

Spanish Film Festival -
"Embrace of the Serpent"
Palace Electric Cinema - Canberra
Sunday 8th of May, 2016



Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues and friends,

I am very glad to be able to welcome you to this closure night of the Spanish Film Festival .I wish to thank Palace Cinema and the organizers of this Festival for this opportunity and for allowing me to make some short remarks on the film shown tonight.

The Embrace of the Serpent (in Spanish: El abrazo de la Serpiente) is a multi-award-winning film and a breathtaking odyssey through the Amazon region, inspired by the expedition diaries of the German ethnologist Theodor Koch- Grünberg (in 1909) and the American biologist Richard Evans Schultes (in 1940). In order to connect the two exploratory narratives (set thirty years apart),the Colombian film-maker Ciro Guerra ingeniously invented the character of *Karamakate*, the Amazonian shaman and last survivor of his tribe, that connects both journeys and leads the men to find the rare sacred plant, *yakruna*. With Karamakate, Ciro Guerra exalts the culture and values of the indigenous populations in our history.

In 2015, the "Embrace of the Serpent" won the Art Cinema Award at the Cannes Film Festival and it was nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film at the recent Academy Awards. The film is set in the Amazonian region of Colombia, specifically in the provinces or Departamentos of Vaupés and Guainía , and provides a dramatic testimony of the life of

Level 2, 40 Macquarie St
Barton ACT 2600
P. +61 2 62732090/91 – Fax +61 2 62732092
www.cancilleria.gov.co <http://australia.embajada.gov.co>
eaustralia@cancilleria.gov.co
Canberra – ACT – Australia



tribes of the Amazon, about to face extinction and the impact that colonialism together with the exploitation of the natural resources of this region has caused to the traditions, culture and way of live of this ancient and unknown tribes.

Film director *Ciro Guerra* (born in 1981) is one of Colombia and South America's top directors. His films are in many ways tributes to the Colombian culture and nature: His first two films, *The Wandering Shadows* (2004) and *The Wind's Journeys* (2009), were screened at numerous international film festivals, and both were Colombia's official submissions to the Academy Awards. His third film, *The Embrace of the Serpent* (2015), has earned him a significantly increased festival pedigree and international critical acclaim.

In different interviews, *Ciro Guerra* valued the support received by the different indigenous communities that were basic for the creation of the film. In this regard, the Governor of the *Guainía* Department, one of the locations used for the film, granted *Ciro Guerra* the Order of the *Inírida Flower* for “exalting the respect and value of the indigenous populations, likewise giving the Department recognition for tourism and culture.”

I wish to highlight the incredible and natural performance of natives *Nilbio Torres*, of the *Cubeo* ethnic group and *Antonio Bolivar Salvador Yangiama*, himself one of the last surviving members of the *Ocaina* ethnic group, both in the role of *Karamakate* (in his youth and old age) and the use of native languages, such as the *Ocaina* language sadly one condemned to disappear in this generation as it is only currently spoken by sixteen people .

Let the myth and magic of the Amazonian region, enchant our minds while we travel together in this journey of self-knowledge. Please enjoy the film!