

JARDIN

a film by NATALIA ALMADA

EL

At the Jardines Cemetery extraordinary mausoleums are being erected in memory of the most powerful drug-capos. A film about Mexico's spiral of violence that has claimed over 30,000 lives.





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EL JARDIN (working title)

Through the vigilant eyes of the night-watchman we enter into the world of El Jardín, a cemetery in the drug heartland of Mexico. Since the war on drugs began in 2007, the cemetery has doubled in size and the mausoleums have doubled in height creating a skyline that looks like a fantastical surrealist city more than a resting place for the deceased. Here, the lives of the cemetery workers and families of the victims, guilty and innocent, intersect in the shadow of this bloody conflict that has claimed nearly 30,000 lives.

Trailer:

www.altamurafilms.com

Production budget:

Production budget : 365.220 Financing in place : 162.427 – 44.47%

Supported by:

El Jardín is supported by Chicken and Egg Pictures, The Jan Vrijman Fund, LPB and NYSCA. Fiscally sponsored by Women Make Movies. Broadcast Premiere Upcoming on P.O.V. 2010 **POV**

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International Financing

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Project Description

El Jardín is a cemetery in Culiacán, capital of Sinaloa and drug heartland of México. Since the war on drugs began, the number of graves in the cemetery has exploded and the extravagance of the mausoleums has exceeded the imaginable. Ranging from minimalist modern architecture to elaborate Arabic-inspired designs, these opulent mausoleums are actually narco-tombs, costing as much as \$100,000 USD. In Mexico's depressed economy, who else can afford such luxuries and dies so young (most of the epitaphs age the deceased around thirty years old)?

Shortly after taking office President Felipe Calderon declared war on the drug cartels and put the military at the service of eradicating the drug trade in Mexico. The blood bath that has ensued has affected every sector of our society and permeated our daily lives. According to the Mexican press more bullets were fired in 2008 than in any other year of the country's recent history. In 2009 over 8000 people died in violent incidents related to drug trafficking - that same year the civilian death toll in Iraq was approximately 4500. The illegal drug trade is a multi-billion dollar industry with no borders. Drugs are produced, trafficked and consumed across the globe and billions circulate in the global economy yet Mexico has become the battle field of this worldwide problem. "There aren't enough living to bury the dead" says the cemetery's director who is losing the race to build graves for the dying.

A portrait of the daily life of the cemetery allows us to see the intersection between those who make a living there and those who rest there – innocent or guilty. In most cases, the drug traffickers and the construction workers come from the same sector of Mexican society and grew up in homes smaller than the mausoleums being erected. The workers who make an average of 200 pesos a day (less than \$20 dollars) build tombs that are more luxurious than the homes they return to at night. The most extravagant mausoleums have solar lighting, air conditioning and even bathrooms while many of the workers live without basic amenities. However, the rows of epitaphs of men killed in their twenties are a quick reminder that the price for such riches is high. As long as the illegal drug industry continues to be seen as a mere delinquency issue rather than the collateral effect of a social system, we fail to understand the complexity of the problem we face.

EL JARDÍN is the story of a place and as such, the entire film will be set within the cemetery walls. We watch the cemetery through the eyes of the night watchman, we mourn with the widows and we see it grow through the labor of the construction workers. Shot over the course of a year we watch the skyline of the cemetery grow and transform. The “growth” and “progress” of the construction is countered by the spiral of violence that is experienced the radio, tv and newspapers. The violence that engulfs the cemetery will give this contemplative film emotional and dramatic tension as the monotony of daily life is fractured by the murders described on the radio news over the loud speaker on the coconut truck, or the tally of deaths on the nightly news that the cemetery watchman watches on his little portable black and white tv.

A plastic poster of a young man flaps in the wind over a fresh grave: born 1984, died 2008. His bright eyes catch the light “I am an angel now.” reads the prayer. A funeral procession makes its way down the dirt road, the full brass band accompanies the procession and a semi-truck stacked with flowers is being unloaded. Meanwhile a construction worker balances on a ladder, his toes poking out through his torn shoes and the cemetery dog nurses her newborn pups. The coconut sales man drives down the road, “Culiacan has become a war zone” concludes the reporter as the daily life of the cemetery maintains its own rhythm and Martin the night-watchman as always arrives with the setting sun. He looks over the skyline of mausoleums that begins to light up with chandeliers and flickering candles.

The mausoleums remind us of the violence that is destroying our country and of the socio-economic conditions in which this violence flourishes. One can sense the worker’s silent coveting of the luxuries his wages will never afford him as he hangs the chandelier or polishes a cupola. The women who look too young to be widows persistently mop the floors as if they could wash away a stain that refuses to disappear. The teetering scaffolding, the rotting wooden ladder and the poster of a man who died before turning 30 remind us that life is precarious.

The architecture of the buried is a reflection of a society’s values, desires and aspirations. The mausoleums at Jardines del Humaya stand not only as monuments to the wealth and power wielded by the drug lords, but also in defiance of a society which has turned a blind eye on the needs and rights of the “dispensable classes.” Yet, above all, the mausoleums are monuments to the human spirit that strives to be remembered, loved and honored into eternity where judgment of right and wrong is no longer for the living.

EL JARDIN is a film about violence without violence.



Director's Statement

When I went to the cemetery in July of 2009 I immediately recalled filming at the paupers cemetery in Arizona just north of the border when I was shooting *Al Otro Lado*, my previous film on immigration. I understood that that image of anonymity and oblivion was the counter point to the skyline of mausoleums. The growth of the cemetery was a shocking reflection of the violence that has claimed over 28,000 lives. Four massive mausoleums were in mid construction and a new hole had been excavated for 300 more graves. The relentless press images of the decapitated, the burned and the executed are so graphic that once their morbid sensationalism fades away, all they leave us with is a feeling of impotence and numbness. In order to break the paralysis that results from these images, it is imperative to reconsider how we look at and understand violence. I am interested in making a film that is both emotive and analytical in its depiction of this tragic, complicated and nuanced reality.

Natalia Almada

Recipient of the 2009 Sundance Documentary Directing Award for her most recent feature EL GENERAL, Almada's previous credits include All Water Has a Perfect Memory, an experimental short film that received international recognition; Al Otro Lado, her award winning debut feature documentary about immigration, drug trafficking and corrido music. Almada's films have screened at The Sundance Film Festival, The Museum of Modern Art, The Guggenheim Museum and The Whitney Biennial and have broadcast on P.O.V.'s PBS, The Sundance Channel, ARTE, VPRO and others. She has received support for her work from, the Jan Vrijman Fund, The Creative Capital Foundation, The Tribeca Film Institute, The Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program, ITVS, LPB. Almada is a MacDowell Colony Fellow and a 2008 Guggenheim Fellow. She graduated with a Masters in Fine Arts in photography from the Rhode Island School of Design and shares her time between Mexico City and Brooklyn, New York.

Altamura Films

Altamura Films is Natalia Almada's production company based in New York and Mexico City. Titles produced to date: All Water has a Perfect Memory (2002), Al Otro Lado (2005), El General (2009) and El Jardín (in production)

Tita Productions

Tita Productions is an independent company created in 2006, based in Marseilles. We develop and produce short films, feature films and documentaries. The company is also present in Mexico.

We co-produce most of our films with European and international partners having in common the strong desire to highlight and support the new talents coming from different backgrounds.

Charlotte Uzu

Charlotte Uzu structures the international financing of the documentary and feature films produced by Les Films d'Ici since 2003. She also develops documentary and fiction projects in collaboration with foreign authors and producers.

Founded in 1984, Les Films d'Ici, is one of the most firmly established production companies in France, with a volume of 30 hours per year and a catalogue of over 700 films.

Charlotte Uzu lectures at several graduate study programs in France and abroad (Ina, Alba Beirut) and regularly participates in workshops and panels.



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