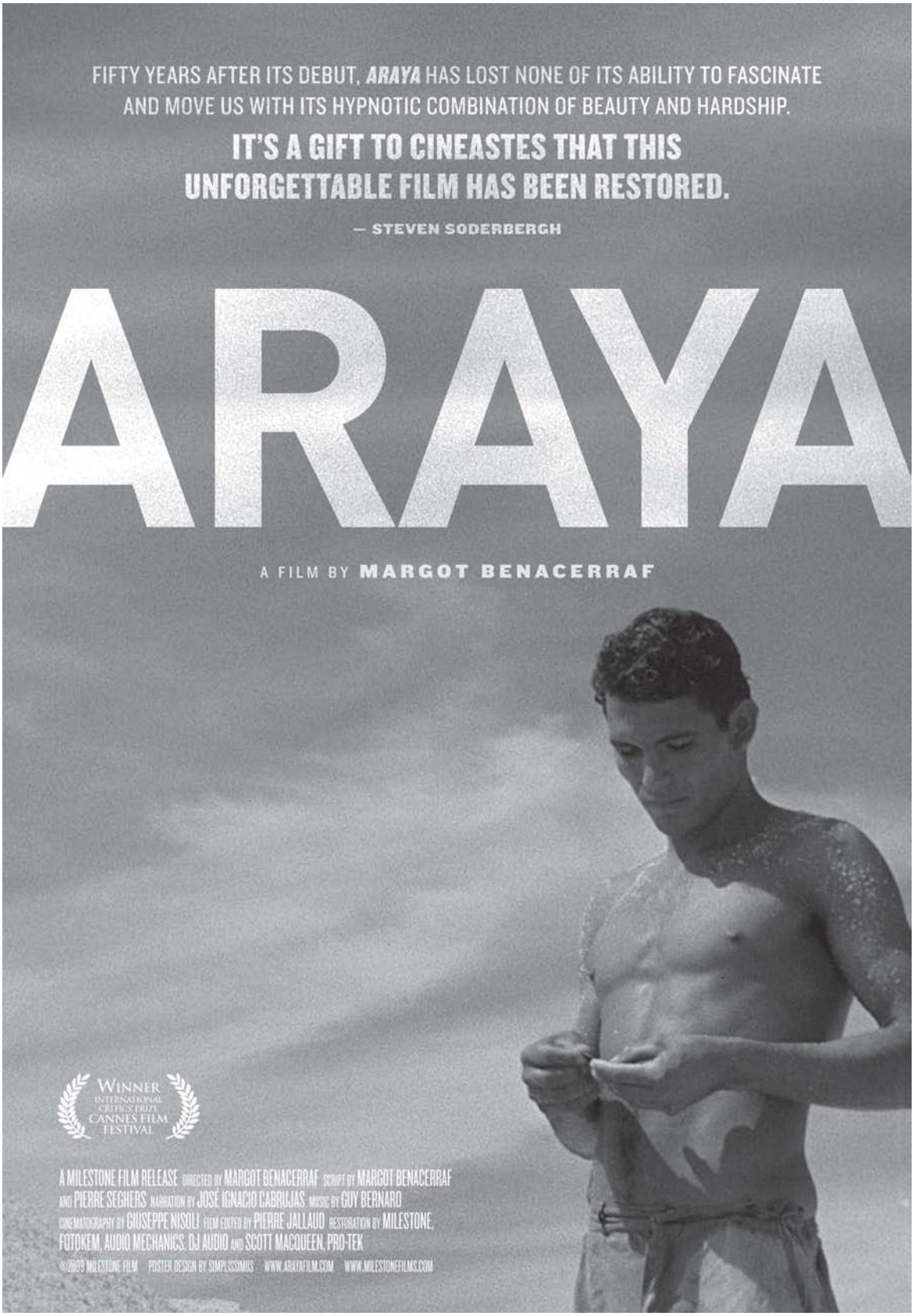

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"Stunningly shot and brilliantly crafted, this is a singular work from an incredibly distinct filmmaker. ARAYA is at once a revealing study of a very unique way of life and also a powerful meditation on the inextricable ties between society and place. We should all feel lucky to have this almost-forgotten gem unearthed and restored in all its beauty." – Barbara Kopple

ARAYA

Director ..... Margot Benacerraf
Writers ..... Margot Benacerraf and Pierre Seghers
Narrator ..... José Ignacio Cabrujas (Spanish language version)
Narrator ..... Laurent Terzieff (French language version)
Produced by ..... Henry Nadler
Original Music by ..... Guy Bernard
Cinematography by ..... Giuseppe Nisoli
Film Editing by ..... Pierre Jalluad and Francine Grübert
Production Companies ..... Caroni Films C.A. (Venezuela) & Films de l'Archer (France)
Distributor: ..... Milestone Film & Video (worldwide)

In Manicuare ..... The Pereda Family (night workers in the salt marshes)
In El Rincón ..... The Ortiz Family (fishermen)
Araya ..... The Salazar Family (salt harvesters)

Venezuela/France. 1959. 35mm. B&W. 82 minutes. 2470 meters. Mono sound.
Location: Araya, Estado Sucre, Venezuela
International Critics' Prize: 1959 Cannes Film Festival
Award of the Higher Technical Commission of French Cinema: Cannes Film Festival
Original Lab: L.T.C. France
Restoration Lab: Fotokem
Restoration: Scott MacQueen and Dennis Doros
Audio Restoration: John Polito, Audio Mechanics.
Film-to-tape: Modern Videofilm, Burbank and Glendale.
Subtitling: LVT Laser Video Titres, New York.
Initial Premiere: May 13, 1959 at the Cannes Film Festival
World premiere of the restored film: February 7, 2009 at the Berlin Film Festival

“And the salt was more precious than gold.”

Presentation from the original 1959 Press Notes

“…and below the everyday, uncover the unusual.” — Berthold Brecht

A peninsula in the Caribbean in northern Venezuela: Araya. One of the most barren regions of the world, where man depends entirely on the produce of the sea: salt, fish.

Since its discovery by the Spaniards in 1500, the exploitation of Araya’s natural salt marshes has been done by hand. For centuries, this land remained one of the richest in the New World, where pirates and slave-dealers mingled with smugglers and pearl-traffickers. For those adventurers, Salt, like Gold, was a coveted object…

After this splendid period, Araya declined into complete oblivion.

The story by Margot Benacerraf takes place over twenty-four hours, one day, in Araya. One day like so many others of these past 450 years.

But these twenty-four hours in the lives of the salt workers (*salineros*) bring about a strange, peculiar dimension. The film, from the first images, submerges the viewer into a universe of rare beauty: where life is born of the sky and the sea, where nature is created and recreated in an endless and ever renewed movement.

It is a landscape ravaged by corrosion. A barren earth whipped by the wind and an implacable, brutal light.

This is Araya. Human beings and animals cling to the soil and perpetuate. This fresco-like film unveils three villages, three ways of living in three families that intermingle and complement each other. Their simplest gestures, as the hours while away, are filled with an exceptional resonance.

Twenty-four hours that have lasted 450 years, twenty-four hours repeated endlessly for the people of Araya, until the day when…

Araya is man persevering under the most taxing circumstances.

Margot Benacerraf

“Passion, I think, makes many things possible.”

Though self-described as small in stature and with only two films to her name, Margot Benacerraf is one of the giants in Latin American Cinema.

Benacerraf was born in Caracas, Venezuela on August 14, 1926. Primarily interested in becoming a writer, she studied Philosophy and Literature at the Central University. In 1947, she won the Pan-American Award for an essay and by the next year, she wrote a play that won an award co-sponsored by Columbia University. Part of her prize was the opportunity to come to New York to study writing for the theater. There, Benacerraf discovered cinema when she appeared as an actress in a student film. Captivated by the medium, she traveled to France in 1950 to study at IDHEC — the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques in Paris – so that she could produce films in Europe.

But in November 1951, she interrupted her classwork to create her first film, *Reverón*, a poetic study of the legendary and eccentric Venezuelan artist. The 20-minute short gained international acclaim when it premiered at the 1953 Berlin Film Festival. At the festival, Benacerraf met pioneer historian Lotte Eisner, who became a lifelong friend. Eisner later introduced her to Henri Langlois, the genius behind the Cinematheque Française, who played a major role in Benacerraf’s life and career.

It took several years and a few false starts before she decided to make a three-part film of the south, central and north regions of her native Venezuela. On investigating the arid north, however, Benacerraf fell in love with the region and people of Araya and decided to focus her first feature there. In 1958, after an exhaustive consultation of the historical documents at the Seville and Madrid archives, she started shooting her film.

Araya is a vast salt marsh situated on a peninsula in the northeast coast of Venezuela, jutting out into the Caribbean Sea. Five centuries after its discovery by the Spanish, salt was still being excavated by hand in the same fashion. However, that very year brought the threat of change. Benacerraf hoped to capture the salt workers’ lives and their archaic working methods — just before industrial mechanization took over.

Araya was presented at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival with great success, sharing the Fiprisci Critics’ Award with Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, as well as winning the Higher Technical Commission’s Award for its exceptional cinematic qualities. It was the first film from Venezuela to win a major award and marked a major achievement for a Latin American director.

After serving three years as the first head of INCIBA, Venezuela’s National Institute for Culture and Fine Arts, Margot founded the Cineteca Nacional in 1966. Starting out as a cinematheque, it soon evolved into a nationwide film society movement and then became the country’s first film archive. She participated in the Board of Directors of Caracas’ first art film theater, the Ateneo de Caracas. In 1991, with Gabriel Garcia Márquez, she created Latin Fundavisual to promote Latin American audiovisual art in Venezuela. In addition, Benacerraf has received Venezuela’s National Film Award (1995) and the Andrés Bello Order (twice) for her achievements in cinema, the Simón Bolívar Medal of Honor, Order of the Italian Government, Bernardo O’Higgins Order by the Government of Chile, National Order of Merit First Class by France, and others from around the world. In February of 1987, the Ateneo de Caracas inaugurated a new theater, the Salon Margot Benacerraf. These days, she spends her time on her various cinema activities and lives in Caracas and Paris.

ARAYA IN CANNES

Programation Magazine of The Fundacion Cinemateca Nacional. Nº. 93, June 1999
By Margot Benacerraf

There we were, those who queue up in front of the doors of the French Cinematheque, while we patiently awaited for Frédéric Rosif to rip the entrance tickets and view the impressive and rushed shape, belonging to Henri Langlois, pass us by, in an endless coming and going.

There we were, Truffaut, Resnais and I. There we were, with our first features, "The Children of the Cinematheque" and I myself who was a blend too, of "Daughter of the Cinematheque" and rebel student of an excessively theoretically school of film.

There we were, all of us, in this month of May of 1959, in Cannes, in the XIIth Festival with *Les 400 Coups*, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Araya*.

Cunningly and without fuss, the "New Wave" had burst into the prestigious and classic Festival within the official competition, with all its revolutionary weight and contribution. And this Festival saw the appearance on stage of a new generation of French producers who used new methods and found new ways of touching the public. It was because of this, that the Festival of 1959 became a point of reference and was so important within the history of the Festivals of Cannes.

It was a particularly competitive and difficult Festival in that it counted 32 feature films and the participation of 30 countries.

Also present in this contest, the giants, Buñuel with *Nazarín* and Rossellini with *India*.

In the award ceremony, Truffaut received the Award for Best Director for *Les 400 Coups,* and Buñuel, the International Award, for *Nazarín*.

Exactly 40 years have passed since that 15th of May when *Araya* was awarded two grand prizes: the coveted (perhaps the most sought after because it did not fall prey to official accords/arrangements) International Critics Award (FIPRESCI), that I had the honor of sharing with *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, and the Superior Technical Commission Award.

From its birth, *Araya* was noted for its peculiarity. Within the limits preordained by the specialized critics, the historians and the distributors-exhibitors, *Araya* did not truly pertain to any genre.

The rigorous Commission of the Official Selection was presented with this problem from the very beginning. Fiction? Documentary? In what category was *Araya* to be placed? Should it participate at all? It did not count with the international "vedettes".

After some doubts, quickly allayed in the second round, *Araya* was unanimously accepted as Venezuela's official contribution. It was the second time. The first was with Carlos Hugo Christensen's *La Balandra Isabel llegó esta Tarde.*

Araya was projected on the second-to-last day of the Festival and was unanimously and enthusiastically received. *Paris-Journal* demanded that it be attributed an important prize, *L'Humanité* asked that the movie be portrayed in the seat of honor, *Le Fígaro* and *Le Parisien Liberé* praised it without restraint. Another newspaper expressed surprise "in the face of the beauty without formality of its images and most of all for its sobriety". Another claimed *Araya* as "one of the highest rewards of the Festival."

Maurice Ciantar of the *Paris Journal*, would write on the day after its projection: "*Araya*, after *Les 400 Coups* and *Orfeo Negro*, reevaluates the attribution of the Palme d'Or to the best film."

George Sadoul in *Les Lettres Francaises* would later recall how *Araya* "moved and revolutionized the last days of the Festival."

The critics of other countries present also concurred in this sensational reception, filled with surprise.

In the meantime, *Araya* was referred to as a cinematographic narrative… as an important "*suite*"… as a fresco narrated with a poetic rhythm…. In short, as a poem… But, never again was *Araya* referred to as a documentary.

From this Festival onwards, the "New Wave" was taken into consideration, and to which I was incorporated as initiator of the "New Latin American Wave"(!!!)

Glauber Rocha was present at this Festival as reporter of a Brazilian newspaper (*El Globo?*) and he wrote a beautiful interview. Years later, recalling this interview, together with Glauber himself, he told me that he always pointed out that, while *Araya* had no real consequence in Venezuelan cinema, in Brazil, it really did influence the "Cinema Novo" and him in particular, especially on his first works, like *Barravento*.

In reality, I must acknowledge that the month of May is a favorite month for me.

The 4th of May of 1966, I saw an old dream come true: the creation of the National Film Library.

The 15th of May of 1959, the XIIth Cannes Film Festival honored me and honored Venezuelan cinema by awarding *Araya* with those two grand prizes. Even today, the recollection of those days of anxiety and happiness move me deeply.

The Flying Dutchman of World Cinema

"In the year 1959 I wrote 'Sooner or later, Araya will prevail as a masterpiece for the people who love and understand films.' … When I saw the film again, after eight years, I was able to appreciate it even more." — Georges Sadoul, Les Lettres Francaises, May 3, 1967

ARAYA had a remarkable reception at film festivals around the world and garnered unanimous praise from film critics. The film was a huge influence on such young directors as Glauber Rocha — as a critic at the 1959 Cannes festival, Rocha was befriended by Benacerraf and she became his mentor. But despite all the accolades, the astonishingly beautiful film failed to find wide distribution and disappeared from view. However, like the story of the Flying Dutchman, *Araya* became a legend of cinema — the film that reappeared every ten years like clockwork. Each decade it would win more rave reviews, and then disappear once more.

Araya was first distributed in France in 1967. Shockingly it did not premiere in Venezuela until 1977. It was briefly shown in a few US cities in an ambitious *Latin American Visions* series organized in 1987. And it was last seen in tributes in Colombia and Venezuela in 1997.

When the Latin American Video Archive acquired the film in 2005, it looked as if *Araya* would at last get American distribution. Sadly, this amazing organization closed at the end of that year. But LAVA director Roselly Torres would not let the film disappear again. She contacted Milestone and asked the folks there to look at this lost masterpiece. She then introduced them to director Margot Benacerraf.

Milestone recognized that the astonishing black-and-white film was an important cinematic rediscovery. And as it had recently done so successfully with Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* and Kent Mackenzie's *The Exiles*, the company prepared to restore and then release *Araya* around the world.

For the release prints, Milestone decided to entrust the precious French internegative and soundtrack to Pro-tek's Director of Restoration Management, Scott MacQueen. Formerly director of Library Restoration at the Walt Disney Studios, MacQueen is recognized as one of the finest archivists and historians of cinema around today. He had assisted Milestone many times in the past, including the preparation of the 35mm negative and prints for Takeshi Kitano's *Fireworks* (*Hana-Bi*) and the production of one of the company's finest DVD releases, *Phantom of the Opera: The Ultimate Edition*. Fotokem was selected to do the lab work and John Polito of Audio Mechanics (working with DJ Audio) was given the job of cleaning up the audio tracks.

At first, as the original French lab had vouched that the materials were in good shape, the team anticipated that *Araya* would be an easy restoration project. The original French-language interpositive from 1960 and a dupe negative made in the 1990s were sent, along with the Spanish optical track and the 3-track mag tracks. However, problems quickly arose upon inspection. First, it was discovered that the steel cans were rusted inside and out leaving the film in great danger. The mag tracks had to be digitally transferred by DJ Audio and then given to Audio Mechanics where they balanced the narration, music and sound effects and then cleaned up the hiss and other defects. Then, Reel 1B's Spanish optical track was found missing and a scene from the same reel was found to be cut out of the negative. After comparing it to the 1960 interpositive and conferring with the director, the restoration team discovered that a lab mistake had occurred decades ago and a short but important scene of the salt gatherers had been removed without Benacerraf's knowledge. That started an intense collaboration between Milestone, Scott MacQueen, Fotokem, Audio Mechanics and DJ Audio to restore and put the scene back in. A new internegative of the section had to be created from the interpositive and the missing optical had to be found in France and shipped over quickly. The film is complete for the first time since its original release.

For the high-definition video master and the usual digital restoration, Milestone once again chose the country's best lab, Modern Videofilm. *Araya* was first transferred from the original interpositive to state-of-the-art 2K. There followed hours of intense work to stabilize the image, remove numerous dust marks and scratches and bring the film back to its original glory. This is Milestone's third straight collaboration with Modern Videofilm following *Killer of Sheep* and *The Exiles*.

The subtitles for *Araya,* which are an extremely important for this tone poem*,* have been translated by Karen Schwartzman, Julianne Burton-Carvajal, Nadja Tennstedt and Ms. Benacerraf.

A Word from Milestone Film

Milestone has built its reputation on presenting exceptionally well-made films that had been lost — forgotten by historians and rarely (if ever) seen by even the most devoted cineastes. We strive to find brilliantly made films that change the way we see the world around us. It is always an incredible experience when these passions come together with the release of films like *I am Cuba*, *Killer of Sheep* and *The Exiles*. These stories — told in stark black-and-white with no stars, little storyline, and without millions of Hollywood dollars to publicize them — took on lives of their own through recent distribution, achieving far greater success than we could have ever hoped for. Each time this happens, we look at each other and know how lucky we are — a distributor can look a whole lifetime without ever finding *one* such lost treasure. And we have had the press and public enthusiastically come along for the ride every time.

Thanks to the help of the Latin American cinema community, we now have the opportunity to present still another great rediscovery. Here is a picture of another world far from the "postcard" Caribbean resorts. *Araya* is a tone poem to be cherished for its absolutely stunning, passionate vision — crafted by a determined and inspired woman who was making films where there was no national cinema and when there were no other Latina filmmakers to look to for inspiration. It took four years to acquire, restore and release this film. It was worth every moment.

— Amy Heller and Dennis Doros

Marta Traba on *Araya*

In her article "*Araya* Across Time and Space," film historian Julianne Burton-Carvajal, included an extended quote from the acclaimed Latin American critic and novelist Marta Traba, which is excerpted here.

"…The intense and perfect beauty of Araya deserves to be called by name. In order to accentuate it, Margot Benacerraf has made every act, situation, and real-life character into the servant of that beauty... *Araya* will always be the condensation of an awesome human experience… filtered through the admirable language of film… Great photography, great editing, the inflamed quest for modulated grays amid unforgettable extremes of black and white — that is what accounts for the visual pleasure that Araya offers. A period text and period music accompany a film that knows no period, a definitive work."

Interview with Margot Benacerraf

Karen Schwartzman with Harel Calderón and Julianne Burton-Carvajal
Journal of Film and Video, Fall 1992 and Winter 1993

I have always been inclined toward literature and the arts. From a very early age, I enjoyed writing. In 1944, while I was in high school at the Liceo Andrés Bello here in Caracas, I learned of an essay contest on the topic of Latin American unity. I believe it was one of the first inter-American competitions; submissions were solicited from all the countries. To my great surprise, my essay won the prize, the Premio Panamericano. That was the first public recognition I received as a writer.

In 1948, I wrote a play called *Creciente* (*Rising Waters*), which was very influenced by the Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca, who had been killed a decade earlier by the Franco forces at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. At that time, I was a student at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), where I developed very close ties to a number of Spanish republicans in exile….

My parents were Sephardic, from Spanish Morocco. My father did not share the political views of my friends in the exile community. My three uncles on my father's side all married French women, and a large part of our family used to live in France. It so happened that two of my uncles and their wives came to Caracas for a visit in 1939. While they were with us, the Germans declared war on France. They decided to stay in Venezuela and did not return to France until after the war was over. Two of my French cousins now live in the United States: one was dean of philosophy at Princeton, the other, Baruj Benacerraf, won a Nobel prize for medicine in 1980, and became the president of the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. (See: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/1980/benacerraf-autobio.html)

Unbeknownst to me, [my professors] entered *Creciente* in a competition sponsored by the Office of Culture under the Venezuelan Ministry of Education. The UCV and the art department of Columbia University were co-sponsors of the contest. The combined prize was three months in New York studying drama and the publication and staging of the play in Venezuela. I won the competition, but things did not turn out exactly as promised.

….On November 23, 1948, President Rómulo Gallegos was overthrown by a military coup d'etat and everything was thrown into chaos. In our Latin American countries, when there is a coup d'etat, even the doormen are thrown out and replaced by friends of the new regime… It was all lost because of the coup. Everything disappeared, even my personal copy of *Creciente*. What I wouldn't give to be able to reread that work today.

New York

In the spring of 1949, I made my first trip out of Venezuela, traveling to New York City on the prize scholarship. Though the invitation had been extended by Columbia, it turned out that I did my studies with Erwin Piscator, the great German theatrical director who had fled the Nazis in 1933, at the New

School for Social Research, down in the Bowery. The first weeks were, as you might imagine, very intimidating ones for a young girl who spoke very little English and had never before been away from home…

Piscator was always a firm believer in the integration, not separation, of theater and film, and so the building where he taught housed the theatrical workshops on the ground floor and film on the second. All I knew about film was what I had seen with my brothers at the neighborhood theaters in Caracas — Hollywood musicals, Tom Mix westerns, and the like. It had never occurred to me that film could be considered an art form.

It amuses me now to remember how cocky I was when I first met Piscator. "We're going to start at the beginning," he told me. "You are going to have to study acting." I replied incredulously, "Me? Study acting? Never! I have no desire to be an actress. I came here to write! Besides, my English is very poor." Piscator just stared at me and said, "If you want to write for the theater, you must learn about the resources of the actor." And I had to yield. I have always been grateful to Piscator for obliging me to study acting.

It wasn't long after that that one of the film students descended from the mysterious upper realm in search of an actress for his thesis film. He pointed at me and declared, "Her!" Piscator told me to go with him and I had to obey. The first lesson I learned about film had to do with "continuity." I happened to be wearing a green skirt with a white blouse and black belt that day; every day for the next month, while the shooting lasted, I had to appear in exactly that same outfit! I think the film was called *Seven Different Ways to Kill*; its director was an aspiring Brian De Palma type — I was always being done in. To dispel the infinite boredom between takes, I began to get interested in the mechanics of moviemaking. So I always say that I came to filmmaking through the theater, literally as well as figuratively.

One night the film students invited me to a screening of Marcel Carne's *Les enfants du paradis*. I was incredulous — I couldn't believe that film could be all this. Suddenly a whole range of possibilities opened before me.

At the time, certain refugees from the Hollywood McCarthy purges were teaching evening classes at the New School — people like Dalton Trumbo, the famous screenwriter. Little by little, I began spending more time on the second floor… Sometimes things have a way of happening the way they must in spite of our best efforts to the contrary.

Paris and the IDHEC

After completing my New York scholarship, I traveled to Paris with my parents in the summer of 1949 to visit family. There, by coincidence, I met a fellow Venezuelan on the street one day. César Enriquez must have been the only Venezuelan studying film in Paris at that time. Today he works in television, but at that time he was about to make an interesting film called *La escalinata* (*The Stairway*, 1950). I told him about my experiences in New York. He told me about the IDHEC [Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématografiques]. I went to see what it was all about and decided then and there to apply.…

I was in the seventh-year class. French directors Robert Enrico and Henri Lanoë were classmates of mine. Among the foreign students I remember a Uruguayan girl who went on to work for the BBC in London; two Brazilians who ended up making *pornochanchadas* [Brazilian soft-core exploitation genre]; plus another Brazilian, Martin Gonçalves, who also came from the theater and became assistant director to Alberto Cavalcanti; and Joanna Harwood, a painfully timid English girl who went on to write all the James Bond scripts.

For a while I resented the IDHEC because it was very theoretical and I wanted to *make* films, to *touch* films, to learn the concrete techniques of *creating* cinema…

So I hardly ever went to class. I hung out instead with classmates from abroad who shared my disinterest because they had already acquired a solid cultural foundation in their home countries. I

always say that my other profession would have been palm reader, because that's what we did in the cafés. Of course, we also went to see movies.

Reverón

In the summer of 1951, after completing my first year at the IDHEC, I was called back to Caracas because my father was gravely ill. Fortunately, he recovered, but while I was there I happened to meet the cultural attaché from the French Embassy, and it was through this connection that I came to make my first film, *Reverón* — a film made without benefit of technical preparation, without having even touched a camera, without having so much as made a two-minute student film, though of course by that time I had seen many films and had a feeling for what I wanted to say and do with my own.

Gaston Diehl, the attaché, told me that he was a great friend of Alain Resnais, whom he was trying to convince to come to Venezuela to do a film about a local painter, Armando Reverón, in whom I was also very interested. Resnais, who had just made *Van Gogh*, his first film about painting, was then starting *Guernica*, as it turned out, so he had to decline. Diehl asked me about Reverón, and I told him that, like everyone else with my interest in art, I had once visited him at his house.

In those days, Reverón did not enjoy the stature he does today, when several rooms in the national art museum are dedicated to his work, when his paintings travel abroad as part of international exhibitions. Though he has always been a great painter, at that time his greatness was recognized in a much more informal way. People would trek out to Macuto to visit him on Sunday afternoons as a kind of diversion. They would buy one of his paintings for a song and laugh at his eccentricities. They called him El Loco de Macuto. This was in 1951! No one imagined the trajectory that lay behind his art.

So Diehl proposed that I take on the project, since I was interested in film. I said I would be honored, but I made it clear that only in November, when I would be returning to the IDHEC, would I begin my technical studies. He still wanted to entrust the project to me. I proposed to make a preliminary trip to see Reverón, after which we would collaborate on the screenplay. That's why Diehl's name appears in the credits, as an acknowledgement that he inspired the project, though as it turned out he did not have a hand in writing the screenplay.

Macuto, a seaside resort which today is easily accessible by freeway from Caracas, back then was at least three hours by car on terrible roads. But this project implied another kind of distance as well — a distance from social propriety and compliance with parental expectations. Society in those days was much more conservative, of course. My parents were already upset with me because sending a girl to study outside the country simply wasn't done — and studying film was beyond human comprehension! So nothing was easy for me, not even writing, because I was always regarded as transgressing "normal" limits. Women of my generation finished sixth grade and got married. To get a high school degree was not normal, and to seek a university diploma even worse. So, when I told them I was traveling to Macuto by myself to see a crazy painter and write something about him … well, I think I caused my parents a lot of anguish. As Spaniards transplanted to a very provincial society, my parents were doubly closed-minded.

It was very difficult to prepare the script because none of Reverón's works had been catalogued. To compile a list of them, I literally had to go door to door asking people what they had and requested permission to photograph the paintings with my little still camera. How often I found what are now regarded as great masterworks stashed out in someone's garage, being gnawed by rats…

To this day, my film stands as the only serious study of this artist's work filmed during his lifetime. I shot my film in late 1951. In 1952, Reverón was committed to a psychiatric hospital where he was subjected to electroshock therapy. He died in 1954.

At the inception of the project, I spent a lot of time talking with Reverón, not just so he would trust me, but also because he had no idea what cinema was. He thought I was just going to take some photographs of him and then go home, like the others, because already foreigners had begun to arrive and take pictures. To my great horror and consternation, on my first visit his long-time model and companion, Juanita, appeared in a bikini with a feather in her hair. When I asked her about her

costume, she said that a foreign journalist had visited recently and asked her to dress like an Indian for his photographs! Out of long, rambling conversations with Reverón, I attempted to assemble as much history and documentation on each of the paintings as possible. I remember this phase as very intense, very beautiful.

I wanted to establish such an intimacy with him, and to make my presence seem so natural, that when we started to shoot he would neither be conscious of the camera nor aware when I was directing — because, make no mistake about it, every take is directed in *Reverón*. It is very important to emphasize that neither of my films are documentaries in the classical sense. I don't simply film what transpires in a certain environment and then assemble the material; I script everything on paper beforehand and direct as if I were filming a fiction film. I still leave myself room to maneuver, so that if something spontaneously comes along that fits within my narrative line, I'm able to incorporate it, but from the beginning of the shooting I am very clear what I want to film.

In *Reverón*, everything is orchestrated to fit into a 24-hour time span. In the editing room, I gave every hour a different color so as not to collapse my predetermined time scheme. For me, the optical track has always been a crucial element. In this instance I recorded the sounds in Venezuela and mixed the soundtrack in Paris for technical reasons. The man who composed the music, coincidentally, had also done the score for Alain Resnais's *Van Gogh*. Guy Bernard had to work with all these sound effects which I brought from Venezuela, and some were pretty exotic, like the sounds I had recorded of the ceremonies of witches and healers, which we inserted during the late-night studio sequence to add to the general hallucinatory mood. Bernard was able to combine both his own musical compositions and elaborate sound effects to create the richly textured score that I was seeking.

My idea from the start was not to make a documentary about Reverón but to develop an essay on film as I would on paper, that is, specifically, to investigate through the filmmaking process the moment of creation and the relationship between creativity and madness… Given his precarious mental state and recurrent crises, he hadn't painted for three years. It was both difficult and delicate to try to convince him to paint again. He would tell me, "You see, this hand says to the other hand that it can't paint right now," and there was no counterargument I could make that he couldn't nullify by telling me, "I have here some horrible animals that don't want me to paint yet." His experience of that prohibition was so physical, so visceral. I had to have a lot of patience.

The script develops three parallel themes: tropical light, Reverón's life, and his paintings. The 24-hour cycle is very calculated. The dawn is simultaneously the beginning of Reverón's life, the beginning of the day, and the beginning of his oeuvre. Midday coincides with his most important period: the middle of his life, the glaring tropical light, and the white period, which represents a midpoint in his artistic evolution. I developed a natural curve in which the three parallel lines coincided.

The self-portrait that he eventually painted for me, which we filmed in process, turned out to be his last.… The actual filming lasted only about two weeks. The preliminary research phase, of course, took much longer, as with *Araya*. I had to move to Macuto, where I took a pension with my cinematographer, Boris Doroslovacki, a Yugoslavian who had worked at the UFA Studios in Germany and then filmed for one of the big Venezuelan oil companies before going on to found Caribe Laboratories. We were a two-person crew.

… I realized that I had to go live in Reverón's house. So I brought my hammock and set myself up in the studio that is shown in the film. Reverón's private quarters were located in a series of huts behind the main house, so this was not a great inconvenience to him. Even spending all of my time on site, the filming was still very difficult. Between all the waiting during Reverón's frequent fits of madness, and running out of film stock when he felt well enough to paint (because the producers could only see their way clear to send me small amounts of film each time), I got pretty desperate. The shortage of film taught me to be very economical.

I shared the studio with a group of life-size dolls that he had made, rather phantasmagorical company in the late-night hours. He called each of them by name, and hade made them elaborate individual wardrobes. I knew that I didn't want to film his attacks of madness directly; it seemed too invasive. So I decided to channel the madness through the hallucinatory power of the dolls. A psychiatrist recently

commented on my strategy of filming in circles and spirals. I enter, circle around the house, then around the studio, around the painter himself, and finally into the mirror. According to the psychiatrist, this circular movement is a sign of madness. For me, it was an instinctive strategy for getting close to Reverón.

Eventually the two of us established a deeper understanding. He began to see that cinema was like painting when he observed how the lighting we created would fall on particular objects, and when he got a feel for the frame of the camera. Once he made these connections, a real complicity developed between us. He became quite fond of me. I realized this when he made the most loving, trusting gesture possible by offering me the keys to the trunks containing the dolls' trousseaus. I felt I was violating his trust by deciding to film the circle dance [la ronde] with the dolls, so Boris and I made collapsible stands of wood, which allowed the dolls, when suspended, to rotate, and I kept my strategy hidden. We shot those sequences late at night, after Reverón had gone to bed.

On the last day of filming, in December 1951, it was 2:00 A.M. before Reverón finally finished his self-portrait. During the day he had locked himself in his hut and we didn't know what he was up to, but when we thought we were finally through with the shooting, he said to me, "Margocita, now we are going to finish the film together. Before the words 'The End' you are going to put in what I have made. First you are going to appear as a priest and pardon all the dolls for their sins, and then the curtain may fall." (He had never been to the movies, so this is how he thought they concluded, just like a play.) He assembled all the dolls as if they were in a cathedral, and decked out in my robes, I had to pass down the aisle between them, blessing and pardoning them all. Reverón watched me intently, and every once in a while he would interrupt, saying, "This one, Menequir, the oriental princess with the bracelets, she is the biggest sinner of all, and you have not pardoned her enough," and I would have to go back and repeat the ritual. I had signaled Boris not to film because we were so low on stock and needed to save some to shoot the last exteriors the next morning. Reverón said suspiciously at one point, "Margocita, you are fooling me, because I don't hear the little noise you make when you are filming me." What could I say to that? I mumbled that something strange must be going on because I didn't hear it either.

As we prepared to leave, he told me to take the painting he had done at my request. The car was filled to overflowing with cameras and equipment, so I told him that I would come back for the painting the following Sunday. When I returned, I found that the director of the Fine Arts Museum had taken it, which made me quite sad since I felt a great deal of connection with that particular work.

Once the shot was completed, the same producers who had made our lives difficult by parceling out film stock in such miserly fashion continued with more of the same. Henry Nadler, of Aguila Films, one of the producers, decided not to pay us our salaries. Boris was furious and refused to hand over the exposed film which he kept in a box at his house for almost a year, a very risky move in the tropics…

Meanwhile, I wrote to the IDHEC asking to be reinstated. In my enthusiasm for the Reverón project, I had postponed by return. Class had resumed in November 1951, and it was now February 1952. It was imperative for me to return, because I had seen there was no infrastructure to support filmmaking in Venezuela, and if I was to work in France I would need my diploma from the film school… So I returned to Paris, worked like mad, passed the exam, and graduated — all this without ever having viewed a frame of the *Reverón* footage…

I felt desperate to see the developed film, for I knew I had captured something very important. So I worked out an arrangement by which Nadler would pay Boris and send the negative to me. Nadler was all too happy to sell me his interest in the endeavor and get rid of this "problem." When the laboratory called to tell me that the images were indeed intact, the sense of relief was overwhelming.

On November 15, 1952, the film was screened a the First International Festival of Documentary Films on Art… *Reverón* won first prize, but I could not be there to receive it because I spent that day alone in Tangiers with my father, who died the following day…

In February 1953 I was invited to the first Berlin Film Festival. Though the political situation was still acute, with the city still in ruins and the "air corridor" separating East and West Germany, they still managed to mount this inaugural festival. I arrived in Berlin very late because of flight delays. I was

alone and felt just as terrified as I had on my first forays into the Bowery. I rushed to the hotel, dropped off my suitcases, and hurried to the screening, arriving after *Reverón* had already started. When the lights came up, there was an enormous ovation, the biggest I had ever heard, and I began to cry. Bauer, the festival director, went up to the podium and called for "Herr" Benacerraf to join him. I couldn't get up because of the trembling in my legs, and of course, I was still crying, but even had I been able to compose myself, I was still draped in black, in mourning for my father, as was the Spanish and Latin American custom at the time. So I stayed in my seat.

As I was leaving the theater, I was intercepted by the French critic André Bazin, who introduced me to Bauer, an enormous, overweight man who looked at me (I am only five feet tall) as if I were an insect. "Where is your father?" he demanded. It was too macabre a story, so I simply said that my father was dead. "Why wasn't I told?" he replied, "We would have organized a tribute!" It was then that I added, "My father died, but I was the one who made the film." Bazin intervened to back me up, but despite his best efforts, this gender confusion persisted all the time I was in Berlin… Nevertheless, that festival changed my life because Lotte Eisner, the great specialist in German expressionism and the work of Fritz Lang, was in attendance. She was very enthusiastic about *Reverón* and wrote a glowing article in *Cahiers du Cinéma.*

One day, back in Paris, I received a phone call from someone who identified himself as "Langlois." In my student days, I had stood in line to get into the old Cinématheque Français on the Avenue de Messine. Henri Langlois was a legend. "Which Langlois?" I replied into the receiver. I thought it was some kind of joke. He explained that Lotte Eisner had told him about my film, and he asked to see it. He later arranged to screen *Reverón* at the Cinématheque and gave a reception in my honor, which was where we finally met face to face. It was the beginning of an unforgettable friendship. He would later be very generous with his assistance when I founded the Cinemateca Nacional de Venezuela in 1966.

From that moment on, the film took off… At the end of the year, I returned to Caracas. I was just leaving the Museum of Fine Arts one day when I heard a voice calling "Margocita! Margocita!" Only one person called me that name. There stood Reverón, accompanied by his psychiatrist. He was dressed in an odd kind of jacket and pants, he had shaved his beard, his face looked completely different, and his ears seemed enormous. (I found out later that his illness made them grow.) He seemed altogether a different person, but he had recognized me instantly.

He began to call me every day, asking to see the film. I felt very ambivalent about showing it to him in his state, but I could not refuse. The screening was arranged for a Saturday morning at the biggest theater in Caracas at that time, the Cine Junín. So there we were, just the two of us in this enormous theater, plus his doctor and two males nurses.

At the beginning of the film, he laughed a lot, but later he became very quiet. I feared for how he would react when he saw what I had done with his dolls at night while he slept. After the film his doctor inquired brightly, "Well Reverón, it's over. What do you think?" Reverón insisted that the film was *not* over, even though we had all seen "The End" appear on the screen. It had been almost two years, and who knows what he had been through, but he still remembered how he thought the film should and would end. "No, no, Margocita knows that it isn't over," he insisted, "because the dolls are still sinners; they were never pardoned." I had to explain to his psychiatrist that Reverón was more lucid than either of us. And to Reverón I tried to explain that I hadn't wanted to show myself in the film. But for him, it simply wasn't finished. Within a few months of that encounter, he was dead.

Mexico and UNESCO

In 1954, I spent five or six months in Pátzcuaro, in the Mexican state of Morelia, at a UNESCO-sponsored audiovisual center where I had been invited to replace the French documentarist Chris Marker as the director of an audiovisual group… It was all very frustrating, but an important learning experience all the same because it was there that I became aware of a shared Latin American identity… Even though I had been educated in Venezuela and felt profoundly Venezuelan… my parents and professors had all been Spanish in origin, so I had never felt this Latin American dimension. It was like a revelation.

That Mexican sojourn was also special because it permitted me to develop a friendship with [Luis] Buñuel, which had begun in Paris.

Between Projects

I returned to Venezuela with two projects in mind, neither of which panned out in the end. I spent some time working on an adaptation of *Casas muertas* [*Dead Houses*], a novel by one of Venezuela's leading novelists, Miguel Otero Silva, who co-wrote the script… In 1956, we traveled to Mexico in search of actresses and a co-producer, Manuel Barbachano, who insisted on the script changes out of which *Oficina No. 1* [his subsequent novel] eventually emerged.

Unfortunately, while the continuation was being written, the film project was postponed. While I waited for the Mexicans to resolve the problem, I had the idea of filming three shorts dealing with everyday life in Venezuela, a kind of triptych set in the mountains, on the plains, and on the seacoast. I thought it would be easier to produce three 30-minute films in Venezuela, without having to go to Mexico for co-production funding. I began reading short fiction and found a fine short story about the Andes and another about the plains. But I was missing the story about the sea.

At the same time, I began searching out locations. I had found the plains location, Guarico; and the Andean segment would be set in Mérida; but I didn't want to film the clichéd palm tree-fringed Caribbean. While I was pondering over this third segment I happened to glimpse a magazine which featured a photo spread on the salt pyramids of Araya. Even though the photographs were rather poor, they managed to convey the beautiful strangeness of that place. I thought something original might be done there. At first no one seemed to know where Araya was, but I eventually found a local contact. So, off I went to Araya.

Araya: Genesis and Shooting

In those days, going to Araya was like going to the moon. First you took a plane to Cumaná. There you waited for a ferry, which might or might not decide to appear. Finally, to reach the Araya peninsula, you had to hire a jeep.

After that arduous journey, I caught my first glimpse of Araya one afternoon about five o'clock. There stood this gigantic colonial castle in all its immense solitude, abandoned to those terrible deserts, and illuminated by this intense, glowing light. Then came those enormous salt peaks with their fantastic dimensions.

But what drew me most to Araya was not its austere, unforgiving beauty but the dignity of its inhabitants. I hope that the love I hold for them shines through in the film. There, in the middle of that desolate, forbidding place, they managed to turn the same elements that made their existence so difficult into their very means of survival.

My first visit lasted for a week. I traversed the peninsula in the jeep. I had come with the idea of developing a 30-minute story to complete a trilogy, but the strength of the place so impressed me that my ideas began to expand. This place was so terrible, yet so authentic. It was a metaphor for Latin America.

Except for the castle, I saw it virtually as the first Spaniard had seen it when he landed there in 1500. It was as if the five centuries since the arrival of the Europeans had not perceptibly altered Araya's way of life. The inhabitants still made their ceramics without benefit of the wheel. They still used the same millenarian methods to fish the sea and to collect the salt. The physiognomy of the people — the fishermen, the salt miners — testified to this same closed way of life.

Everything seemed like it had been frozen in time, yet everything was also about to be violently, irremediably transformed. Within six months, the salt operation was to be taken over by machines. I realized that this impending transformation offered a unique opportunity to film the abrupt displacement of timeless traditions by a modernizing impulse which would give no consideration to the past. How would this violent change mark the families whose sagas went back 500 years?

I decided that I wanted to tell this story, but not as documentary in the contemporaneous sense of the word. I wanted to employ a more poetic mode, a narrative shaped by scripted rather than spontaneous action, a fictionalized documentary if you will, the flip side of the Italian neo-realist style which had enjoyed such prominence during the decade.

I returned to Caracas to find out what I could about the history of the Araya peninsula. Why was that castle there, once so important and now so sad? What in that immense solitude had justified the construction of that castle, which was to become for a time the second most important fortress on the continent? I searched the National Library and the Academy of History but found virtually no information. I realized that my best hope was the Archives of the Indies in Seville. I had to travel to Spain to discover that the fame of Araya was once so great that it appeared on all the 16th-century maps — the only toponym in what is now Venezuela. I spent three weeks reading the chronicles. I learned that the city of Cumaná was founded on salt, because that was the coin the Spanish rulers used to pay the soldiers who built the city. The only phrase that appears in the film, the only trace of three months of research, is the comment, “And the salt was more precious than gold.”

I decided to develop three stories based on the lives of three families who practiced three occupations in three different villages. The villages formed a triangle that covered the peninsula. In Manicuare, a ceramics center, the Pereda family were nocturnal salt workers. In El Rincón, the Ortiz family were fisherman. In the village of Araya, the Salazar family harvested salt by day. Each family has a distinctive physiognomy, though of course, the family members who appear in the film are not necessarily related biologically. The grandmother is not related to the girl, Carmen, who plays the granddaughter, for example. The couple who played the lovers were mortal enemies.

When I saw the marine cemetery, all built out of seashells, I marveled once more at the ability of the people of Araya to turn terrible desolation into haunting beauty. An old woman visiting a tomb was transformed, in my imagination, into the grandmother who appears in the film, accompanied by the young Carmen, dressed all in white. The girl would constantly be collecting shells. Carmen’s story, the story of the seashells, was much longer originally. It was to form a thread which would weave through the entire film. But my cameraman, Giuseppe Nisoli, had a problem with the threading at one point, and when I finally saw this footage, many months later in Paris, only half the frame had been exposed. That was a terrible blow…

I chose a 24-hour time frame because I have always believed that this unit of time gives a dimension of repetition, and it seemed essential to me to emphasize the inherited gestures and the virtually uninterrupted passage of 500 years. You see a day that potentially repeats itself for a lifetime, infinitely, until the machines arrive unexpectedly and all is transformed. It all disappears in a flash. As in *Reverón*, my script marked each hour of the 24-hour cycle, albeit differently. There was the hour of the wind, when the boat departs, when the kites are flown. There was the hour of the sunrise. Each element makes its mark on daily life. Each character, too, had a particular story. Each family was assigned its own color in the editing. When one family advanced, another retreated. It was very tricky to juggle all this during the editing, because we had to make perceptible the passage of time on the one hand, and the circularity of it all on the other. Choosing two families of salt workers, one nocturnal and the other diurnal, allowed me to close the cycle. As the Peredas return to sleep all day, the Salazars go to work in the lagoon, extracting the salt from the bottom of the marsh. The circular cycle of the salt never stops.

In this sequence, the camera makes a 180-degree pan. I felt that this was the way the sequence had to be shot. Giuseppe and I were walking together in the salt marsh — which was horrible, because our legs got scratched and the salt was burning into the wounds. With the Arriflex, Giussepe did a perfect, hand-held 360-degree turn, which lasted a full two minutes. Later, in the final edit, we cut it in half because we realized that with the music it was just too much for the overall rhythm of the film.

As in *Reverón*, we were a two-person production crew. We’d fired our assistant after the first week because he was so disorganized that it seemed preferable to do everything, including the sound, ourselves. The shooting lasted less than four weeks; we began in late September and had to finish by October. We were very pressed for time because we had to wait until the end of the rainy season, but then the machines were scheduled to arrive immediately after. Each of the locations was a great

distance from the next, and there wasn't anything that we might call a road between them. So if we wanted to be able to shoot in the fishing village at 6:00 A.M., we had to set out at 4:30 in the morning in the inky darkness. There was no electricity in our sense of the word, but we were fortunate that a small generating facility provided some light to the villages.

When the film screened at Cannes, no one believed that we had only been a two-person crew. "What about the crane shots?" they demanded. We had simply taken advantage of a construction crane that had been left on a building site. We would go up in it together, fighting against the wind. It was as heroic as it was fortuitous. Passion, I think, makes many things possible.

We often filmed all day and then went out at night to collect sounds. Each of the families has a theme song. Because the peninsula had been so isolated for centuries, they have preserved musical traditions dating from the 15th century. The *polos* which they sing come from Andalusia, where they are still heard, but in Venezuela they are extremely rare. We would record this local music at night, in people's huts. Other times we recorded the sound of the sea because I wanted the sea to have its echo throughout the film so the viewer feels its intensity, which is ever-changing.

The most curious event during the filming was the unannounced arrival of the presidential yacht. Aboard was the dictator Pérez Jiménez and his entire retinue, including his concubines. He had come to perform a collective marriage ceremony, of all things! Here were all these consensual unions which had lasted much longer than any of his own, but he was determined that these couples should have the benefit of a Roman Catholic ceremony. He lured people with gold rings and wedding dresses. On the crest of a hill, a Spanish priest performed the mass marriage. Guiseppe and I sat in the jeep, looking on. When the Pérez Jiménez people spotted our camera equipment, they asked us to film the spectacle. I declined, but have always regretted it. It would have been a wonderfully surreal document. But once again, I was concerned not to run out of precious film stock. I later told this story to Gabriel García Marquez, who incorporated it into *Eréndira.*

***Araya*: Editing and Public Response**

Araya begins with a prologue, which, like *Genesis*, situates its viewer at the moment of creation. You have the sky, you have the sea, you have the earth, and, in the midst of it all, Man appears, followed by these strange forms, pyramids of salt. The narrative portions are framed within these biblical echoes. At midday, there is a return to the elements, as in the beginning, and only afterward does the "eternal" daily narrative continue. The ending combines with the prologue and the midday sequence to compose three pillars which frame the stories of the three families.

Because the Venezuelan film labs did such a poor job with black and white, I had to ship the exposed footage off to Paris, as I had done with *Reverón*. We took pains to see that the footage got shipped out of Araya for Caracas, and from Caracas to Paris, on a regular basis. Though this was difficult, it turned out to be well worth the effort. This was the eve of the fall of the dictator Pérez Jimenez, and suddenly no one and nothing was safe. My great friend Miguel Otero Silva was imprisoned. Those intellectuals who had not been arrested were busy campaigning for the release of those who had. Out of solidarity, I could not leave for Paris to edit a film. The bombings and other public disturbances began in December 1957 and lasted through January. Everyone was either in jail or in hiding until January 23, 1958, when Jiménez finally fell.

I had managed to send the remainder of the footage, but I myself didn't manage to get to Paris until June. Many hours of material awaited my viewing, as did the shock and disappointment of the half-exposed Carmen footage. My dream had always been to work like Flaherty or like any director working under organized industrial conditions, shooting by day and viewing the rushes at night. That way, any problem sequences could be identified and reshot on the spot. With the primitive, delayed-time method that circumstances had consigned to me to work under, there was no going back.

With editor Francine Grübert and composer Guy Bernard, we produced a three-hour version, which seemed to me a perfect length in terms of the film's internal rhythms. I showed this version to Henri Langlois, who in turn screened it for Jean Renoir, who said to me upon leaving the screening, "Don't cut a single image." But in those days, a three-hour film was almost unheard of.

The editing was a long and costly process. I had intended to act as my own producer, but as costs kept rising, I decided to go into partnership with Belsollel, a French-Catalan associated with the Paris-based Films de L'Archer. He showed the three-hour version to the Cannes selection committee, who said that if we could have it ready by April, they would place it in competition. This year, 1959, promised to be a very important one at Cannes, with films like François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour*, Marcel Camus's *Black Orpheus*. But it was already February and we had yet to do the voice-over commentary. We embarked on a mad race to get the film finished, and because we needed to reduce its running time by half, I ended up working with an expanded team of five editors, with Pierre Jallaud at the helm, in order to get the thing finished in time.…

Pierre Seghers worked with me on the voice-over text. We wanted a kind of biblical tone in the opening, midday and concluding sections. The narrations related to each of the three families had a different tone. I asked actor Laurent Terzieff to do the voice-over. We hired a sound effects specialist to re-create sounds that we had been unable to tape on site. I was told that Raoul Coutard was the best in France. We sat down together and I showed him some footage: "These are the images. I would like you to add the sound of the earth as it expands from the heat of the sun." He just stared at me, speechless, but his expression clearly said, "This woman is crazy." When I pressed him a bit, he told me that a man in the studio above ours had just asked him to produce the sound of a caress, and now I wanted the sound of the earth expanding. It was all too much! We were going to drive him crazy! "Who is that working upstairs?" I asked. "His name is Alain Resnais, and his film is called *Hiroshima, mon amour*."

In the marine cemetery sequence of *Araya*, for example, there are at least five distinct sea sounds, but no footsteps at all, though this is the sound the viewer expects to hear. We taped the ocean noises backwards to give them a submarine quality. Thus, the "documentary" images are counterposed to a highly manipulated, poeticized soundtrack. Sound doesn't have to correspond to the image; it can transform it.

The prize at Cannes that year was shared by two films, *Hiroshima, mon amour* and *Araya.* Despite the parallels and coincidences that have marked our careers, Alain Resnais and I have never met.

I always insist that neither of my films is a documentary. *Reverón* is an essay on madness and creativity, and *Araya* is a great metaphor, a poem. When you film a conventional documentary, you don't intervene in the reality until the editing state or by adding a voice-over commentary. My procedure was basically the reverse: I worked like a writer or a poet, allegorically, intervening from the start in the reality I wished to record.

Various comparisons have been made between Araya and Flaherty's *Man of Aran*, Visconti's *La terra trema*, and even Rossellini's *India*, which was presented at Cannes in 1959 with *Araya*. After analyzing the soundtrack of my film, Georges Sadoul wrote that no documentary would permit these kinds of experiments with sound and rhythm. No documentary is directed sequence by sequence. Sadoul writes that *Man of Aran* aged in relation to *Araya*. The balance between reality and poetry shifts in my film. Beneath this apparent simplicity lie both extensive research and prolonged, intense human proximity. Though social commentary is explicit in both the images and the voice-over commentary, every viewer sees something different, as every reader does in Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's great epic poem, "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" (from his *Canto general*), for example.

Araya also won the Superior Technical Commission award for sound and image, and another prize for sound research. Distribution rights to the film sold briskly at Cannes, purchased by countries from Canada to China. Ironically, buyers from Spain and Latin America were conspicuously absent. Even the Venezuelan distributors who were at the festival and witnessed the film's acclaim were not interested, claiming that the Venezuelan public would never understand such an "intellectual" film.

One of the additional ironies of the post-production process was that the film's voice track was in French, not Spanish. According to the rules for entry to the Cannes event, the film must either be spoken in French or have French subtitles. The time pressure we were working under left us no choice but to record directly in French…

Eighteen years would pass before *Araya* would be screened in Venezuela… When the time came for a Venezuelan premiere, I was very nervous. It's terribly difficult to launch an 18-year-old film. I insisted that we make a Spanish-language version, and asked the playwright José Ignacio Cabrujas to do the voice-over.

Araya opened at the Cine Humboldt. In the gallery of that theater, all the leading Venezuelan painters had collaborated on an exhibition of paintings inspired by the film. This was a wonderful reverse effect for me, since painting had been one of the original inspirations for my career as a filmmaker. After the premiere, *Araya* enjoyed a rare three-month run in several theaters, often to packed houses.

During the months of postproduction in Paris, I had been quite sick, with a high fever. To this day, I don't know how I managed to hold up under all the pressure, given how ill I was. Apparently, I had picked up some bug in the salt marshes of Araya. Doctors prescribed cortisone, a new drug at the time, and one that can have unpleasant and dangerous side-effects. I have always been very small, but I blew up like a balloon…

I traveled with Henri Langlois to the Moscow Film Festival. I was still a very rare bird at these international festivals, one of the few Latin Americans, and, of course, the only female and the only Venezuelan….

Though it was never diagnosed, my illness lasted a year and a half… The timing of the illness could not have been more unfortunate. Suddenly, I had become the center of attention. I received several offers for production support. I was invited to go to Cuba with Alain Resnais to work at the newly founded Cuban Film Institute, ICAIC. I had to decline, because I was spending all my time in bed. That was in 1960.

INCIBA and the Amazonas Federal Territory Pilot Plan

In late 1964, at the urging of Mariano Picón Salas and Miguel Otero Silva, the Venezuelan Congress established the National Institute of Venezuelan Culture and Fine Arts, INCIBA… Otero Silva and Picón Salas had long talked about my directing this institute, but I kept saying I wasn't interested. I had established myself in Paris; I was very comfortable there and enjoyed many enriching friendships. They decided to intensify their campaign to entice me back to Venezuela and mounted a concerted drive which they called "Operation Margot…."

Readaptation was not easy since I had spent seven years away, not even returning for a visit in all that time.

As director of INCIBA, I took charge of six departments that covered the whole gamut of Venezuelan culture, including art, theater and dance. I established an audiovisual department, with a small production team that often worked in conjunction with people from the folklore department. My responsibilities including bringing international theater and dance groups and arranging large foreign exhibitions for the Fine Arts Museum. Today, such a post would be designated Minister of Culture. It was a formidable job.

One day I suddenly had a realization; it was as if the cultural sphere had functionally cut the country in two. Everything south of the Orinoco River — Bolivar state, Apure, the Amazonas federal territory — was not really on the map as far as cultural initiatives and activities were concerned. It was if this vast area wasn't even part of Venezuela. In response to this time-honored neglect, we developed a project called the Amazonas Pilot Plan. The idea was to use audiovisual technologies to penetrate this remote region… circulating programs first in land vehicles and later acquiring two *bongos* (dugout canoes)… Each of the boats carried a projectionist equipped with a projector, generator, sound system, films and slide shows, as well as a trained "cultural promoter" and later a doctor as well…

The Cinemateca

In May 1966, I founded the national Cinemateca. I had seen with dismay, upon my return to Venezuela the preceding year, that nothing had really changed with regard to film… During my years in Paris, as

I've mentioned, I had developed a close friendship with Henri Langlois… He taught me a great deal and made it possible for me to attend international congresses in which representatives from cinematheques the world over gathered and conferred. It was, I later realized, as if he had trained me to establish and direct the future Cinemateca.

I remembered that, in my early days at INCIBA, someone had alluded to some unused film equipment which was gathering dust in a storage area in a section of Caracas called El Paraiso. I found the equipment in amazingly good shape… We began programming at the Cinemateca Nacional on May 4, 1966 with Akira Kurasawa's *Red Beard*, a Venezuelan premiere arranged in cooperation with local distributors. The following day, we began a cycle of Brazilian Cinema Novo films — Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Carlos Diegues, and so on. We wanted to make it clear that we were, after all, a Latin American cinematheque.…

I didn't think of these programs as only for people who lived in the capital. I established a network of cine-clubs within the university system, which enabled us to circulate these programs around the country.…

Traditionally, films purchased by distributors had a five-year contract life, at the end of which the distributor was obligated to destroy the prints or return them. In practice, returning them, particularly to foreign producers, was simply too expensive, and destroying them was not a very appealing alternative. We began a campaign to persuade distributors to give their expired prints to us. Ironically, the first prints we succeeded in obtaining were *Hiroshima, mon amour* and *Reverón*… In Barquisimeto we located some wonderful films by local pioneer Amabilis Cordero, whose career spanned approximately 1916 to 1950. In Maracaibo we located footage which dates from 1896, the earliest shot in Venezuela…

[An] early visitor was the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha, whom I had met in 1959 when he was a journalist covering the Cannes festival and asked to interview me for his newspaper. Whenever we met after that, he would tell me that I had indirectly inspired the Brazilian Cinema Novo. He said he had been very impressed that a young Latin American woman, unaffiliated with any group, had managed to convey the realities of her country as I had in *Araya*. He made *Barravento*, which arguably has certain similarities in setting and theme, in 1962.

In 1967, the Cinemateca took part in the first important gathering of Latin American filmmakers on Latin American soil: Chile's Viña del Mar festival. The Union of Latin American Cinematecas [UCAL] designated ours to be one of two Latin American centers; we were to be the northern center and Buenos Aires the southern one…

These were very busy years, I was still director of INCIBA and still promoting the Plan Piloto Amazonas when I founded the Cinemateca… in 1968, after three years at the helm of INCIBA, I took a leave of absence.

I was thinking about going back to filmmaking. In 1968, I was introduced to Gabriel Garcia Márquez, who had not yet achieved the international renown he has since enjoyed. We talked about writing something in collaboration, something that would be strictly for film, because Garcia Márquez, as is widely known, has a long-standing fascination with the film medium… This was the genesis of *Eréndira*, which was born as a film script and later transformed into a short story. We spent about a year writing the first draft; two more drafts would follow… Finally I succeeded in getting a commitment from the Italian producer Carlo Ponti. His people, too, almost died of fright when the visited La Guajira, the coastal desert region contiguous to Colombia where I proposed to shoot the film. It's true that it is a desolate locale, home to smugglers since time immemorial, but Ponti understood that no similar location had the same force. Nowhere else was the proportion of man to environment so appropriate… But just when we had the production organized and set to go, Ponti became embroiled in income tax problems at home and everything fell through. Eventually, of course, the Brazilian director Ruy Guerra took up the project and filmed it in Mexico with an international cast that included the Greek actress Irene Pappas…

Concluding Reflections

… I am optimistic about the changes I have seen in Venezuelan film culture. The distributors here are no longer "buying films by the pound;" they are making an effort to import better-quality films. I think this is because of exhibition spaces like the Cinemateca and the Ateneo's Sala Margot Benacerraf, which have helped educate our national film audience. We have produced a generation of highly competent filmmakers whose technical expertise is sufficient to allow us to compete on the international market. Venezuelan films have won an enthusiastic home audience. I believe there are many reasons for optimism.

Milestone Film & Video

Milestone enters its nineteenth year of operation with a reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's work in rediscovering and releasing important films such as Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep,* the Mariposa Film Group's *Word is Out*, Kent Mackenzie's *The Exiles*, Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, the company has long occupied a position as one of the country's most influential independent distributors. Milestone has been awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission's first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association's first Legacy of Cinema Award "to Dennis Doros and Amy Heller of Milestone Film & Video for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation," the Anthology Film Archive's Film Preservation award, the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba* and later two NSFC's Film Heritage Awards including one for the release of *The Exiles in 2008*. The International Film Seminars presented the company with its prestigious Leo Award *and* the New York Film Critics Circle gave it a Special Award "in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films." In 1999, *L.A. Weekly* named Milestone "Indie Distributor of the Year." Milestone/Milliarium won for Best Rediscovery in the 2006 Il Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards for its release of *Winter Soldier*. In 2008, Dennis Doros was elected to the Board of Directors of the Association of Moving Image Archivists.

Such important contemporary filmmakers as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Barbara Kopple, Woody Allen, Steven Soderbergh, Thelma Schoonmaker, Jonathan Demme and Dustin Hoffman have co-presented Milestone restorations.

"They care and they love movies."
— Martin Scorsese

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