British Academy of Film and Television Arts
BAFTA Goes To Mexico

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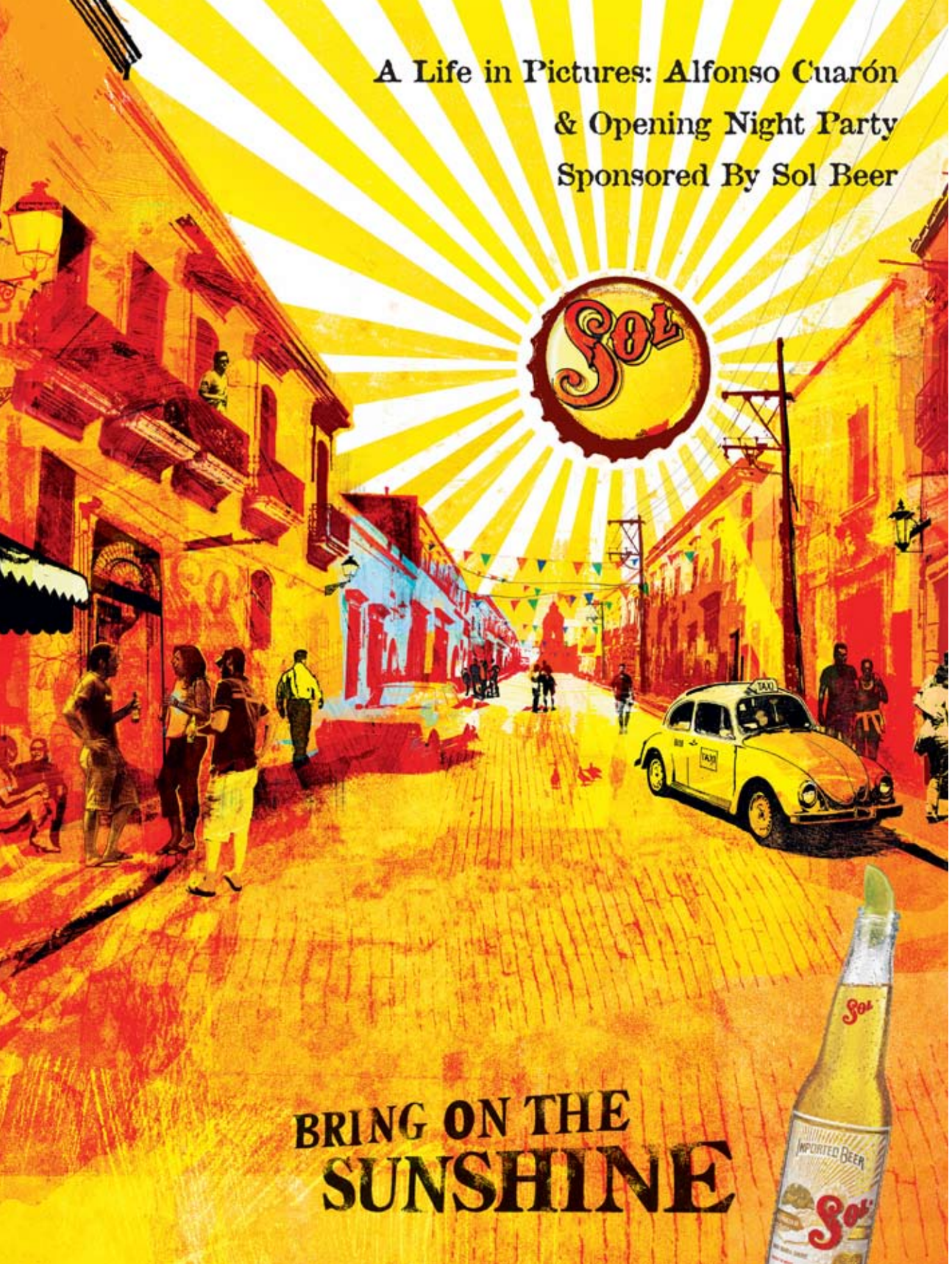
BRITISH ACADEMY OF FILM AND TELEVISION ARTS



Cover:
This special event brochure has been produced with two different covers. The Mexican flag image is taken from Carlos Reygadas's *Battle In Heaven*, whilst the other is from Guillermo del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone*.
Credit: Rex/Moviestore

David Parfitt

Deputy Chair of the Academy

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to our BAFTA Goes To Mexico weekend, a celebration of inspired and inspiring filmmakers whose talent has captivated audiences around the world, and continues to do so.

The facts speak for themselves: films by Mexican directors won six BAFTAs and four Oscars in the past year, and were nominated for some 24 more at these two ceremonies alone. Such global success, reinforced by a myriad of other homegrown and international awards, honours, festival prizes, critical kudos and box office triumphs, is proof that Mexican filmmakers have well and truly arrived on the international stage.

However, Mexican cinema is not just about a small band of directors or actors who have made it 'big' in recent years. A relatively large number of Mexican screenwriters, producers, cinematographers and artists in other craft disciplines have also demonstrated their outstanding vision and skill, with more women than ever before entering the filmmaking fray.

Whilst sharing a collective national heritage, these filmmakers are now asserting their right to express the complex and diverse tapestry of contemporary Mexican society more personally, directly and unapologetically than ever before. Conveying the stark realities of everyday life and the realms of vivid imagination with equal passion, they share a belief in the ability of cinema to enlighten, to empower and, most importantly, to engender social change.

Ignacio Durán Loera

Minister for Cultural Affairs, Mexican Embassy to the UK

Mexico has a long and rich cinematic tradition. From the weighty melodramas of the 40s to the committed films of the 70s and 80s, film has been a substantial sign of Mexican identity or *Mexicanidad*.

In recent years, Mexican cinema has experienced a wave of international recognition. New films with different visions captured the attention of critics and media alike as a turning point for a film industry that still has many challenges to meet.

It is very fitting that BAFTA celebrates Mexican cinema from 27–30 July. Over these four days, London audiences will have the opportunity to experience a repertoire of new films from filmmakers who have expanded the expressive potential of the medium. Through light, atmosphere and texture, landscapes and everyday life are tackled with unique vision – sometimes sensual, sometimes highly dramatic in mood. The screenings and events prepared especially for this occasion will allow attendees not only to engage in the latest film productions but to meet with the skilled directors, producers, actors, scriptwriters and cameramen behind these vibrant, original and versatile stories.

Throughout the weekend, BAFTA Goes To Mexico will prove that we can find a way to others through cinema, no matter how distant or different we are. Film opens dialogue, fosters communication and acts against grief and isolation, whilst reinforcing the idea that human beings are not islands but a continent.

Introduction

The notable success of *Amores Perros* and *Y Tu Mamá También* alerted world audiences to the abundant talent in Mexican cinema. From skilled directors Alejandro González Iñárritu and Alfonso Cuarón, cinematographers Rodrigo Prieto and Emmanuel Lubezki, to the electrifying screen presence of Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna, it is clear that Mexico boasts filmmaking savvy in spades.

The rise to prominence of these so-called 'Buena Onda' artists – aided by a new entrepreneurial spirit amongst Mexican financiers and producers – coincided with an emerging generation of Mexican cinemagoers thirsting for intelligent, identity-affirming, homegrown product.

Though Mexican cinema has followed patterns of boom and bust, frequently aligned to changes in government – and rarely has the relationship between cinema and the state been so pronounced – its tradition stretches back to the earliest days of the medium.

One of the belle époque's success stories, Mexico was prosperous and politically stable in the 1890s. The movie projectors and early films produced by the Lumière Brothers appeared there shortly after they did in Europe. By 1900, cinema in Mexico was well established.

In this formative period, the bulk of 'entertainments' were locally-produced documents of national events. However, in 1907, a notable feature was released: *El Grito De Dolores*. After a surge, a period of decline followed in the 1920s as Hollywood asserted its dominance. Film production dwindled. However, such Mexican film artists as had established themselves were not averse to overtures from across the border, with figures such as Dolores del Río setting sail for pastures new.

The arrival of sound allowed Mexico to regain ground as a filmmaking entity. Although in 1932 (a few years after the arrival of Eisenstein, one of a number of non-Mexican filmmakers to find inspiration there) only six films were produced, two were significant: Fuentes's *El Anónimo* and Soviet emigré Boytler's *Mano A Mano*. Buoyed by renewed private investment, by 1933 Mexican cinema was once again at the forefront of Spanish-language production and enjoying a healthy relationship with the Cárdenas government. This fertile patch continued to the declaration of World War II.

The more conservative regime of Avila Camacho coincided, perhaps surprisingly, with one of the healthiest periods in Mexican cinema. As the war effort led to a decline in US production, a foothold was gained both at home and abroad, with Mexico exporting films for the growing Latin American market. Marked by their technical excellence, these films – a mix of family melodramas and patriotic historical epics – flourished as Mexico achieved the difficult task of establishing a self-sustaining film industry capable of bridging the gap between art and commerce.

The golden age of Mexican cinema, its Cine de Oro, coincided with the administration of Miguel Alemán (1946–1952) and was linked to unprecedented

economic prosperity. Mexico was courted as an ally by the US; increased revenue and access to technology became widely available. Similarly, the period saw amplified attention to filmmaking as the state sought to protect a valuable cultural and economic asset. Thus, in 1942, the Banco Cinematográfica was established to facilitate film financing. New tax law was passed to protect the industry. Thriving in the shade of subsidisation, Mexican cinema found itself in the midst of an epoch of big stars, quality films and high output that continued into the late 1950s.

Sadly, state involvement contributed to the increasingly conservative and middle-class nature of Mexican output at this time. Rising production costs were problematic and films stuck to tried and tested formulas to court broad appeal. The country's intelligentsia began a quest for quality filmmakers and the encouragement of younger talent but to little avail. In 1958, with the Mateos presidency, its national cinema entered another dark epoch.

After a series of concerts attended by leftist scholars and filmmakers including Buñuel – a figure inextricably linked with the development of Mexican cinema after his relocation to the country in 1946 – El Grupo Nuevo Cine was formed. From 1960–62 they published a manifesto criticising the Mexican film industry. Nuevo Cine demanded a number of sweeping reforms, including an institution to teach filmmaking, increased exhibition rights and more independent production.

In part a response to declining production levels but also as a retort to calls from young university-based cineastes, the First Contest of Experimental Cinema was held in 1964. A new generation of politicised filmmakers was its legacy. Rising to prominence in the 1970s under the presidency of Echevarría Alvarez, an ardent supporter of the arts, key filmmakers of this period include Joskowicz (*Crates*, 1970), Ripstein (*El Castillo De La Pureza*, 1972), Leduc (*Reed: México Insurgente*, 1973), Cazals (the exceptional *Canoa*, 1975) and Fons (*Los Albañiles*, 1976).

With the coming to power of José López Portillo, the 1980s are widely regarded as Mexican cinema's nadir. Reversing many of Echevarría's advances, re-introducing stricter censorship and encouraging the return of private investment to reduce the involvement and responsibility of the state, Portillo's sexenio saw annual production levels rise (94 features in 1981) but also led to lower production values and the suppression of films dealing with difficult social themes. The rule of Miguel de la Madrid brought renewed hope with the establishment of the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE) and the encouragement of more diverse product in both political and aesthetic terms.

During the 1990s, the work of IMCINE and two excellent film schools, the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematograficos (CUEC) and the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC), began to bear fruit. After years of drought came the feature debuts of several directors who would become international names: Carlos Carrera with *La Mujer De Benjamín*, Alfonso Cuarón's *Sólo Con Tu Pareja*; María Novaro's *Danzón*; Alfonso Arau's *Como Agua Para Chocolate* and Guillermo del Toro's audacious allegorical horror yarn, *Cronos*.

Despite suffering another scare during the post- *Amores Perros* renaissance with then President Vicente Fox's thankfully aborted plans to axe IMCINE, close the talent-breaking CCC and sell famous studios Churubusco, Mexican cinema has continued its ascendance and gone some way to consolidating a domestic film industry of permanence.

Eimbcke's *Temporada De Patos*, Rulfo's *In The Pit*, Escalante's *Sangre* and Vargas's *El Violín* are evidence of new talent coming through, whilst Carlos Reygadas (*Japón*, *Batalla En El Cielo*) has cemented his growing reputation with *Silent Light*, the film which brought him the 2007 Director prize at Cannes. The award places the young Mexican in the company of his three most famous contemporaries – del Toro, Cuarón and González Iñárritu – whose *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Children Of Men* and *Babel* respectively, dominated recent international award nominations. Today, Mexican cinema is perfectly and no longer precariously poised. Enjoying a rich heritage, it is also able to look boldly ahead to an exciting future.

Jason Wood

Special Guest

Left:
Cuarón's *Y Tu Mamá También* was BAFTA-nominated for Original Screenplay and Film Not in the English Language in 2003.
Credit: Rex Features

Alfonso Cuarón

With a critically acclaimed and award-winning body of work that, to date, spans adult comedy, children's drama, erotic road movie and apocalyptic sci-fi, Alfonso Cuarón's position at the forefront of Mexican filmmaking's current wave is testament to his ability to produce powerful and provocative cinema from a wide range of material.

Born in Mexico City in 1961, Cuarón was seven years old when George Roy Hill's discussion of his work in *The Making Of Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid* made such an impression on the youngster that he decided a career in film direction was the path to pursue.

Though Cuarón studied for degrees in both philosophy and film, he finished neither, moving instead to television production where he made a textbook ascent through the ranks from runner to assistant director. After directing several episodes of the 80s sci-fi series *A Hora Marcada*, the buzz surrounding Cuarón was beginning to travel.

His first feature in 1991, *Sólo Con Tu Pareja* (*Love In The Time Of Hysteria*), was co-written with his younger brother Carlos. The black comedy followed a womanizing yuppie wrongly diagnosed with AIDS by his nurse and lover as punishment for his philandering. A breath of fresh air amongst the stale, Hollywood-influenced fare so popular at the time, it was the biggest film at the Mexican box office in 1992. It was nominated for four Ariel awards (Mexico's national film awards), including cinematography for Cuarón's regular collaborator, Emmanuel Lubezki, with Alfonso and Carlos triumphing for their original screenplay.

Ironically, Hollywood beckoned and Cuarón felt he had no choice but to emigrate to the States to pursue opportunities that were lacking in Mexico. Sydney Pollack hired him to direct an episode of neo-noir TV series, *Fallen Angels*, which won Cuarón the CableACE Award for Best Director in 1993.

Two features followed, both of which would begin to cement Cuarón's interest in themes of social class, identity and coming-of-age. The riches-to-rags fable *A Little Princess* in 1995 received wide critical acclaim and two Oscar nominations. Three years later, he directed a modern update of the Dickens classic, *Great Expectations*. With the latter a frustrating experience for Cuarón, the time now seemed right to return to a road trip idea developed with Carlos some ten years previously and head back to Mexico to make it.

The release of *Y Tu Mamá También* in 2002 struck a worldwide chord with audiences and critics alike, securing Cuarón's position as an undisputed talent of international regard. In it, two teenagers (Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna) take a road trip with an older woman, observing rural Mexico and its people, whilst dealing with the sexual and class tension that erupts between them. Reflecting a change in style of Cuarón's filmmaking with its looser, more naturalistic, handheld camerawork, it was both BAFTA and Oscar-nominated.

Returning to Hollywood, Cuarón directed *Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban*, the third in the blockbusting franchise. Credited with moving the series into slightly darker, more adult territory, Cuarón won the Feature Film BAFTA at the Children's Awards and a nomination for British Film of the Year at the 2005 Film Awards.

His most recent work, *Children Of Men*, made effective use of an urgent, handheld camera style to portray its dystopian narrative in which a man must protect a pregnant woman, the first in nearly 20 years. Noted for its meticulously choreographed single-shot scenes, it was BAFTA-nominated for visual effects, winning for cinematography and production design.

As a producer, Cuarón was last seen collecting the Film Not in the English Language BAFTA this year with old friend Guillermo del Toro for *Pan's Labyrinth*. With several more productions underway, the momentum of Cuarón's career is seemingly unstoppable and will no doubt continue to produce exceptional work in Mexico and beyond.

Christine Beck

Our Guests

Guillermo Navarro Cinematographer

Born and raised in Mexico City in 1955, Navarro's interest in cinematography stemmed from an early interest in stills photography. This led to professional work, during which time he shot album covers, fashion and movie production stills for his sister, producer Bertha Navarro. By the mid-80s, Navarro was lighting his first feature film. A long-standing collaboration with director Guillermo del Toro has seen Navarro work on *Cronos*, *The Devil's Backbone*, *Hellboy*, *Pan's Labyrinth* (which earnt him a BAFTA nomination and an Oscar win this year) and the forthcoming *Hellboy* sequel for the director. Other work includes *Desperado*, *From Dusk Till Dawn* and *Spy Kids* for director Robert Rodriguez.

Rosa Bosch Producer

Barcelona-born Rosa Bosch founded the production and international sales company Tequila Gang in 1998, with Guillermo del Toro, Laura Esquivel, Bertha Navarro and Alejandro Moreno Toscano. Based in London, Bosch's producing credits include *Buena Vista Social Club* and *Lost In La Mancha*. She was also involved in the international launch and distribution of films such as *Amores Perros*, *Sin Dejar Huella* (*Without A Trace*) and *Nueve Reinas* (*Nine Queens*). In 2003 she set up the international theatrical distribution operation for HBO Films, working on *Real Women Have Curves* and *La Niña Santa* (*The Holy Girl*). She currently heads World Circuit Records' film, TV and multimedia production activities.

Vanessa Bauche Actress

Bauche began regular work as an actress in the early 90s. Her role in *Amores Perros* as Gael García Bernal's character's love interest is widely acknowledged as her breakthrough performance. Bauche's desire to portray strong and interesting female characters has been reflected in films such as *Digna: Hasta El Ultimo Aliento*, in which she played the slain Mexican human rights lawyer, Digna Ochoa. She has won two Ariel awards (Mexico's national film awards) for *Un Embrujo* and *De La Calle*, and was nominated for a further two, for *Hasta Morir* and *Digna… .* Bauche has also been producing short films since 1999.

Brigitte Broch Production Designer

German-born Broch first worked with Alejandro González Iñárritu on his debut, *Amores Perros*, and has been a regular collaborator ever since, working on *21 Grams* and *Babel*. She also worked with Alfonso Cuarón on his debut *Sólo Con Tu Pareja* (*Love In The Time Of Hysteria*) and with Guillermo Del Toro on his first feature, *Cronos*. In 1997, she was Oscar-nominated for her work on Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, later winning for her set decoration on Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* in 2002. She won an Ariel award in 2000 for *Sexo, Pudor Y Lagrimas* (*Sex, Shame And Tears*) and has been nominated for a further three, including María Novaro's *El Jardín Del Edén*.

Frida Torresblanco Producer

After completing an MA in Literature and Scriptwriting in Madrid, Frida worked as an assistant director on a number of films, documentaries, TV series and ads. For five years, she was responsible for the production design, pre-production and sales of Lolafilms' international English-language productions, including John Malkovich's *The Dancer Upstairs*. Frida coordinated the US distribution of Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mama Tambien* in 2001 and, more recently, the US theatrical release of his debut, *Sólo Con Tu Pareja*. She now heads up Cuarón's NY-based Esperanto Filmoj and has recently produced *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Año Uña*, Cuarón's *The Possibility Of Hope* and Carlos Cuarón's debut feature, *Rudo Y Cursi*.

Francisco Vargas Director

Newcomer Vargas has made a huge impression with his debut feature, *El Violin*, which has enjoyed critical acclaim and a string of awards since it began on the festival circuit in 2005. The feature is an extension of his short film of the same name that won an Ariel award. Detailing the struggle between the peasants and military in 70s Mexico, it follows an elderly musician who secretly smuggles weapons and supplies to the freedom fighters attempting to overthrow the regime. Vargas won two Ariel awards for Best First Work and Original Screenplay, and was nominated for a further two, Directing and Editing.

Gael García Bernal

Actor

It is truly impossible to take politics out of any story made in Latin America or Mexico. The place demands that you involve its history. It would be very disappointing not to use that wider scope. I think *Y Tu Mamá También* is a truly involved political film that will be more important in ten years time because it is a document of something that was happening in Mexico right after the fall of the PRI [who were] in power for 72 years. So it is inevitable to be political and irresponsible not to acknowledge it. It augments the fiction and it is there to be grabbed and used, without the politics having to be spoon-fed to the audience.

I have a strong commitment, with my acting comrades, to making things happen in Mexico and in Latin America. Why? Because that's where we can fly, where we can find ourselves, and get to know how good we can be. We can try out different things: there're a million stories to be told and we've the urge and itch to tell these stories, be true to ourselves and be consistent and keep on doing what we like.

(Speaking at the Guardian NFT Interview on 16/10/06)

Alejandro González Iñárritu

Director

The main reason I relocated [to the US] was that I wanted another challenge, and this gave me the opportunity to go to new territories. It really excited me and got me focused. I always focus more clearly when my adrenalin is running high. I think that you can know your idiosyncrasies much better, and your *Mexicanidad* from the outside, rather than just by living in the inside in your own little ranch of fear and prejudice. On a more personal note, the level of insecurity is very high in Mexico and to live in Mexico with two children was becoming very hard for me. Some people incorrectly though that *Amores Perros* had made me a millionaire, and it was a little bit frightening dealing with the possibility of being kidnapped. Also, it's hard enough to make films in Mexico. It is equally hard to survive on the salaries directors are paid. The normal fee is about $40,000. When, as I do, you invest three years of your life in a project, this is not so much money. The main reason, however, is that, for this particular film [*21 Grams*], I wanted and needed to work with the very best actors in the world, and English was the universal language that would allow me this opportunity. I am not only talking about Americans, but French, Australians and Puerto-Ricans.

(Extract from The Faber Book Of Mexican Cinema by Jason Wood)

Guillermo del Toro

Director

The Spirit Of The Beehive is, to me, one of the most beautiful films ever made. It combines two of my all-time favourite things: five-year-old childhood and Frankenstein. What is admirable – but something I'm incapable of and absolutely not attracted to – is its ability to be vague and sort of ethereal. But in my movies, I have such a love for monsters that they are manifest, they are real and there. I love them, and I would kill for monsters to be real, for them to walk down the street. I would love to meet Hellboy and the vampires from *Blade*. I am that childish about it, and that glee is what prevents me from keeping things more ethereal. I want to see them. I'm not capable of doing movies where the monster is implied, there's just a creeping shadow and a whisper. I want them to step into the light. What I love, and what I find unattainable, from *Spirit Of The Beehive*, is that capacity of a man that is occupied by something other than the fantastic and who allows the fantastic to gently seep into the reality of the girl. In my case, in *Pan's Labyrinth*, the fantasy world is as strong, real and palpable as the other world, if not more.

(Speaking at the Guardian NFT Interview on 21/11/06)

Guillermo Arriaga

Writer

For me, the epitome of the human condition is contradiction. The more contradictory the character, the more human and interesting they are. I personally avoid making characters likeable; I want to make interesting characters, not likeable ones. Some of my characters are despicable but rather than the audience liking them I want to understand and perhaps recognise them.

Mexico City is very complex, very interesting and very difficult to understand. It is a strong presence within itself and, as the biggest city in the world, it's an anthropological experiment – there's no way it could not be a character in the script [for *Amores Perros*]. I think that there are cities in the world that can be there or not – Mexico City has far too much power for that. I cannot escape it when I write.

I think that my major influence is perhaps the street. I want the films I write to look real; and I would hope that anyone watching *Amores Perros* would say, 'The guy who wrote this, he was *there*'.

I think that *Amores Perros* taught filmmakers and producers to take bigger risks and to show more respect for audiences. It is also a very contradictory film. It shows Mexico and Mexicans as ugly but sometimes we are and we are also tired of trying to live up to the fantasy of a soap-opera world.

(Extract from The Faber Book Of Mexican Cinema by Jason Wood)

From left to right:
García Bernal played the title role in *The Crime Of Father Amaro*.
Credit: Rex Features
González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* followed three stories, each connected by a horrific car accident.
Credit: Moviestore Collection
Del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* won three BAFTAs this year, including Costume Design and Make-Up & Hair.
Credit: Optimum Releasing
Arriaga won the Best Screenplay award at Cannes in 2005 for *The Three Burials Of Melquiades Estrada*.
Credit: Rex Features

Ángel Tavira won the Best Actor award at Cannes this year for his role in Francisco Vargas' *El Violin*.
Credit: Cámara Carnal Films

Behind The Lens

One of the most striking features of this year's Orange British Academy Film Awards was the conspicuous success of Mexican talent in the Cinematography category. Rodrigo Prieto was nominated for *Babel*, Guillermo Navarro for *Pan's Labyrinth* and Emmanuel Lubezki – the eventual winner – for *Children Of Men*. Each film was quite different and yet, as Navarro explains, the men behind the cameras have plenty in common.

"In a way I think we have a shared experience, myself, Emmanuel and Rodrigo," he says, on a crackly mobile from the Hungarian set of *Hellboy 2*. "We were forced to leave our country at different stages in our careers to find our fortune elsewhere. The conditions in Mexico were very limited, so we took particular paths and were able to embrace the opportunities that came our way.

"I think a lot of that comes from being a product of adversity. We also come from a very strong visual culture where things are displayed and the images speak for themselves. But it's our point of view that allows us to select what we see and how we see it."

Another common link is that these three men have developed their careers in tandem with Mexican directors enjoying breakthrough international success, continuing to work on big budget, commercial pictures around the world. Navarro is DP of choice to Guillermo del Toro, working with him on *Cronos*, *The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, while also lensing other movies including *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Jackie Brown* and *Stuart Little*.

Similarly, Rodrigo Prieto has built his reputation upon a diverse body of work since his name was made with Alejandro González Iñárritu on *Amores Perros*, his other credits including *Frida*, *8 Mile*, *The 25th Hour* and *Brokeback Mountain*, as well as Iñárritu's subsequent *21 Grams* and *Babel*.

Emmanuel Lubezki, a regular collaborator of Alfonso Cuaron's, has mixed and matched American and Mexican movies for some time, with credits including *Ali, Lemony Snicket's A Series Of Unfortunate Events* and *The New World*. For each man, the significance of moving into the wider world of cinema was, Navarro believes, a quite natural development. "We came very well prepared," he says. "You can see the particular qualities each one of us has, our creativity and sensitivity for doing the work, and preserving a point of view. I don't think we 'do' jobs, we're not there just to serve that purpose. We are creators as well. I'm speaking in the plural because I think this speaks for the others in just the same way as well. We didn't come to learn, we came to excel."

That they undoubtedly have. But whether or not there are others working their way up the lighting crew hierarchy, ready to follow as the next generation of cinematographers, only time will tell. At least an example has been made that the young and ambitious might follow. "I hope it helps people who follow in our footsteps to know that it is possible," says Navarro.

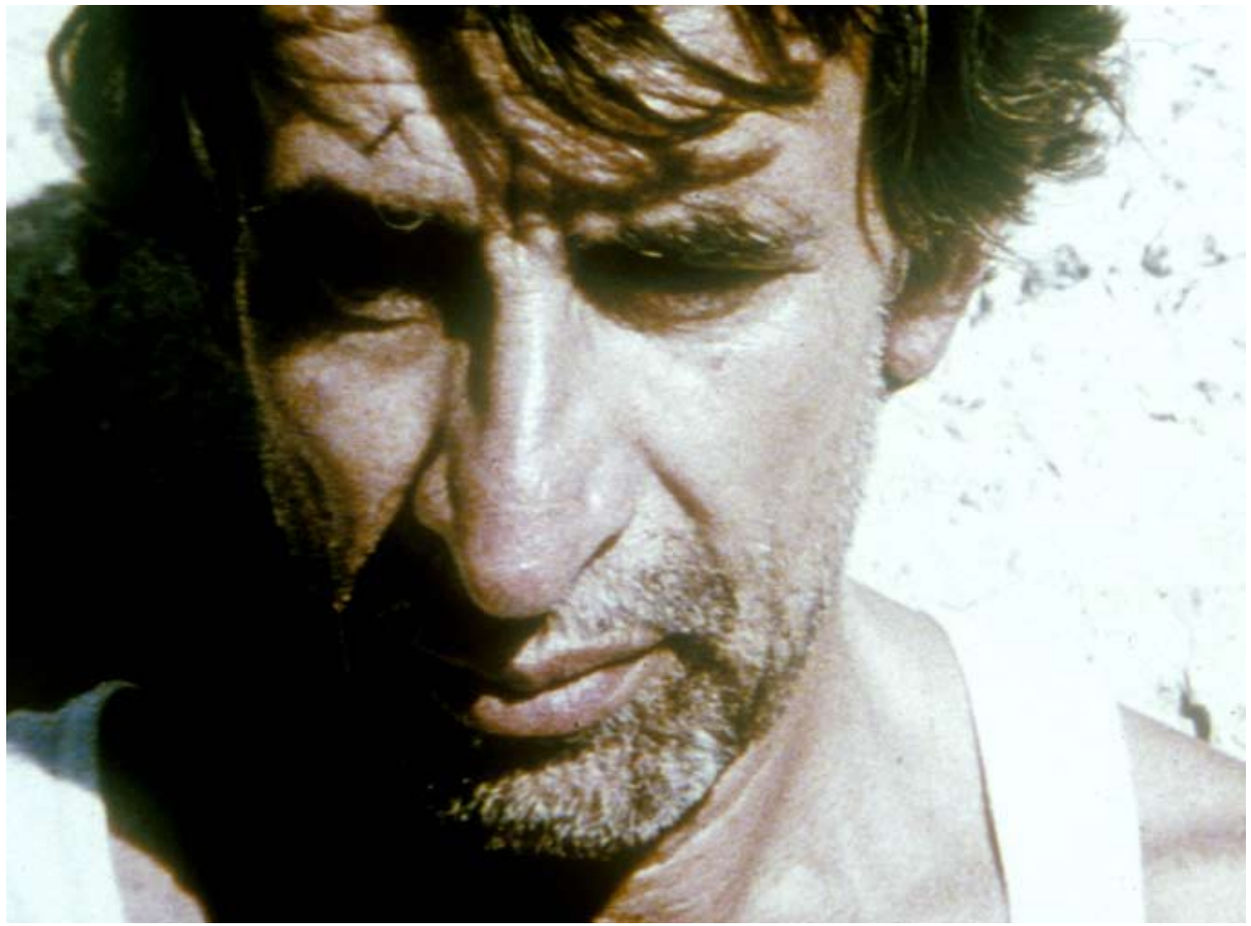
Among those whose footsteps they followed, the name of legendary Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa stands out. He was the man to whom American directors turned when coming to shoot in Mexico, the likes of John Ford, Don Siegel and John Huston calling upon his services on *The Fugitive*, *Two Mules For Sister Sara* and *Under The Volcano*.

Figueroa enjoyed an acclaimed 50-year career but was, sadly, prevented from shooting *Prizzi's Honor* for John Huston back in the US by work permit issues. Thankfully no such bureaucratic nightmares have held back Navarro, Lubezki and Prieto, men in demand with well worn passports and shelves beginning to creak with the awards they have amassed in recent years. These are good times for Mexican cinematography – and long may they continue.

"Emmanuel won the BAFTA and I won the Oscar for *Pan's Labyrinth*. Do you know I'm the first cinematographer not just from Mexico but the whole of Latin America that has one? So in terms of the scale of things," Navarro pauses, searching for just the right word: "this is very big."

Anwar Brett

Clockwise from top left:
Emmanuel Lubezki at work on *Children Of Men*, for which he won a BAFTA this year.
Credit: Universal Pictures
Rodrigo Prieto with Alejandro González Iñárritu on the set of *Babel*, their third collaboration.
Credit: Rex Features
Guillermo Navarro won an Oscar this year for his work on *Pan's Labyrinth*.
Credit: Optimum Releasing



Left:
Reygadas's *Japón* was nominated for seven Ariel awards, winning for Best First Feature and Original Screenplay.
Credit: Moviestore Collection

The Next Big Thing

With the likes of Alfonso Cuarón and Alejandro González Iñárritu amongst his admirers, Carlos Reygadas has quietly emerged as the Mexican filmmaker's filmmaker.

Born in 1971, Carlos Reygadas trained in international law at the University of Mexico. After completing his studies, he relocated to London for a Master's degree. From there he was employed by the Mexican Foreign Service at the United Nations, preparing work for the International Penal Court.

In 1997, Reygadas decided to leave the legal profession and moved to Brussels where he discovered a passion for cinema. Roberto Rossellini's use of filming environment would exert a mammoth influence. Robert Bresson would likewise prove instructive in terms of sound and use of non-professional actors. It was Tarkovsky, however, who would really open the filmmaker's eyes.

Whilst preparing to gain entry to film school, Reygadas met Diego Martinez Vignatti, an Argentinean cinematographer who would work with him on a number of shorts and, later, on Reygadas's remarkable features, *Japón* and *Battle In Heaven*.

Completed with a team of newcomers, Reygadas's self-produced film debut, *Japón*, was presented at the 2002 Rotterdam and Cannes festivals. One of the most audacious films that year, it received a Special Mention for the Camera D'Or. Hot on the heels of works by Alejandro González Iñárritu and Alfonso Cuarón – though aesthetically a million miles from both *Amores Perros* (2000) and *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001) – the film was heralded as completing a major renaissance in Mexican filmmaking.

Shot in Super16 'Scope and making phenomenal use of the natural habitat, *Japón's* parable was also remarkable for a final tracking shot set to Arvo Pärt's *Cantus*. Acclaimed for its uncompromising aspirations to a transcendental form of filmmaking, it also established something of a pattern for Reygadas in terms of its enigmatic title and inflammatory cross-generational sex scene.

Described by the director as an "existentialist drama dealing with moral corruption," *Battle In Heaven* similarly screened at Cannes to a chorus of controversy and acclaim. Marcos (Marcos Hernández) and his wife (Berta Ruiz) kidnap a baby for ransom money but the plot goes terribly wrong when the infant dies. Seeking spiritual salvation, Marcos confesses to Ana (Anapola Mushkadiz), the prostitute daughter of the wealthy general Marcos chauffeurs, and so sets himself down a path of reckless abandon. The film climaxes at the Basilica during an intense religious festival in a teeming Mexico City.

Presenting a stark vision of human folly, Reygadas's second feature is also open to the possibility of redemption and grace. Again, he almost exclusively casts non-professionals, claiming that his requirement for the most natural performances necessitates a total lack of acting from real people.

The film again deals with moral and spiritual themes that are irrefutably universal, but the closing pilgrim's procession to the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe seems to suggest a more concrete grappling with the notion of *Méxicanidad*, a consideration of national identity and what it means to be Mexican today. This is a subject that continues to fascinate the emerging band of contemporary Mexican filmmakers.

Having recently turned his hand to producing with Amat Escalante's *Sangre*, this year saw Reygadas deliver his most assured feature yet. Inspired by primal, neo-Biblical imagery and echoing the work of Dreyer and Malick, *Silent Light* is a moving mediation on love and betrayal set amidst a Mennonite community in Chihuahua, northern Mexico. Though overlooked for the Palme d'Or at Cannes, the film did see Reygadas win a much deserved Best Director award. Superlatives abound in film criticism but *Silent Light*, with its extraordinary long take sequences that bookend the minimalist narrative, is unquestionably a masterpiece of our time.

Jason Wood

Left:
The kidnapping and murder of hundreds of women in an industrial town near the Mexico-US border is documented in *Bajo Juárez: The City Devouring Its Daughters*.
Credit: IMCINE

Women in Mexican Film

When contemplating the presence of Mexican women in cinema, the average movie lover may be hard pressed to name anyone beyond actress Salma Hayek. This is not to diminish Hayek's remarkable achievement, however. Since her breakthrough role in *Desperado*, she's produced the BAFTA and Oscar-winning film *Frida* and formed her own production company, Ventanarosa, which is currently enjoying worldwide success with TV series, *Ugly Betty*.

It is clear, though, that Mexican women filmmakers have yet to achieve the crossover that many of their male counterparts have. However, their active involvement in the development of a Mexican film tradition and film industry is undeniable, dating back to the early 20th century.

Amongst the earliest practitioners was Mimi Derba, one of the founders of the pioneering Azteca Film Company in 1917 and an active filmmaker in the early 1920s. Over the next five decades, Adela Sequeyro, Matilde Landeta and Marcela Fernandez Violante made an impression in roles from continuity to editing and even directing. With institutionalised sexism and the male leadership of powerful unions excluding women from participating easily in the higher echelons of film production, these four were the only women who managed to achieve the status of director until the 1980s.

Unsurprisingly, women found primary access into the industry through acting. The first Mexican 'superstar' was Emma Padilla in 1917, whilst Elena Sánchez Valenzuela was the most popular actress throughout the silent period. Legendary stars of the Golden Age (1940–1954), included Dolores del Río and María Félix. Del Río, dubbed "the perfect Latin type," was one of a number of Mexican actors whose career developed in Hollywood. During her 20-year career there, however, she fell foul of ethnic stereotyping, always relegated to the role of a foreign, exotic woman – a gypsy, Spanish vamp, or Mexican señorita.

When significant social, cultural, and institutional transformations occurred in the late 70s, a generation of women filmmakers soon become a visible and influential force within the Mexican film industry. In the 80s, over one third of first-time directors were women, including Sabina Berman and María Elena Velasco.

More recently, Mexican women have emerged as a driving force in the current wave of Mexican cinema, working as producers. Few outside of Mexico realise that female producers have played significant roles in internationally recognised films. Bertha Navarro, for example, has been producing films in Mexico since the 70s and is now a regular collaborator of Guillermo del Toro's, with *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Cronos* amongst her credits.

Furthermore, at no other period of time has there been such a significant number of women directors in the Mexican film industry, with María Novaro, Marisa Sistach, Busi Cortés, Guita Schyfter and Dana Rotberg leading the pack.

Significantly, many of these filmmakers are choosing to tell stories specifically concerned with women's lives. These films contest the ways in which classical Mexican cinema portrayed women as virtuous and suffering mothers, seduced and abandoned young girls, and outright mala mujeres (bad women). Instead, they offer diverse, multi-dimensional characters, reflective of the complexity of contemporary Mexican society. Sistach's multi-award-winning *Perfume De Violetas* narrates a violent coming of age story about two 15-year-old school girls in Mexico City. Novaro's *Sin Dejar Huella*, tells the story of a single mother who works in one of the numerous 'maquiladoras' (factories) that line the Mexican-U.S. border where hundreds of women have been murdered or have disappeared over the past ten years. The same issue is explored in Alejandra Sánchez's documentary, *Bajo Juárez: La Ciudad Devorando A Sus Hijas*.

With the diverse talent in today's Mexican filmmaking being recognised on an international level, we can look forward to seeing more films produced and directed by Mexican women that feature strong, independent female protaganists.

Joanne Hershfield

History of Mexican Film

The Silent Film Era: 1895–1929

1896 First public screening at the Cinématographe Lumière of early state documentaries.

1898 Salvador Toscano Barragán opens public movie houses in Mexico City.

1907 Early narrative fiction films by Felipe de Jesús – *Aventuras De Tip Top En Chapultepec* and *El Grito De Dolores*.

1910 Mexico's centenary of independence is marked by a series of propaganda pieces as well as a major commercial venture, *El Suplicio De Cuauhtémoc*.

1916 *1810 o los libertadores de México* – the country's first full-length fiction feature. Fiction film production dramatically increases.

1920s As the silent film industry languishes, Dolores del Río and other stars are courted by Hollywood.

Arrival of Sound: 1930–1939

1931 *Santa* – Mexico's first full-length sound film. Sergei Eisenstein arrives and begins *Que Viva México!*.

1932 Construction of the México Films studio and the production of *El Anónimo* by Fernando de Fuentes and Soviet émigré Arcady Boytler's *Mano A Mano*.

1934 Fred Zinneman and Emilio Gómez Muriel's *Redes*, an early example of *contenido social*.

1935 The landmark *Vámonos Con Pancho Villa!* by Fernando de Fuentes, an acute analysis of the Revolution.

1936 *Allá En El Rancho Grande* by de Fuentes establishes Mexico as the premier Spanish-language film producer. It also acts as the prototype for the *comedia ranchera*.

1937 Boris Maicon's *Novillero*, Mexico's first colour film.

1939 The outbreak of war in Europe has a fortuitous impact on Mexico's film industry.

1940–46 Mexican cinema gains commercial footing; Mario Moreno "Cantinflas", María Félix and Pedro Armendáriz become stars.

El Cine de Oro (The Golden Age): 1946–52

1946 A period of unprecedented economic growth sees the creation of 'quality' films addressing social realities. Emilio Fernández's *María Candelaria* screens at Cannes.

1947 Establishment of the Ariels, Mexico's Academy awards.

1948 *Pueblerina and Salón México* by Emilio Fernández and *Una Familia De Tantas* by Alejandro Galindo.

1949 The rise to stardom of Germán Valdés 'Tin Tan' in vehicles such as *El Rey Del Barrio*.

1950 Buñuel's career-revitalizing *Los Olvidados*. Its success masks the fact that Mexican film production was again decreasing.

1953 Alejandro Galindo's outspoken *Espaldas Mojadas* advises Mexicans against crossing the border to the United States.

1960–1983: Grupo Nuevo Cine

1960–62 The publication of *Nuevo Cine*, a manifesto demanding changes to Mexican cinema. Wrestling movies starring 'El Santo' achieve mass appeal.

1963 Mexico's first film school, The Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematograficos (CUEC) is established.

1964 *Simón Del Desierto*, Buñuel's last Mexican film. First Contest of Experimental Cinema.

1967 Alejandro Jodorowsky makes a huge impact with *Fando Y Lis*, and again three years later with *El Topo*.

1970–76 *Crates* by Alfredo Joskowicz; Arturo Ripstein's *El Castillo De La Pureza*; Paul Leduc's *Reed: México Insurgente*; Felipe Cazals's *Canoa*; *Los Albañiles* by Jorge Fons.

1976 Founding of another major film school, The Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC).

1977 Incoming president José López Portillo reverses many of Echevarría's advancements.

1983–1990: Reconstruction

1983 The Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE) is established. New IMCINE head Alberto Isaac sees his challenge as "rebuilding a ruined cinema in a ruined country."

1984 Paul Leduc's *Frida*, Hermosillo's *Doña Herlinda Y Su Hijo* and Luis Mandoki's *Motel*.

1988	A new generation tentatively emerges with *Historias De Ciudad* by María Novaro, Gerardo Lara, Rafael Montero and Ramón Cervantes.
	1990–2000: Director action
1991	Carlos Carrera's *La Mujer De Benjamín*, Alfonso Cuarón's *Sólo Con Tu Pareja* and Novaro's *Danzón*.
1992	Alfonso Arau's *Como Agua Para Chocolate* enjoys international renown and global award nominations.
1993	Guillermo del Toro's Cannes prize-winner, *Cronos*. The following year, Carrera's short, *El Héroe*, wins the Palm D'Or.
1999	Antonio Serrano's *Sexo, Pudor Y Lágrimas* is instrumental in wooing Mexican audiences back to locally-made pictures.
	The Buena Onda: 2000 – present day
2000	*Amores Perros*. Credited with starting the 'new wave', Alejandro González Iñárritu's privately-funded film wins over 31 international awards.
2001	*Y Tu Mamá También* marks a highly successful return to Mexico from Hollywood for Cuarón. Del Toro also returns from Hollywood with *El Espinazo Del Diablo*. Marisa Sistach tackles sexual assault in *Nadie Te Oye: Perfume De Violetas*.
2002	*Japón* by Carlos Reygadas. Carrera's *El Crimen Del Padre Amaro* out-performs *Titanic* in Mexico and is one of the most successful Mexican films ever.
2005	*Batalla En El Cielo* from Reygadas. *El Violin*, Francisco Vargas's debut, wins the Cannes Actor prize for Don Àngel Tavira.
2006	Films by Cuarón, González Iñárritu and del Toro hold the monopoly on international awards ceremonies. At Sundance, Juan Carlos Rulfo's *En El Hoyo* wins the Grand Jury Prize.
2007	Gael García Bernal directs *Déficit*; Diego Luna helms boxing documentary, *J.C. Chávez*. Reygadas delivers the rapturously received *Luz Silenciosa*.

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