

CENTER FOR CUBAN STUDIES WEEKLY FILM SCREENINGS

FIRST UP: A TOMAS GUTIERREZ ALEA SERIES

12-week series tickets \$50/\$40 CCS members

Individual evenings \$6/\$5 members

(short films and occasional speakers will accompany each feature screening)

For Gutiérrez Alea, the revolution is a fact of life, but it is a fact that can be seen through many lenses, and from many vantage points. It is a vast constellation of ideas and positions, ranging from anti-colonialism to the ethnography of class. His films do not shrink from lampooning the Cuban revolution's excesses or its fetish for bureaucratic detail, something Gutiérrez Alea feels the retreating colonialist powers left behind as they fled Cuba in disarray. He frequently chooses the device of the parable as the basic narrative structure for his films, appropriate for the educational and persuasive goals of his work. While Gutiérrez Alea took seriously his role as the leading cinematic analyst of revolutionary ideology, he also remained passionately dedicated to a socialist Cuba; his films materially furthered that project. — *Kevin Hagopian, Penn State University*

MAY 27: “Titón, de la Habana a Guantanamera,” 2008. Directed by Mirta Ibarra. The life of the great Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, through his movies, interviews with his widow (who directed the film), friends, family and colleagues. Shown for the first time at the recent Havana Film Festival in NY, many of our supporters missed this wonderful documentary. Signed copies of a collection of Alea's correspondence, edited by Ibarra, will be available too. To be followed by several weeks of Titón's best movies.

JUNE 3: “Las Doce Sillas” (The Twelve Chairs), 1962. 97 min. Black and white. When the Cuban revolution comes to power, a wealthy woman can't bear to give up all of her wealth and possessions to the new government, so she hides all of her treasures in the 12 chairs of a dining room set. After her death her nephew finds out what she had done and, since the chairs had been “nationalized,” and now belong to a dozen different people, he sets out to track them down and get the treasures he believes rightly belong to him.

JUNE 10: “La Muerte de un Burócrata” (Death of a Bureaucrat), 1964. 85 min. Black and white. A Cuban worker dies accidentally and is buried together with his union card. It soon turns out that the widow will absolutely need the card for claiming her pension. Young nephew starts his hilarious fight against the authorities in order to disinter and rebury his uncle and retrieve the precious document. Alea's funniest movie.

JUNE 17: “Memorias de Subdesarrollo” (Memories of Underdevelopment), 1968. 97 min. Black and white. A stunning look into the life of Sergio (played by Sergio Corrieri), a wealthy aspiring writer who decides to stay in his native Cuba after

the Bay of Pigs invasion, even though his family (including his wife) and friends all flee to Miami. Unable to internalize the changes, he leads a detached and secluded life, avoiding real interaction. His seduction of a young woman leads to a clash in idealism, values, and morality that ends in a dramatic court scene. Alea's use of documentary footage laced through the fictional story was groundbreaking at the time. A movie so well-done and thought-provoking it warrants repeated viewing.

JUNE 24: "Una Pelea Cubana contra Los Demonios" (A Cuban Fight against Demons), 1972. 130 min. Black and white. Adapted from Fernando Ortiz' *Historia de una pelea cubana contra los demonios* (1959). A rare opportunity to see an Alea film seldom shown, *Una Pelea* reflects Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's unwillingness to limit himself to one visual style or even genre and it stands as evidence of the spirit of experimentation that has energized the Cuban film tradition since the revolution. The film is a feverish, cinematic polemic that draws on 17th century Cuban history to spin a narrative that slams right into the contemporary reality of 1970's Cuba, a time of heightened ideological vigilance. But this is not a simple tale of right and wrong: Alea weaves a multi-layered and philosophically complex narrative that refuses to settle for superficial morality. The film retells the story of a documented event that occurred in 1672. A priest in a coastal town (Remedios) becomes obsessed with a notion of religious purity, which is endangered by the possibility of pirate incursions and the presence of heretics. He exhorts his congregation to pick up stakes and move, *en masse*, to a new inland site, away from these external threats. The opposition is led by a larger-than-life local landowner whose skepticism and hedonism are his undoing. Quick flashes of iconic contemporary Cuban figures such as Che, Fidel Castro, and José Martí transpose the story to contemporary Cuban reality. The acting is neorealist, the camera is on wings but the director's vision keeps a firm grasp on the mayhem.

JULY 1: "La Ultima Cena" (The Last Supper), 1976. 120 min. Color. Although the movie has pronounced religious overtones, they are not necessarily reverent ones. Based on a purportedly true incident, the film stars Nelson Allegra as an 18th century count and landowner. The count sees nothing wrong in keeping slaves, but he does worry about his status in the hereafter. To this end, he begins instructing his slaves in the edicts of Christianity, inviting a dozen of them to restage the Last Supper. The lengthy and manic supper scene is unforgettable. Not even at the end does the hypocrisy of religiosity combined with forced servitude become obvious to the well-meaning count. The movie serves not only as an investigation of the history of slavery in Cuba but is also a film that uses this historical information to incite awareness of racial and class politics in the contemporary audience by showing how such history informs the present.

JULY 8: "Los Sobrevivientes" (Survivors), 1979. 120 min. Color. This movie was an important signpost on the road of Cuban cinema, as it matured from an explicitly revolutionary cinema to one which began to see its political role in subtler, more ironic terms. This wry Bunuelian comedy shows the ability of the

Cuban cinema to chuckle, as well as to preach. A family of Cuban aristocrats, the Orozcós, locks itself into its mansion following the Cuban revolution in order to avoid contact with its degeneracy. Ironically, the family's attempts to retain its "civilized" standards strand the individuals in ever-more barbaric conditions. Allegorically, the family and its many servants begin to act out Cuban history in reverse time, returning to colonial times and slavery and a "slave" uprising. At the end, the survivors are left with little to eat and no one to serve it to them.

JULY 15: "Hasta Cierta Punto" (Up to a Point), 1983. 88 min. Color. This clever, self-reflexive satire about the battle of the sexes in contemporary Cuba tells the story of Oscar, an educated, liberal filmmaker who, in doing research for a film about the social problem of machismo in Cuban society, finds himself falling in love with the sexy, liberated Lina (played by Mirta Ibarra, the first film with her director husband), a pioneering female dockworker. What starts out as a funny and tender love story gets more and more frantic as Oscar finds he can't choose between his wife and his new lover. As in "Memories," Alea mixes documentary footage of Havana dockworkers with the fictional love and work story.

JULY 22: "Cartas del Parque" (Letters from the Park), 1989. 88 min. Color. Set in Matanzas In 1913, the idea comes from a few pages of García Márquez' *Love in the Time of Cholera*. As the film unfolds, two shy young lovers – he is a timid young hot-air balloon enthusiast -- enlist the help of the local poet (Argentine actor Victor LaPlace), a professional letter-writer, to write passionate letters to each other. When the balloonist's plan to circle the world fails, he cannot admit to his love that he is still in Cuba, so the poet continues to send postcards from around the world using his collection of world stamps. Soon the young woman becomes the object of the poet's affection, and all are faced with a perplexing dilemma in this sweet and surprising romance.

THE NEXT FILM IS A SPECIAL SCREENING IN COMMEMORATION OF JULY 26!

JULY 29: "De Cierta Manera" (One Way or Another), 1974-77. Directed by Sara Gómez, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa. Sara Gómez (1943-74), died before she could finish the film, so Alea and García Espinosa finished the direction and Alea much of the writing.

Critic John Mraz writes: "Here is a revolutionary film: dialectical in form and content, humble in the face of real human experience, proposing no final answers except the unending struggle of a people to make something out of what history has made of them. *De cierta manera* is that powerful hybrid—the fictional documentary set to a tropical beat—for which the cinema of revolutionary Cuba is justifiably famous. In this instance, the documentary deals with the destruction of slum housing and the struggle against the culture of marginality generated in such slums through the creation of a new housing project (Miraflores) and an accompanying educational program. The fictional embodiment of this historical

process is seen in the clash of attitudes between Mario (a product of the slums), his lover Yolanda (a teacher who has come to Miraflores to help integrate such marginal elements into the revolution), and his friend Humberto (a fun-loving slacker). In the course of telling these stories, and others, *De cierta manera* demolishes the categories of fiction and documentary, insisting that both forms are equally mediated by the intention of the filmmaker, and that both thus require a critical stance. . . . a rich blending of fictional present and historical recreation with documentary and semi-documentary [makes it] impossible to distinguish the different forms; fictional characters are set in documentary sequences where they interact with real people and real people re-enact historical re-constructions which are not visually in accordance with their *own* telling of the stories. Further, the film repeats various sequences several times, twisting the film back on itself and requiring the audience to participate actively in analyzing the different perspectives offered on the problems posed by the film.

AUGUST 5: “Fresa y Chocolate” (Strawberry and Chocolate), 1994. Directed with Juan Carlos Tabío. 110 min. Color. Diego (played by Jorge Perrugorría), a cultivated, homosexual and skeptical young man, falls in love with a young heterosexual communist, a university student full of prejudices and doctrinary ideas. First come rejection and suspicion, but also fascination. The movie is set in a 1970s Cuba when being gay was much tougher than now. It is the story of a great friendship, really a great love between two men, which overcomes incomprehension and intolerance. Senel Paz wrote the story (“The Wolf, the Woods and the New Man”) and the screenplay. Film critic [Roger Ebert](#) comments that “nothing unfolds as we expect. *Strawberry and Chocolate* is not a movie about the seduction of a body, but about the seduction of a mind. It is more interested in politics than sex . . . “

AUGUST 12: “Guantanamera,” 1995. 101 min. Color. The final collaboration by Alea, who died in 1996, and Juan Carlos Tabío, with whom he worked on “Strawberry and Chocolate,” the movie is really two stories, one a light-hearted comedy, the other an equally light-hearted but harsh critique of Cuban bureaucracy. Stephen Holden, writing in The New York Times: “Cuba may be suffocating in the grip of a strait-laced and bumbling Communist bureaucracy, but the warm-blooded spirit of its people can't be chilled by economic hardship and silly rules and regulations. That's the cheerful message of “Guantanamera,” . . .

For further information and/or to reserve series tickets or for specific films, call 212.242.0559. All showings are at the Cuban Art Space, 231 West 29 St., 4th floor. Limited Seating, reservations necessary!! Films start at 7:30 pm, doors open at 7.