



FRANCI DURAN
In Departure's Wake

By Cecilia Araneda



Born in Chile in 1967, Toronto-based filmmaker Franci Duran came to Canada as a refugee as a child, following the coup that ousted democratically-elected president Salvador Allende and unleashed large-scale military violence against civilians. Duran's thirty year body of work often serves as a response to narrative-building attempts to legitimize the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, and by extension global neoliberal systems of rule. More recently, Duran has widened her artistic scope to consider the nature of violence done by humans not only onto other humans, but onto life as a whole. Like many of her Latin Canadian filmmaker contemporaries, Duran does not seek to examine her place in Canadian society through her work, but instead casts her vision squarely back onto Latin America as a site of origin, examining and analyzing it from a distance, dialoguing with and challenging the definition of Latin American cinema.

Franci Duran, photo by Justine McCloskey





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Franci Duran's work does not give comfort. Even to me; for if there was ever a film curator somewhere in the world best situated to contextualize Duran's work, it is probably very specifically me. But for those familiar with my work, you will know I do not approach filmmaking through an academic lens; as both a filmmaker and a curator, I am led instead by the intuitive moment. Duran, on the other hand, works in a way that responds to philosophical and academic texts as a point of impetus, consciously building and weaving around tightly spun themes. I've been interviewing Duran for several years now, both formally and informally, as part of my attempt to unearth what Latin Canadian cinema is. I've interviewed dozens of other Latin Canadian filmmakers from across the country at the same time. This started for witnessing for a while now the emergence of a meaningful independent film movement that was unnoticed by institutional film programmers and critics. It's true that most of the knowledge of these gatekeepers tends to be years behind current living movements, but this problem is multiplied when it comes to filmmakers whose life experiences do not mirror the makeup of the programmer class in Canada, manifesting itself as large communities of undocumented practitioners. Is there a Latin Canadian cinema? Some will argue there is not, though I believe this is more a response to it not having entered the country's formal memory-keeping systems. It is in this larger context that I examine the work of Franci Duran.

Francisca Duran was born a few years before me in 1967, and in the same city: Santiago, Chile. Long seen as the serious version of Latin America, by the time the 1970's rolled in, Chile felt buoyed enough by the global social justice movements of the 1960s to feel that equitable evolution was possible through democratic means. But then the USA triggered a violent coup d'état and installed a right wing military dictatorship that would last nearly 20 years. All utopian visions ended. Duran's family was, by luck of circumstance, able to flee to Canada almost immediately; my family would take a longer route to Canada the following year, after my mother's imprisonment in the infamous *Estadio Nacional* and eventual release. Both Duran and I would grow up within the aftermath, arriving to a sense of understanding the foundation of our lives while in exile, living the experience of our departure only through its

wake. Our paths have crossed only a few times over the past decades, as Duran lives in Toronto and I live in the West. But the Chilean exile diaspora has a quick shorthand with each other - no matter where in the world we are - and so it's possible that site and presence is not essential to understanding.

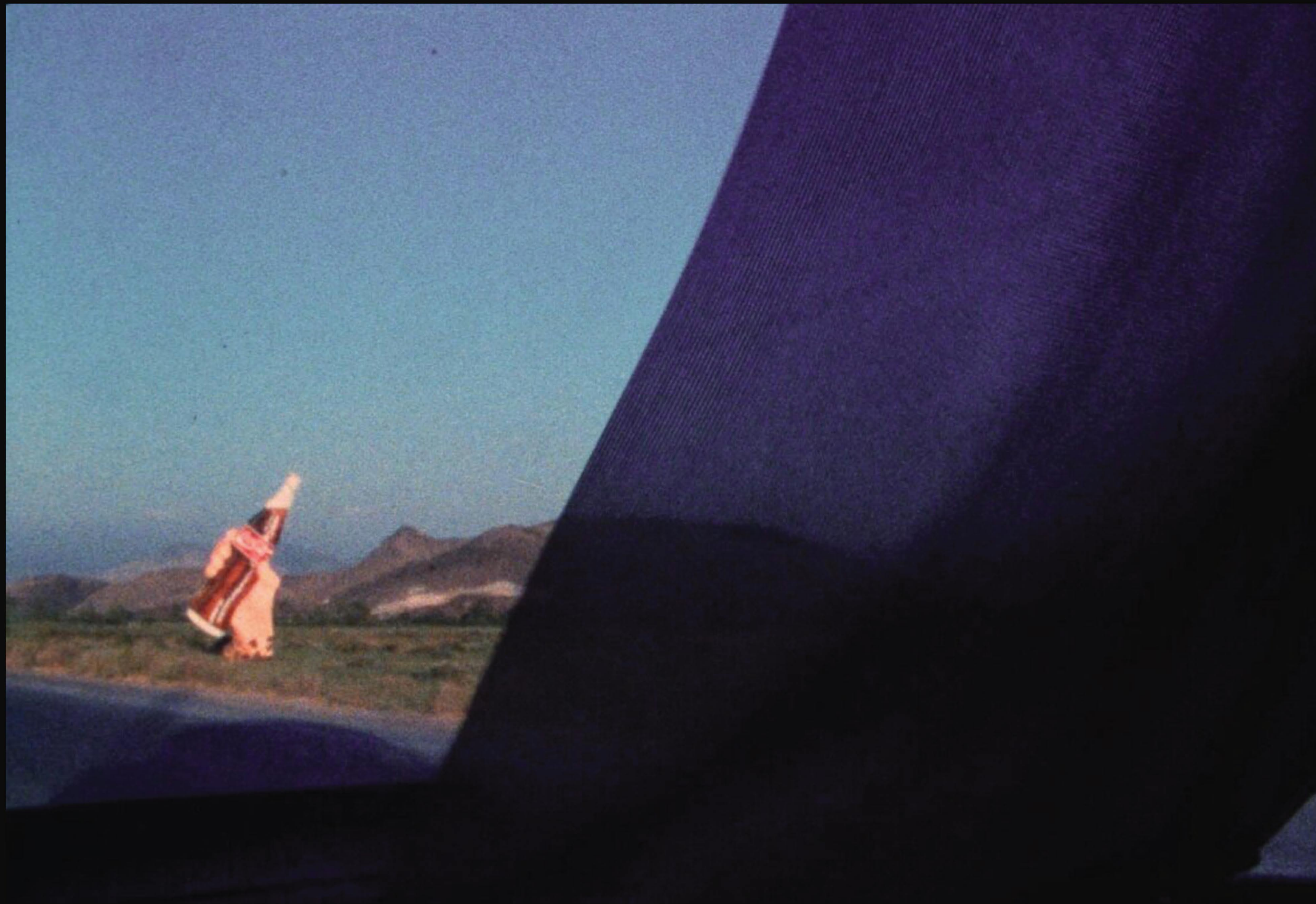
Duran always knew she wanted to be a filmmaker. After growing up in Toronto, she pursued Film Studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where she would learn both mainstream approaches and more personal ones. It was there that she was first introduced to the *Escarpment School*, a loose grouping of filmmakers with similar approaches to personal cinema who emerged from Toronto's Sheridan College in the 1970s and 80s, reacting against both mainstream cinema and the NFB's aesthetic approach to documentary, which had come to dominate in Canada. There, Duran would incorporate the influence of the *Escarpment School*, as well as filmmakers such as Midi Onodera and Barbara Sternberg, to make her first film, *Cuentos de mi niñez (Tales from My Childhood)* (1991), an untraditional first person POV documentary about how she ended up in Canada. After graduating from university, Midi Onodera would give Duran her first job in the film industry, but soon Duran would lose her way. While Duran always knew she wanted to be a filmmaker, the mode and mechanism was still unclear to her at that moment. She focused on the idea that serious filmmakers worked in long from and this soon resulted in a 50-minute fiction film that would never see the light of day. Shortly after, Duran moved to Vancouver, started a family and entered into professional graphic design while working in non-profit organizations. It would not be for another ten years before Duran would seriously return to filmmaking, returning to the influence of the *Escarpment School* and moving to take her MFA at York University under one of its members, Phil Hoffman.

In the wake of departure from Chile's past to Duran's present moment, Duran would turn to an examination of the archival image as both artefact and idea. Prior to the advent of the digital age in the early aughts, images were scarce, physical in nature and difficult to copy. Images retained were retained for specific reasons, and eventually that rationale would become the meaning of the archive. The examination of the

archive has become a de rigueur component of Canadian experimental filmmaking, and so Duran's approach evokes a Canadian lens, but with a quintessentially Latin American perspective, working in a way that shares many underpinnings central to Latin Canadian cinema.

Latin Canadian cinema is a transnational cinema that completely bypasses the dominant American cultural notion of "Latino" that casts a shadow over Canada. Latin Canadian filmmakers do not seek to examine or define what it means to be Latin in Canada. Instead, they cast their vision back onto Latin America itself as the site of origin, examining it from a distance, with a hybridized Canadian lens that is impossible to remove once you have lived here for some time. And with this lens, it is difficult to avoid the subject of militarization at the root of the larger Latin American macro culture, whether directly or indirectly, because it is unlike any experience in Canadian history.

Latin America's militarization of societal structures was the outcome of first Spanish and then later auto colonialism, the latter overlaying a new monarchy-like authoritarian system on top of the old Spanish one. Latin America did not actively seek independence the way that France or the USA did, but rather this was an outcome of Napoleon's invasion and weakening of Spain in 1808, as he sought control of the Iberian peninsula. Though Spanish America became independent en masse between 1808 and 1833, its revolutions resulted not in democracy as we understand it today, but rather in local wealthy land owners replacing the Spanish royal class as the directors of government. Dubbed the *elite* in Latin America, this oligarchical group of land-owning families still owns large swaths of the continent and still maintains large control over its governments and military systems. In this way, a military dictator like Pinochet was not working as an independent actor, but rather as an effective employee of the *elite*. The Latin American revolutions overlaid a new origin story over Latin America, where militarization, hyper masculinity, authoritarian rule and colonial violence were re-branded as righteous pathways to liberty and replaced existing cultures as the new and only accepted monoculture, with everything else in its path to be erased. In a recent interview I had with Colombian-Canadian filmmaker Pablo



Álvarez-Mesa, he described this principle as residing in monument form in nearly every city and town plaza in Latin America today, with a church on one side and the statue of a revolutionary military figure on the other, be it Simón Bolívar in Colombia or Bernardo O'Higgins in Chile. Here, the message is clear: *la patria o la muerte* - *fatherland or death*. Modern Latin America's economic systems still require extreme poverty to exist in order for the elite to maintain their control of countries and their expected living standards. Rebranded as neoliberalism during the Pinochet era, the modern version of this system co-opts the idea of freedom as ensuring lower social classes do not participate in societal decision-making that affects the private wealth of the elite. This larger continental macro culture is at complete odds with modern concepts of democracy and is why Latin America has had so much difficulty with the basic ideals of democracy for so long.

Latin Canadian filmmakers, as a collective group, challenge the narration of Latin America in cinema, becoming a counter-cinema movement that extends the idea of *Latinness* as beyond belonging to one certain geography. And in Canada, it does not matter if a filmmaker comes from the 'right kind of family,' as has been the case with art until only fairly recently in Latin America, where control of each country's narrative has traditionally been available largely only to the elite. While Latin America has started to slowly move away from this system of control, vestiges still remain; international poster boy of contemporary Chilean cinema Pablo Larraín (*No, Jackie*), for example, is a member of Chile's active oligarchy. Beyond not navigating social class the way their Latin American counterparts do, the generation of Latin Canadian filmmakers who grew up specifically in the 80s and the 90s have strongly entered into experimental forms as a challenge to the dominant conventions of contemporary Latin American cinema.

Duran's ongoing *Retrato Oficial* (*Official Portrait*) series of films examines the modern historical legacy of the larger militarized macro culture on Chile. This series focuses on the image of Chilean military dictator Pinochet as the outcome and exemplification of the neocolonial ideal in Chile. Layered within her

examination of the image of Pinochet - both as object and idea - as an archive, is the activation and re-activation of other images that present a juxtaposition to the strong control exerted over the meaning of the image of Pinochet.

The connection between the UK and Pinochet is immediate to Chileans because of Margaret Thatcher's vocal support of the dictatorship and her continued defense of Pinochet long past the dictatorship. This connection is evoked with *Retrato Oficial 1* (2002), which captures the aftermath of a historic attempt by Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón to have Pinochet arrested for extradition to Spain while in London for medical treatment. Pinochet stands up out of his wheelchair and greets supporters at the airport in Santiago after having been released by the UK for having been found medically unfit to stand trial. In *Retrato Oficial 1*, Duran contrasts this event with grainy, black and white footage of a plane that evokes both Pinochet's departure from the UK, as well as the military plane from 1973 working under Pinochet's orders to attack Chile's presidential palace, seeking to kill president Salvador Allende. Garzón himself has written that "the image of a helpless old man in a wheel chair leaving British territory contrasted with his upright figure after landing at the airport in Santiago, Chile on March 3, 2000"¹. Duran evokes the connection between the UK and Pinochet once more in *Dominion* (2004), which reflects on the image of Princess Diana as the re-branding mechanism of an old empire, in contrast with images that speak to the outcomes of colonialism.

With *Retrato Oficial 2* (2009), Duran examines more closely - quite literally - the image of 19th century oligarch and revolutionary Bernardo O'Higgins as the "great liberator of Chile." The narrative of O'Higgins was strongly reactivated by Pinochet as a mechanism to legitimize himself by associating the modern day military with the one of the past. Here, like in many of Duran's works, the ending modifies the beginning. *Retrato Oficial 2* ends with footage of Pinochet's first address to the nation on September 11, 1973 as its new self-declared President while under a portrait of O'Higgins, as a juxtaposition to the beginning, which presents the image of O'Higgins as metaphor. The idea of who



is permitted to take and modify an image of authority is considered doubly, as the footage of Pinochet's infamous first speech Duran uses was shot by Patricio Guzmán, the filmmaker widely recognized for having given birth to modern Chilean documentary through his narration of Chile's dictatorship while living in exile. Duran describes the third film in the *Retrato Oficial* series, *Even if my hands were full of truths* (2012) as a "mirror that contemplates how memory might or might not become history," analyzing the idea of image making, or how national narratives are built, through its exact reverse. On one side is a declassified CIA document from 1970 recounting American intervention in Chile's democracy, days after Allende's election; and on the other side, the modern day Museum of Human Rights and Memory in Chile, designed to document the atrocities of the CIA-backed dictatorship.

When I first formally interviewed Duran at her home in Toronto in mid 2019, she told me she was done with Chile as a subject, in part because of Chile's active policy of oblivion, and in part for no longer being as versed in its contemporary politics. Although this was just months before Chile's political terrain would suddenly experience a seismic shift away from the Pinochet-era constitution that had cemented Chile as a neoliberal haven, triggered by the cost of public transit increasing by 5¢, Duran's work had by then already started entering into a new philosophical space with *Traje de luces* (*Suit of Lights*) (2018), the fifth of her *Retrato Oficial* series. *Traje de luces*, named for the suit worn by bullfighters, serves as a transition work that begins to consider more consciously "other-than-humans," and specifically the outcomes of human violence not only on other humans, but onto the entirety of the natural world. The film is based on found footage of a bullfight during the emerging post Franco dictatorship era in Spain and examines what Duran describes as "masculinity and violence masked as nationalism." The work also considers the physical nature of the source film itself in her inquiry, through initiating an interaction with the meat-based origins of gelatin that binds film's reactive agents to its transparent base. Here, Duran permits microbes present in soil to eat away at the image on the film and incorporates their subtractions in her finished work. In this way, she creates a dialogue

between the materiality of the film and the butchery of the bull in the bullfight.

It Matters What (2019) is a continuation of the expansion of ideas introduced in *Traje de luces*, both of which focus on animal trophies as a larger metaphor for the machinery of human violence. *With It Matters What*, Duran also returns to the structure of her earlier *Retrato Oficial* works, constructing two distinct film components, with the ending creating a modification of the beginning. The starting point is a reworking of text from Haraway's essay *Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene*, to consider how humans act upon the earth, as well as our place within it. A large dead owl is stretched out like a trophy and Duran requires us to watch, much like she required us to watch the killing of a bull in *Traje de luces*. Duran juxtaposes this beginning with an ending of images of plants taking over the film emulsion, incorporating a practice called phytography where the chemistry within plants reacts directly with the emulsion to create an almost memory of the image of themselves. On the one side is humanity, and on the other, plant life and the earth.

In her more recent films, Duran's increasing mastery of the technical elements of experimental filmmaking emerges squarely to the fore. Duran interestingly describes her physical touching of the films she makes as incorporating an element of autobiography into all of her works. With *Traje de luces*, she painstakingly re-photographs new iterations of the film by hand, reworking them to introduce or draw out elements and colours. With *It Matters What*, she continues and builds upon her sophisticated re-photography work, while also adding eco-processing methodologies, including using hydrogen peroxide to develop the positive image, leaving the telltale evidence of this process as the sparkle effect on the images of the owl. The phytography work in the latter half of this film is another laborious process that starts with picking the plants, soaking them in a solution of washing soda and vitamin C, and then physically positioning them on the film emulsion in a camera-less approach similar to how rayographs are achieved.

The description of Duran’s films as all autobiographical for being her conscious output, brings us back to *Cuentos de mi niñez* and her later work *Boy*, filmed in 1999 but finished in 2005, after Duran had already gone to study with Phil Hoffman. These two works, which are autobiographical not only as conscious output, but also in form, represent the emergence and re-emergence of Duran as a filmmaker. With *Cuentos de mi niñez*, Duran combines a diary cinema approach and footage from a recent trip to Chile as an adult to recount stories from the time of the coup, which resulted in the assassination and disappearance of thousands. *Cuentos de mi niñez* also represents another kind of emergence for Duran, the child and daughter, as she finds safety with her family in Canada. With *Boy*, Duran finds a re-emergence after giving birth to her first son in Vancouver. Grainy, out-of-focus sepia-toned 16 mm footage accompanies the recounting of milestones of her growing son that eventually merge into the sound of a heart beating, evoking the more experimental turn of new work to come. After this creation of new life, Duran states “it is impossible to imagine a time he did not exist.”

Departures, in Duran’s work, at once evoke arrivals: of Pinochet leaving the UK physically unfit to stand trial, while arriving in Chile a healthy man able to stand and greet supporters; of Duran leaving the dangers of Chile to arrive to the safety of Canada; of Duran leaving life before motherhood to arrive at a place where she couldn’t imagine life before. The wake she is situated within as an artist challenges the narration of official histories invoked onto images and archives with counter-narratives that dare show us what lies on the other side of the coin - or that even the coin itself is a mirage. And Duran leaves us with the discomfort of knowing that each one of us participates in and consumes this mirage.

[1] “Pinochet’s arrest,” undated web post by Baltasar Garzón on his website, baltasargarzon.org/en/universal-jurisdiction/pinochets-arrest/



FRANCI DURAN: IN DEPARTURE'S WAKE
CURATED BY CECILIA ARANEDA

SCREENING AT THE WNDX FESTIVAL OF MOVING IMAGE
Saturday, Oct 9 at 7 PM - Winnipeg Cinematheque

In a partnership with Harbour Collective

Cuentos de mi niñez

Dir: Franci Duran, 8:45 mins, 16 mm, 1991

In this autobiographical experimental film, a young woman remembers and recounts difficult childhood memories of the 1973 coup in Chile when her family was forced into exile.

Retrato Oficial 1

Dir: Franci Duran, 1:00 min, 16 mm, 2003 - no sound

After declared unfit to stand trial in England, former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet stands up out of his wheelchair and greets his supporters.

Retrato Oficial 2

Dir: Franci Duran, 4:00 mins, digital file, 2009

Based in part on a conceit borrowed from Raul Ruiz's essay *Images of Images* and original footage shot by Patricio Guzman on September 11, 1973, *Retrato Oficial 2* explores the nature of the mediated image and image-making technologies as it reacts to the mythology of Chilean revolutionary Bernardo O'Higgins and the reach of the Pinochet dictatorship.

Dominion

Dir: Franci Duran, 2:51 mins, digital file, 2004

A found footage piece consisting of reworked of images of Princess Diana, pointing to England's colonial past and the elusiveness of a media image.

Even if my hands were full of truths

Dir: Franci Duran, 7:29 mins, digital file, 2012

The third part of the *Retrato Oficial* series, *Even if my hands were full of truths* contemplates how memory may or may not become history, using excerpts from now-declassified CIA correspondence and a photo-montage taken at the Museum of Human Rights and Memory in Santiago.

Traje de luces

Dir: Franci Duran, 18:03 mins, digital file, 2018

A traje de luces, or suit of lights, is a bull fighter's uniform. Intricately hand-crafted film footage of a bullfight during the time of Franco's dictatorship in Spain is used to explore the broad reach of fascism and why citizens accept the harm done to others.

It Matters What

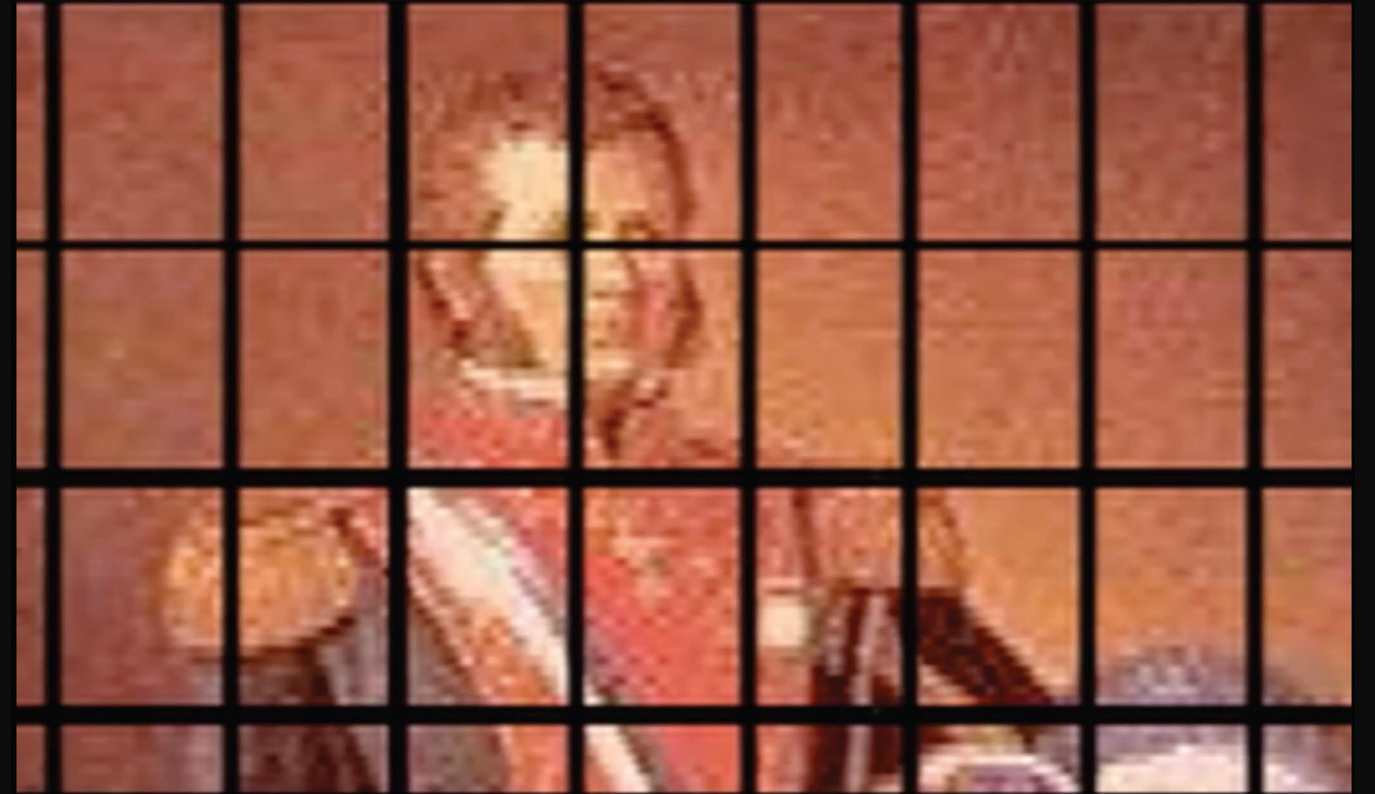
Dir: Franci Duran, 9:06 mins, digital file, 2019

A textual and textural filmic manifesto combining extracts from Donna Haraway's essay *Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene* with in-camera animation, contact printing and phytograms (the exposure of 16mm film overlaid with plant material and dried in direct sunlight) - Kim Knowles

Boy

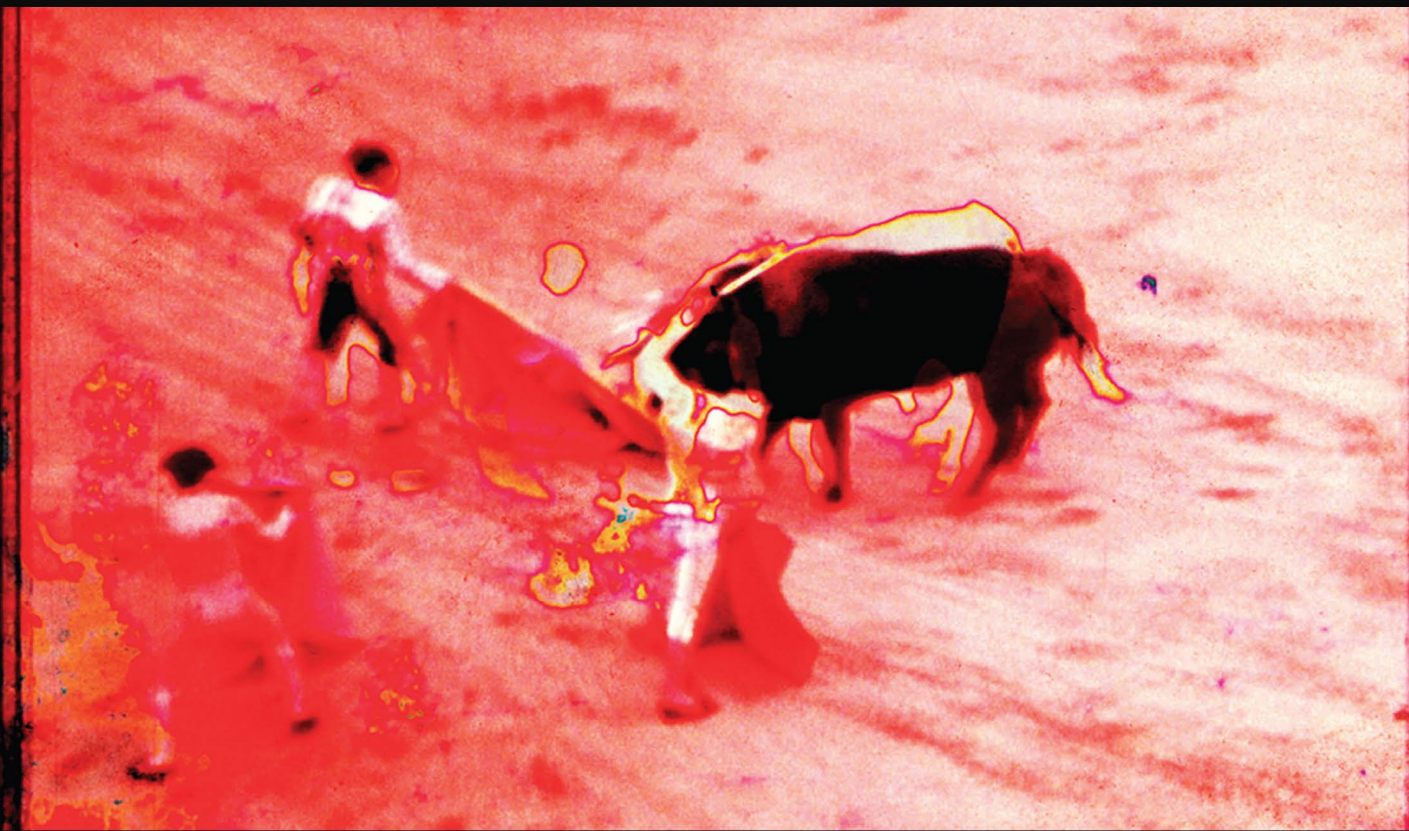
Dir: Franci Duran, 7:00 mins, 16 mm, 2005

The visual poetics of Vancouver are brought to light as the filmmaker reflects on the cities she has lived in, motherhood and the birth of her first son.





Even if my hands were full of truths





ABOUT CECILIA ARANEDA

Chilean-Canadian filmmaker and curator Cecilia Araneda came to Canada as a child as a refugee together with her family, after they escaped Chile's right wing military dictatorship. She grew up in northern Manitoba and currently lives in Winnipeg. She holds a BFA (hons) from York University and an MFA from UBC, and is also three-time alumna of the fabled Film Farm. She is a founder of the WNDX Festival of Moving Image and remained a central force to the festival from 2005 to 2014. Araneda is also a founder of the Winnipeg-based Mujer Artista Latin women's artist group, which has held two group shows at aceartinc., in 2017 and 2019, and will hold a third one in 2022. In 2018, she curated Caroline Monnet's first artistic career survey, presented at the FICWALLMAPU International Film Festival of the Mapuche Nation, in Temuco and Santiago, Chile. In 2019, she became the first-ever curator from the prairies to be awarded the Joan Lowndes Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts, for independent curatorial practice in visual and media arts. In 2020, she served as commissioning curator of the *!in.site*; exhibition at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, featuring new work by emerging rural Manitoba Indigenous digital artists Dallas Flett-Wapash and Taylor McArthur. Among the other organizations Araneda has worked with as an independent curator include Envoi Poetry Festival, Gallery 101, Harbour Collective, imagineNATIVE and Winnipeg Cinematheque.

ceciliaaraneda.ca

ABOUT HARBOUR COLLECTIVE

Working within the medial and visual arts, Harbour Collective engages in research activities, artistic programming and service delivery for filmmakers, media artists and visual artists. Harbour's activities include: regional moving image labs, curated screening programs, curatorial research and sector research and development.

harbourcollective.ca

ABOUT WNDX FESTIVAL OF MOVING IMAGE

Founded in 2005, the WNDX Festival programs new and innovative moving image works from across Canada and around the globe, with a mandate to showcase films made in its local community. WNDX celebrates work from underrepresented communities who are often ignored by mainstream film festival circuits, and strive to find the most innovative, challenging and original moving image works.

wndx.org

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Harbour Collective and the WNDX Festival of Moving Image are grateful for the opportunity to work on Treaty 1, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Ininew, Anishinew, Dakota, Dene and Métis Nations.

WNDX





