

Nostalgia for the Light

Cert 12A Chile 2010 93 mins

Crew

Director Patricio Guzmán
 Cinematography Katell Djian
 Film Editing Patricio Guzmán and
 Emmanuelle Joly

Featuring

Patricio Guzmán Narrator
 Gaspar Galaz Astronomer
 Lautaro Núñez Archaeologist
 Luís Henríquez Former prisoner
 Miguel Lawner Former prisoner
 Víctor González Engineer
 Vicky Saavedra Searcher
 Violeta Berríos Searcher
 George Preston Astronomer

Synopsis

The Atacama Desert, 10,000 feet above sea level, is the driest place on earth. Atop the mountains astronomers from all over the world gather to observe the stars. The sky is so translucent that it allows them to see right to the boundaries of the universe.

But the Atacama is also a place where the harsh heat of the sun keeps human remains intact: Pre-Columbian mummies; 19th century explorers and miners; and the remains of political prisoners, "disappeared" by the Chilean army after the military coup of September, 1973.

So while astronomers examine the most distant and oldest galaxies, at the foot of the mountains women are still searching for the remains of their loved ones, to reclaim their families' histories.



- The film's title was inspired by a 1987 book by the French scientist Michel Cassé: 'Nostalgia for the Light: Mountains and Wonders of Astrophysics.'
- It premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2010, and won the European Film Award for Best Documentary



Reviews

This magical, moving documentary is from Patricio Guzman, the Chilean filmmaker who has spent a lifetime exploring his country's unsteady relationship with its past. While others bury their heads in the sand over Pinochet's murderous regime during the 1970s and '80s, or the slave labour on which Chile's nineteenth-century prosperity was built, Guzman heads to the sands of the country's Atacama Desert to confront with poetry and sensitivity – but also a journalist's keen eye and rigour – themes of remembering and forgetting, exploring and ignoring.

It's in the airless time capsule of the Atacama that Guzman encounters astronomers seeking answers about the universe, archaeologists hunting for evidence of past societies and ageing women searching for the remains of loved ones who were 'disappeared' under Pinochet. Guzman draws gentle but illuminating parallels between these stories.

But underlying his film is a forceful plea for us to look beyond our noses to understand where we've come from, whether that means reaching out to the stars in the sky (presented beautifully in crisp images captured by observatories in the Atacama) or digging for bones in the ground.

Everything about this film makes you look with fresh eyes at the familiar. Guzman himself is a quiet, offscreen presence. You can imagine Werner Herzog making similar connections between the vastness of the cosmos and the more concrete details of human experience, but you can't imagine him doing it – as Guzman does – with a sense of wonder anchored in solemnity and sobriety. A truly eye-opening experience.

Dave Calhoun, Time Out London, July 2012

.....This is a film of extraordinary beauty, in its desolate way as breathtaking as any BBC nature series. See it on the big screen, and you get the full benefit of the vast blue skies over Atacama's red sand and rock, shot with gorgeous contemplative clarity by Katell Djian.

You also become aware..... that what seems like an infinite expanse of desert is just a pinprick in our galaxy. *Nostalgia for the Light* does something that, in the era of CGI space operas, you'd think impossible: it restores a cosmic dimension to cinema. But this profound and moving work also reminds us that part of the cosmic is the history of humanity – politics, slaughter and all.

Jonathan Romney, The Independent, July 2012