissioning of the "Gemini" observatory. In "Paranal" the first photograph of a planet beyond the solar system.

2003 The HARPS telescope at "La Silla" discovers 20 planets beyond the solar system (exoplanets). The search for celestial bodies on which life could exist accelerates.

2004 The women of Calama unveil a monument to the memory of 26 executed prisoners. But until their complete bodies are discovered their mourning remains in suspense.

2006 Michèle Bachelet, a Socialist, is the first woman President of Chile.

In the US, the discovery of 25 bank accounts belonging to Pinochet with 28 million dollars stolen from the Chilean treasury. Pinochet dies in Santiago without ever being tried.

2007 At “La Silla”, the discovery of an exoplanet which resembles Earth, Gliese 581 c : water in liquid form is detected there, a sign of possible life.

2008 Discovery of the bodies of 3 of the disappeared near Almagro, in the Atacama desert. A small group of women continue their search.

Definite confirmation of a black hole at the centre of our galaxy, made by the “Paranal” and “La Silla” observatories. Each night this black hole passes over the Atacama desert.

2010 Sebastián Piñera, candidate of the right, wins the presidential election.

A huge earthquake (8.8 on the Richter scale) devastates Southern Chile. It's the fifth strongest ever recorded.

