

PRESS RELEASE

THE HARVARD FILM ARCHIVE PRESENTS

MARGINAL HISTORIES. THE FILMS OF PABLO LARRAÍN

November 16 - 18

CAMBRIDGE, MA: The Harvard Film Archive is pleased to present the series **MARGINAL HISTORIES. THE FILMS OF PABLO LARRAÍN** from **SATURDAY NOVEMBER 16 – MONDAY NOVEMBER 18, 2013** with the filmmaker in person.

About the filmmaker:

The films of Pablo Larraín (b. 1976) simultaneously expand and confound the tradition of vociferously political counter-cinema once proclaimed as the greatest legacy of Latin American cinema. Bracingly direct character portraits, Larraín's films cast awkward anti-heroes as the unlikely protagonists of a contested historic past revisited through dark, disconcerting allegories of treason, myopic idealism and the unbridled arrogance of power. With his latest and most audacious triumph, *No*, Larraín completed an unintentional trilogy of films that each look back differently at the dark – and in Chile still irreconcilably divisive – past of the brutal seventeen-year Pinochet dictatorship whose unbroken tyranny began in 1973 with the US-backed overthrow of Socialist President Salvador Allende. While markedly different from the films of fellow Chilean Patricio Guzmán, Larraín's work nevertheless shares a similarly obsessive return to the troubled Pinochet era that each time confirms a troubling notion of the past as a traumatic waking dream still haunting and confusing the present.

The first and most controversial showcase for Larraín's unconventional retelling of history from the shadowy margins was *Tony Manero* which returned to 1978 Chile via the demented figure of a sadistic dancer cruelly pushing his threadbare troupe to the breaking point in preparation for a high stakes televised disco competition. A black parody of the back-stage musical, *Tony Manero* unsettled audiences with its savage humor and the nightmarish mood of terror that pervades the film. Larraín's follow-up *Post Mortem*, looked back even more pointedly to the Pinochet era by reimagining the chaotic, frightful days leading up to and after Allende's September 11 overthrow and suicide, seen now through the jaundiced eyes of a sociopathic morgue attendant drifting through the shattered Santiago streets and past the corpses piling up horrifically in the neon-lit mortuary corridors.

On one level postmodern revisions of history from unexpected angles, Larraín's films are also inventive twists of film genres into trenchant, black satire. Indeed, if *Tony Manero* is a musical of sorts and *Post Mortem* a kind of zombie film, then *No* can be read as a screwball comedy revisiting the plebiscite that ultimately toppled Pinochet from the restless and frequently absurdist point of view of the rival ad men and agencies responsible for the warring liberal and conservative political campaigns. The sophistication and exacting control of Larraín's mediation on cinema and history lies also in the bold technique and stylization through which each film of his trilogy embraces a different patina and mood conjuring the specific texture of the past but also underscoring the controlled artificiality of the period film. In this way *Tony Manero* uses grainy 16mm to give pulsing life to the film's relentless darkness, while *Post Mortem* takes on a sci-fi otherworldliness through its use of distorting Soviet-era wide-angle lenses. In *No*, Larraín goes further still, using obsolete video equipment to radically embrace the saturated colors and imperfections of the televisual image which is its very subject.

As the privileged son of a high-level Pinochet cabinet member, Larraín's career trajectory as a political filmmaker carries a fiercely contrarian and provocative charge that is clearly legible in the films themselves and in Larraín's daring exploration of his country's troubled and still unsettled past. Larraín's films together explore a bold and

difficult mode of political cinema that challenges the viewer to understand the insightful yet biased view from the trenches of history's battlefields while cautioning about the distorting power of cinema, and moving image media in general.

The Harvard Film Archive is truly privileged to welcome Pablo Larraín for a rare visit and opportunity to discuss his films. This program was made possible by the generous support of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS), as part of the ARTS@DRCLAS initiative, and takes place in conjunction with the event, Democracy & Memory in Latin America, multidisciplinary exploration of the relationship between democracy and the collective memory of violence, injustice, repression, and resistance in Latin America.

This event is the 4th Annual ARTS@DRCLAS – HFA film retrospective and is co-sponsored by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS). Special thanks: Paola Ibarra – DRCLAS

Film Schedule:

\$12 Special Event Tickets

Pablo Larraín in person

Tony Manero

Saturday November 16 at 7pm

Larraín's nimbly confrontational approach to history was first revealed in his controversial *Tony Manero*, a gripping and disquieting story of a machismo brute whose unhealthy obsession with disco dancing and John Travolta inspires his unnatural violence. A Stygian vision of late 1970s Santiago set largely at night and in dim interiors, *Tony Manero* punctuates its literal and thematic darkness with flashes of vicious and unsettling black humor. *Tony Manero* was co-written by Larraín and the film's star, Alfredo Castro whose uncanny resemblance to Al Pacino echoes the dancer's manic imitation of John Travolta's disco idol and, by deliberate extension, the aggressive embrace of American free-market capitalism adopted by the Pinochet dictatorship.

Directed by Pablo Larraín. With Alfredo Castro, Amparo Noguera, Héctor Morales
Chile/Brazil 2008, 35mm, color, 97 min. Spanish and English with English subtitles

<http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/films/2013octdec/larrain.html#tony>

\$12 Special Event Tickets

Pablo Larraín in person

No

Sunday November 17 at 7pm

Larraín's latest film gives a surprising uplift and kind of closure to his Pinochet trilogy, echoing and insightfully revising the actual unexpected turn that led to the dictator's sudden removal from power. A backstage version of the 1988 plebiscite forced upon Pinochet by international pressures, *No* focuses upon the clever admen behind the competing television campaigns, with Gael García Bernal as the young and seemingly apolitical upstart hired, with unwitting savvy, by the opposition to sloganize the long simmering dissent of a repressed nation. Larraín channels own early background directing television commercials to capture the nicotine fueled idea sessions and clipped ruthlessness of the advertising world, while also suggesting a deeper paradigm shift at work in the realm of political image making. As meta-cinematic commentary, *No* goes further with its brilliant use of obsolete late-Eighties videography rendering the film's brisk narrative a seamless simulacra of the slick advertising and of history itself in the form of the actual television footage incorporated into the film.

Directed by Pablo Larraín. With Gael García Bernal, Alfredo Castro, Antonia Zegers
Chile/USA/France/Mexico 2012, 35mm, b/w and color, 118 min. Spanish with English subtitles

<http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/films/2013octdec/larrain.html#no>

Post Mortem

Monday November 18 at 7pm

Post Mortem offers a haunting and almost fantastically apocalyptic vision of Chile's descent into national chaos immediately following the military overthrow of September 11, 1973. Refusing any easy nostalgia for the past, Larraín's extreme attention to those historical details often fetishized in period films- clothing, hairstyle, décor – imparts an unnatural and eerie pallor to early Seventies Santiago as a city floating in a deadly netherworld where the horrors strangely chronicled in the film are made to seem frighteningly inevitable. *Tony Manero* star Alfredo Castro delivers another unfettered performance as a pathologically lonely, emotionally bankrupt, mortician who increasingly resembles one of the cadavers piled unceremoniously in the devastated streets and everywhere in his overrun hospital. Although *Post Mortem* glows with a dark unshakable anger over the unthinkable injustice it so brilliantly depicts, the film also aims equally savage caricature at both the blind brutality of the military forces and the untenable utopia of the Socialist revolutionaries.

Directed by Pablo Larraín. With Alfredo Castro, Antonia Zegers, Jaime Vadell
Chile/Germany/Mexico 2010, 35mm, color, 98 min. Spanish with English subtitles

<http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/films/2013octdec/larrain.html#post>

Additional resources:

<http://sonyclassics.com/no/>

This press release is available for download on the press page of the Harvard Film Archive's website: http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/general_info.html#press. The user name and password are hfa_press. Please contact bgravely@fas.harvard.edu for screeners, additional photos, or more information.

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<http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa>

General Admission Tickets \$9, \$7 Non-Harvard Students, Seniors, Harvard Faculty and Staff. Harvard students free

Special event tickets (for in-person appearances) are \$12.

Tickets go on sale 45 minutes prior to show time. The HFA does not do advance ticket sales.

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