

Patricio Guzmán, *memory or life*

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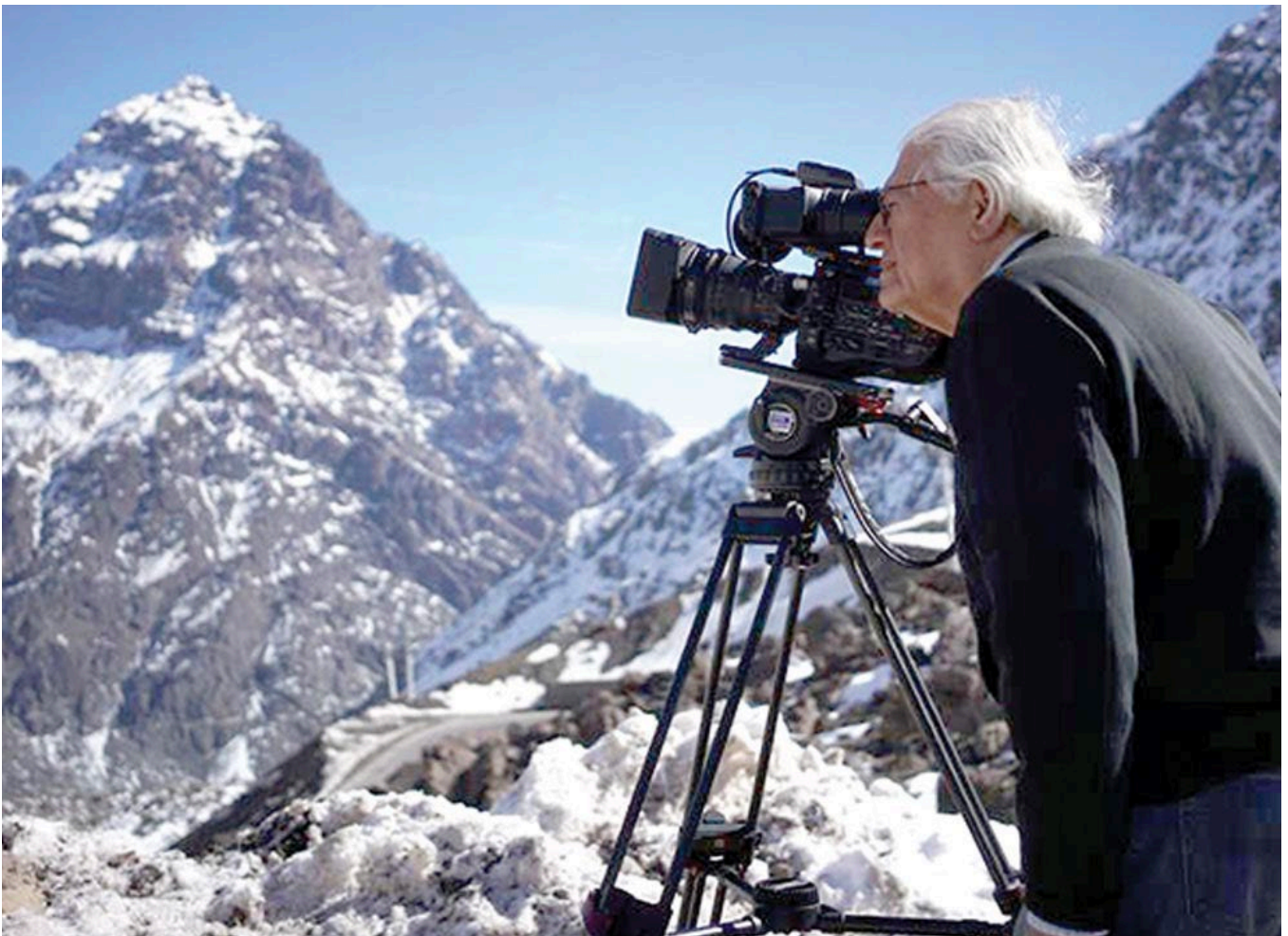
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It is not an easy task to talk about Patricio Guzmán in just a few words; nor would it be in a few pages, or even a book. Few filmmakers in the world have so powerfully made me feel the way that documentary film, more than any story, is capable of expressing the intense and dramatic heartbeat of history, or how two seemingly opposing dimensions such as historical transmission and poetry can be combined with such delicate balance. The Chilean filmmaker is today a notable figure in the history of film, widely recognised for how he has managed to preserve and transmit the history and collective memory of his homeland using a fully mastered cinematographic language, which blends historical rigor with powerful artistic sensitivity.

Born in 1941 in Santiago de Chile, Patricio Guzmán showed a true passion for film from a very early age and trained in Madrid at the former Madrid Film School. But the event that was to mark his life, and naturally the course of his cinematographic career, was the coup d'état of 11th September 1973, in Santiago de Chile, which overthrew Salvador Allende's democratically voted government and brought the military dictator Augusto Pinochet to power. What would his films have been without this tragic event, the imprint of which has been etched on the majority of his works? The short films that the then young filmmaker had made prior to the fateful date were going in different directions, and did not reveal the way in which, tenaciously and obsessively, this event would become the core of his film work and of his life, by being examined, or rather, dissected by the precise scalpel of his lens. His famous documentary trilogy *The Battle of Chile* (1975-1979) which, in the aftermath of the fatal coup, bore witness with highly dramatic images, not only to the events, recorded with daily devotion, but also to the ideas and hopes that were soon to be dashed. *The Battle of Chile* (1975-1979) was a milestone in committed film at the time.

Following on from this somewhat “initial” account, his documentary choices to date have varied hugely. But the aspect which, some forty years after the events, established him as a filmmaker on the global stage was another trilogy, comprising three feature length films *Nostalgia for the Light* (2019), *The Pearl Button* (2015), and *The Cordillera of Dreams* (2019). This time from the perspective of memory, expressing it with a unique and perfectly recognisable style, which explores the past through the present, entangling timelines and deepening the reflection with global echoes. I must confess that my favourite film of his is *Nostalgia for the Light*, whose story fascinatingly blends the activity of scientists stargazing in the Atacama Desert with the search for relatives who disappeared during the dictatorship. Past, present and future intertwine, to the backdrop of Chile’s tragic political history, leading to a philosophical reflection expressed in captivating images in a story guided by the recognisable gentle voice-over of the director.

Lauded and awarded prizes, Patricio Guzmán’s work is a model to be followed, in particular among new generations of directors, for whom film continues more than ever today to be a powerful tool to condemn and resist against the dictatorial regimes which, beyond Latin America, have spread during the century and continue to do so, unfortunately. His legacy will undoubtedly live on in the history of film for his defence of a tireless “obstinate memory”, to paraphrase the title of one of his films, to build a fairer future.



1. Patricio Guzmán during the shooting of *The Cordillera of Dreams* (2019). Promotional image.