

# **"I AM CUBA, THE SIBERIAN MAMMOTH"**

Soy Cuba, o Mamute Siberiano

Directed by Vicente Ferraz

2004, 35mm, 90 min., color

***Int'l Press Award at Chicago Int'l Documentary Festival 2005***

***Best Documentary at the Guadalajara Int'l Film Festival 2005***

**"Witnessing the amazing trip of the film "Soy Cuba" is like traveling down a spiral into the past, not only toward the unknown film by Soviet Mikhail Kalatosov, but also Cuba's recent history. Ironically, when the film is finally rediscovered, all the utopian dreams portrayed in the first co-production of the old Soviet Union and Cuba are nothing more than the remote past." *Vicente Ferraz***

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

In the early sixties, the USSR famous director Mijail Kalatasov and a 200 people crew spent two full years in Cuba shooting a film that was intended to be a propaganda piece of the Cuban Revolution. However, a week after its release in Moscow and Havana, the movie was taken out of the theatres and subsequently unknown to west audiences until it is "rediscovered" in the 90's.

The documentary retrieves a peak moment in cinematic history through the eyes of the authors and technicians, reading in their testimony the intensity of this creative process 37 years later.

## SYNOPSIS

**"I am Cuba, the Siberian Mammoth"** is a documentary of the film **"I am Cuba"**, the unknown and extraordinary film that the famous Soviet director, Mijail Kalatosov made in Cuba in the early 60's during the time of the Cold War.

This super production intended to be a propaganda piece for the Cuban revolution, made by the cultural elite and Soviet avant-garde. However, a week after its screening in Moscow and Cuba, it was taken out of release, stored and consequently unknown to the West for more than 30 years until the discovery of this gem by Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford-Coppola.

Discovering what drove the Cuban and Soviet authorities to shelve this masterpiece is one of the objectives at the root of this project. This documentary explores the reasons and speaks about the rediscovery or redemption of **"I am Cuba"** by the North American critics – after the fall of the Soviet Union – and how it has stood out as one of the most important works in world cinematography **"I am Cuba, the Siberian Mammoth"** is a reflection on how a work of art can take on different interpretations throughout time.

This documentary retrieves a peak moment in cinematic history, through the eyes of authors and technicians (Soviet and Cuban), reading in their words and gestures the intensity of this creative process thirty seven years later. This testifies to the human effort, frequently forgotten, that gives life to a great feat: the impressive and defiant **"I am Cuba"**. The interviews show the impact that this work provoked in the people who worked on this ambitious project, the mark that **"I am Cuba"** left on their lives.

Finally, this documentary attempts to delve into two contrasting worlds showing the grandiosity of the Slavic epic in the inner world of the afro Cuban culture, which could be seen as a metaphor for Socialist Cuba's own story: the project that the Soviets abandoned at the end of the Cold War. Perhaps, both the Island of Cuba and the movie have navigated the same waters and suffered the same fate.

## **CREDIT LIST**

<i>Production Company:</i>	Tres Mundos Producciones
<i>Written and Directed by:</i>	Vicente Ferraz
<i>Produced by:</i>	Isabel Martínez
<i>Photography:</i>	Tareq Daoud and Vicente Ferraz
<i>Edition:</i>	Dull Janiel and Mair Tavares
<i>Composer original music:</i>	Jenny Padrón
<i>Co-Producer:</i>	URCA FILMES -Brazil
<i>Associate Producer:</i>	RACCORD - Brazil
<i>Support:</i>	
	ICAIC - Institute of Cuban Art and Cinematography –
	Jan Vrijman Fund – International Documentary film Festival, Amsterdam
	EICTV – International School of Film and Television, San Antonio de los Baños

## **THE DIRECTOR**

Vicente Ferraz Gonçalves was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1965. He studied at EICTV (International School of Film and TV, San Antonio de Los Baños, CUBA). He directed several shorts and documentaries in Brazil, Cuba, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. He lives in Rio de Janeiro, and he's also a screenwriter, cinematographer and TV director.

"I Am Cuba, the Siberian Mammoth" is his first feature documentary.

## **LIKE A HORSE**

*By Vicente Ferraz*

"I was all on my own in the darkness of the projection room watching for the first time a copy of "Soy Cuba, The Siberian Mammoth", the documentary I had been working on for the last three years. It was then, in that private meeting with myself, looking at those images, that I started thinking about the film I had just made. The images I saw didn't only belong to me, I hadn't made the film on my own".

I started thinking of the other co-authors, specially of my companion Isabel Martínez, who produced it and was present at all times. I also remembered all the people in Cuba, Brazil, Russia, Costa Rica, USA and all of the other places that helped me to tell this story. It's a story that belongs to a lot of people! And during all this time I was always being assisted by the imponderable, the destiny! There were a number of times that I came upon it, the destiny.

To re-create the story that had taken place over 40 years ago about the film "Soy Cuba", we needed to not only have a very careful production, but also an immense emotional effort. It was a journey in spiral to the past, to the memory of a certain time and to the adventure of making that film. I tried to speak to all of those that had been involved, not only to those alive but also to the dead! And after reading the diaries and the letters of Serguey Urusevsky, Belka Fridman e Mijail Kalatosov, I began to understand these Russian film makers and to grasp the feelings that had led them to Cuba, to try and understand this country and its young revolution. They didn't want to make a propaganda film but to show all the love they felt for that island.

Unfortunately the film wasn't understood at the time. And during these last three years it seems to me that I spoke to them, I could feel their anguish with that forgotten film. I tried to hear their opinions and doubts. And they, the ones departed, were my real guide in this curious journey.

In Brazil we have an expression that sums up all of my feelings concerning this film. I felt like the "horse" of this story. Being "horse" the name given to a person used to embody the spirits of the dead so that they may speak, teach and lead our way. And it's this strange relationship with the dead and the living that I would like to show you on this occasion "Soy Cuba, the Siberian Mammoth" is also a film about my love for Cuba."

## **ON MIJAIL KALATOZOV'S "SOY CUBA"**

The mega-production of the classic "Soy Cuba" begun during those unforgettable days of the October crisis over the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba and the United States decreed a naval blockade of the island.

The film was intended to be a powerful propaganda tool for the Cuban Revolution and flaunt the support that the Soviet Union was giving to the people of Cuba. A team of almost 200 Soviets and Cubans went the length and breadth of the island, spending 16 hours a day filming and recreating the newborn Revolution on the screen.

Kalatozov had *carte blanche* to do what he wanted. He and his photographer, Sergei Urusevsky, even altered the course of a river to fit into their plans. At another moment, they recruited 5,000 soldiers, which was quite a feat considering that this small country was about to confront an American blockade and defend its frontiers. But Kalatozov was adamant that the project should be grandiose, because he knew he was about to make his mark on history. He said, "This film will be *my response and that of all the Soviet peoples to the aggression of American imperialism*".

## **ON MIJAIL KALATOZOV**

Kalatozov was born in Georgia in 1903. He became a director, a scriptwriter and a photographer and began working in films at the end of the 1920s. He made "The Cranes are Flying", which is his best known film in the West and for which he received the Golden Palm Award at the 1958 Cannes Festival. The film was a milestone in post-Stalinist cinema and the cultural "thaw" that was the highlight of the years in which Nikita Krushov was in power. This was a war drama, in which there were many elements that demonstrated an analysis of Soviet society, which had, hitherto, been strictly avoided on film.

In the 30s, Kalatosov made some important films, among them, the classic "Salt for Svanetia", which was shot in a village in Georgia, his native land. This film, in which he was photographer, reveals elements that were to reappear in other films, especially in "The Letter that was Never Sent" and "Soy Cuba".

He passed away in 1973 without ever knowing that the film he made in Cuba would, one day, be recognised and acclaimed by the whole world.

## ABOUT THE LAUNCHING OF THE CLASSIC IN THE U.S.A

"If I had been able to see 'Soy Cuba' when I was still a student of Cinema, today I would be quite a different film maker!" **Martin Scorsese**

*"A sensuously beautiful movie...a hymn to the liberation off appetite... IRRESSISTIBLE!"* **David Denby - New York Magazine.**

*"Spectacular visually stunning"* **Stephen Holden. New York Times.**

*"Exquisite"* **L.A. Weekly**

*"Stupendous"* **Washington Post**

*"Masterpiece"* **Christian Science Monitor. San Francisco**

*"Fabulous"* **The Nation**

*"Spectacular"* **National Public Radio**

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