



SSIFF

Donostia Zinemaldia
Festival de San Sebastián
ZABALTEGI-TABAKALERA

MIXTAPE LA PAMPA

A FILM BY ANDRÉS DI TELLA

SYNOPSIS

This is the diary of an extended trip across the Pampas, on the trail of Guillermo Enrique Hudson, aka William Henry Hudson. An enigmatic figure, full of paradoxes. He was an Argentine gaucho who became an English writer. He fought in the army against the “savages” but also defended them. He wrote obsessively about his native land, but never returned. In the twists and turns of the road, emerges a mix of documentary speculation, Argentine history, personal memory... and dreams.



THE NATURALIST WITH A CAMERA

The tradition is old, possibly incompatible with our own times: a person would travel to a distant unexplored destination with the mission of scrutinizing attentively, and later translating onto paper, all that his eyes had recorded from an unknown environment. The desire for knowledge was associated with a movement of the spirit intoxicated with curiosity. Naturalists worked with their eyes and their hands; in that, they do not differ all that much from filmmakers. Is not the camera -can it not be- an instrument of knowledge?

Andrés Di Tella sets out to restore a specter from the Nineteenth Century. This is no longer about his late father or mother, as in previous films. The chosen ghost is now a distinguished if somewhat forgotten writer: Guillermo Enrique Hudson. He wrote in English about what he had lived through in Spanish. Once he had left the Argentine Pampas for good, and from the distance of the United Kingdom, he never gave up in his attempt to recover through words all that his eyes and ears had experienced in his mysterious native land. Di Tella travels through the territory that inspired Hudson's prose, picks up the thread of his concerns, and transfigures the poetry into cinematic images. In the course of unearthing the detritus of memory from a buried century, he comes upon clues to his own personal history, which merges with that of his country.

Mixtape La Pampa elevates the tradition of the essay film, because it embodies with grace the most generous expression of the documentary, where archival footage, actuality, voice over, occasional portraits, musical moments and literary allusions come together as an artistic form in the service of amazement and delight. Suffice it to retain the passage in which 97-year-old Don Borges outlines his lifelong project, to appreciate the generosity of the film with regard to the audience. How could we possibly remain unmoved by the old man's endeavor to reconstruct in miniature scenarios all the places where he toiled and every machine he operated? Out of such indelible pieces takes shape the new film by Di Tella, probably the most unfettered and beautiful film of his long career.

Roger Koza



CONVERSATION WITH ANDRÉS DI TELLA ABOUT MIXTAPE LA PAMPA

Roger Koza

RK: Andrés, you've made films like this before that are more like essays, a kind of open investigation. But you made one film in particular that was a portrait of a key writer in Argentina, Ricardo Piglia, who's quite well known. That isn't strictly the case with William Henry Hudson. For many readers today, Hudson is just a small town in the Province of Buenos Aires, isn't it? So why did you choose Hudson?

ADT: I like that. For most people in Argentina, Hudson is no longer the name of a writer and has become the name of a place. And there's a certain poetic justice in that. This project actually started out with the desire to travel the roads of the Pampas, the mythical Pampas. Then we had the pandemic, which made me long to just get out anywhere.

RK: The pandemic isn't mentioned but it's implied.

ADT: Maybe. In any case, it reflects a moment of my own, a spiritual one, the sensation of being cooped up and needing to get out. I prefer not to explain it, so that it resonates in anyone who's had a similar sensation. So I started to investigate the Pampas, places, characters, stories. Among those stories, Hudson appeared. For me, Hudson is synonymous with the mythical Pampas. The legend of the Pampas, to some extent, was constructed by Hudson, through his texts written from afar. Borges said no one described the Pampas like this "English gaucho," although Hudson wasn't English, he was Argentine. I read Hudson again. His memoirs, *Far Ago and Long Away*, the stories from *El Ombú*, the chronicle *Idle Days in Patagonia*. They're extraordinary books, extraordinarily modern. A kind of autobiographical essay, that anticipates things that are being written today, and I felt an affinity with them, even though they were published over a century ago. And then I remembered that I had heard of Hudson before, in an English television program, when I was eleven. I lived in England when I was a child. And it was a strange way to hear them talk about my country, as an exotic place, through a writer who was unknown to me. Something else that appealed to me was a kind of mystery around his figure. Hudson was a gaucho, born in the Pampas, but a gaucho who dreamed of being a naturalist. At the age of 33 he got on a boat and traveled to England with that dream. But the English naturalists ignored him. He devoted himself to writing, obsessively, really longingly, about his native land, the Pampas. But he never returned. I was interested in two things: one was to explore where exactly in the Pampas he had been. That itinerary opened the possibility of making a film, following Hudson's footsteps. And secondly, I wanted to explore the idea of a person who leaves and is then haunted all his life by the place he left behind.

RK: The similarity with your experience of exile springs to mind.

ADT: When Hudson reached England he stopped speaking Spanish. Everything he wrote was in English. My case isn't exactly the same, it could even be the opposite. I spent part of my childhood in England, and I then returned to Argentina. But I shared that same problem, of being pulled between two places and two languages. Hence the title, too: *Mixtape la Pampa*. When I was fourteen, when I returned to Argentina, I had to learn to write in Spanish again.

RK: Borges observed that Hudson in a way sought out that exile because it was a way of feeling more acutely what he had lost.

ADT: Exactly.

RK: I think that's another dimension the film deals with, the relationship between a stage in your life, when you've already experienced so much, and life starts to be populated with ghosts.

ADT: I can't explain it, but I believe in ghosts. I feel the presence of my dead parents, for example, my friends also, now that I'm starting to have dead friends. Places are inhabited by ghosts, ghosts of the people who were there, ghosts of the things that happened, the pain that was suffered, the blood that was spilled on that land. None of that disappears completely. So, for example, we discover the nineteenth-century fort where Hudson served, a mound of earth that is still there in the middle of the countryside, just that. But you can make out the structure of the fort. And other objects appear, for example, a piece of a tea cup, from ceramics made in Manchester. Like the lost piece of a giant puzzle, a ghostly world that coexists with ours.

RK: I wanted to talk about the title. A mixtape is precisely a group of songs that on the one hand was part of your relationship with your friend Javier, and on the other hand a way of feeling Argentine music at a certain moment. How did the idea of the mixtape come about as a central element?

ADT: The mixtape is the Argentine rock songs that Javier, a friend who died, recorded for me on cassettes. That for me was a kind of "Introduction to Argentina," when I came back from London and didn't know a thing. At the same time, it's what I'm doing in the film, as if returning the favor to Javier, who's no longer here. The film has a lot to do with things that are done when it's too late, or things understood too late, like old letters that now take on new meaning. So the mixtape is something very concrete: some songs that

we managed to salvage from those mixtapes. On the other hand, it's a metaphor for the mix as a form of composition.

RK: The film, as is to be expected, fires an arrow back in time, to the nineteenth century, and returns to one of the big subjects of Argentine history, “civilization or barbarism.”

ADT: Hudson's vision of the indigenous question was very different from the one we have today, of course. What we today call “indigenous peoples” in his time were called “savages.” But his vision is also very different from that of other writers from the same period, such as Sarmiento, who coined that civilization/barbarism dichotomy. For Hudson, the “savage” represented an ideal, a perfect form of living with the natural world. And “civilization” was what was destroying the world he loved. He says it explicitly: his ideal death would be on a horse, galloping across the plain, or drowning in an attempt to cross a swollen river. Even though he was recruited into the National Guard and fought the indigenous at those forts. Only the poor were recruited. Hudson wasn't an English traveler who wrote about his travels, like some think. He was a gaucho.

RK: I get the impression that Hudson is a MacGuffin in the film. Not a MacGuffin of the story, as Hitchcock had it, but a MacGuffin of the imagination. He sets in motion a variety of interests, from photographing the stars to the question of how to travel the nineteenth century like a “ghost” from the twenty-first century, recognizing that the story can resemble a palimpsest.

ADT: You've just used a word that hadn't occurred to me before but that's exactly what's at the heart of this process: the idea of the palimpsest. That is, going to places where there is nothing left of the landscape of the nineteenth century, but in which there might appear something underlying, like the fort in the middle of a soy field. We try to evoke all those layers through that mix of archive footage, echoes of the same movement: a character makes a movement, for example, they crouch down, and archive footage appears of someone who made a very similar movement one hundred years ago, in a very similar place. They are diverse materials, but they convey the sensation that everywhere we go, we are treading in someone else's footsteps.



TECHNICAL INFO

MIXTAPE LA PAMPA

A film by **Andrés Di Tella**

Argentina / Chile 2023

Español

World Premiere San Sebastián Zabaltegi /Tabakalera

100 min / Colour / DCP

Produced by **Gema Juárez Allen / Clarisa Oliveri**

In co-production with **Paola Castillo Villagrán**

Editor: **Valeria Racioppi (SAE-EDA)**

Direction of photography: **Darío Schvarzstein**

Color: **Daniel Dávila**

Sound design: **Roberto Espinoza**

Original music: **José Manuel Gatica**

Research: **Darío Schvarzstein**

Archive research: **Andrés Levinson**

Personal archives: **Andrés Di Tella**

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BACA, Mecenazgo Cultural Ciudad de Buenos Aires.**

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Andrés Di Tella is a filmmaker, writer and curator from Argentina. He directed *Montoneros una historia*, *La televisión y yo*, *Fotografías*, *El país del diablo*, *Hachazos*, *327 cuadernos* and *Ficción privada*, among other films. His latest film, *Diarios*, includes a live performance and was presented at San Sebastián, BAFICI, Harvard Film Archive, Doc Montevideo and E tudo verdade. He also published two books of nonfiction: *Hachazos* and *Cuadernos*. His work includes installations, performances and video-art pieces. He was distinguished with the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Konex de Platino award for best documentary filmmaker of the decade 2010-2020. Retrospectives of his work have been held at Filmoteca Española de Madrid, la Filmoteca de Catalunya de Barcelona, el Festival dei Popoli de Florencia, el Festival de Lima, E Tudo Verdade de Sao Paulo, Tabakalera de San Sebastián, Museo de Artes Visuales de Montevideo, and elsewhere. As curator, he was the founding director of BAFICI and the Princeton Documentary Festival. He has been professor at Princeton and Harvard, where he was a fellow of the Harvard Film Study Center. He currently directs the Film Program at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella. He is a member of the Hollywood Academy.

FILMOGRAPHY

Diarios (2022)

Ficción privada (2020)

327 cuadernos (2015)

El ojo en el cielo (2013)

Máquina de sueños (2013)

¡Volveremos a las montañas! (2012)

Hachazos (2011)

El país del diablo (2008)

Fotografías (2007)

La televisión y yo (2002)

Prohibido (1997)

Macedonio Fernández (1995)

Montoneros, una historia (1994)



GEMA FILMS

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Gema Films is a production company established in 2009 in Buenos Aires and directed by Gema Juárez Allen and Clarisa Oliveri. We are interested in cinema with a strong authorial proposal that explores the narrative forms and the limits between reality and fiction. Our films have been part of the most important international film festivals. Among our most recent films are *Mixtape la pampa* by Andrés Di Tella (San Sebastián, 2023), *El castillo* by Martín Benchimol (Berlinale, 2023), y *Pornomelancolía* by Manuel Abramovich (Festival Internacional de San Sebastián, 2022).

Gema Juarez Allen, its founder, is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and a member of Eurodoc and EAVE professional networks.

ERRANTE

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Errante is a Chilean company specialized in documentaries that promotes the development of films where the author's stamp and personality are expressed. Its works address social, indigenous, human rights and art issues; and have been awarded and selected in the most important festivals in the world such as Cannes, Berlinale, Idfa, Karlovy Vary, Venice Critics' Week and New York Film Festival, among others.



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