

PROLOGUE (2025) - 3 min. approx.

Madrid 2025. Rogelio Sánchez (65 years old), member of the Spanish Association of Scientific Cinema (ASECIC), shows the camera a 70mm rusty tin can. Rogelio tells how in 2010 the object came into his hands -along with other materials from the personal archive of Guillermo Zúñiga (1909-2005) that had been donated by his family to ASECIC-. He recalls how hard it was to open the tin and his surprise when he found inside 3,500 photographic negatives with images of the Civil War and the Republican exile in France. Rogelio knew that Zúñiga had been a founder of ASECIC and had produced scientific documentaries, but beyond these notions, he was completely unaware of his past. When he started to investigate, he discovered that all that material was completely unreleased and of enormous historical and archival relevance, but even more surprising was the fact that Zúñiga's own family was also unaware of the existence of those negatives.

ACT I – THE MISSION TO EDUCATE (1909-1939) – 25 min. approx

Guillermo Zúñiga was born Guillermo Fernández López in Cuenca in 1909. His father died shortly before his birth and his mother remarries the principal of the Cuenca Secondary School. It was her stepfather who instilled in her a perpetual love of nature and a passion for education. As a teenager, he studied at the San Isidro Secondary School in Madrid, where he developed his interest in Natural Sciences, particularly entomology. He later graduated in Natural Sciences at the Central University of Madrid.

In 1931 he began teaching Natural History at the Instituto Escuela. Zúñiga took part in the first Pedagogical Missions (those that travelled through the towns of Segovia and Toledo), as a documentary filmmaker - participating as an assistant in the Cinematography Service. He recorded his first documentary, *Boda en Navalcán* (1932). At the same time, he worked as a research assistant in the Entomology Laboratory of the National Museum of Natural Sciences. This activity led him to make a scientific trip to the Ketama region in Morocco, where he shot the film *Por Marruecos* (1933) and to co-direct with Carlos Velo *La vida de las abejas* (1935), which was presented at the VI International Congress of Entomology held in Madrid in 1935. These were years in which Zúñiga's vocation to combine science, film and popularisation was pleasantly rewarded. A young high school teacher who travelled around Spain and Morocco armed with a 16mm camera, shooting documentaries, screening his work both at top-level congresses and in impoverished Castilian villages. Guillermo Zúñiga is appointed to take part as a camera operator in what was to become the great republican enterprise, but the ambitious scientific expedition aboard the ship "Ártabro" commanded by the adventurer Francisco Iglesias Brage to explore the Amazon is called off at the last minute.

The coup d'état of 18 July 1936 surprises Zúñiga in Madrid, recently married to the woman who has been and will be his lifelong companion, Teresa Muñoz, pregnant with a baby girl. During the Spanish Civil War he took part in the filming of two newsreels: *España al día* and *Gráfico de juventud*. He recorded and photographed many events of the Spanish Civil War. He works alongside the great photographers who covered the conflict: Robert Capa, Gerda Taro and Walter Reuter. Following the Republican government, he left Madrid and went from Valencia to Barcelona, eventually crossing the border into France with many other exiles in February 1939. His luggage included a 70 mm film can full of negatives¹.

ACT II – ‘HALF A LIFE’ (1939-1947) – 25 min. approx.

Guillermo Zúñiga spends his 30th birthday locked up in a refugee concentration camp in the south of France. From there he writes to his wife, Teresa, who has stayed in Cuenca to look after their daughter, whom Guillermo has not yet been able to meet: *‘30 years, Tere, half a life and in prison. Many things have happened in these thirty years... I had my life made; I had reached the pinnacle of happiness. I had a wife, my illusion, and a daughter, my hope. Everything was in place for my future to offer the greatest hopes, but the unforeseen, the fatal, came to destroy our life when we had barely begun it. I was left without a home, without a country, without parents, without a wife, without a daughter, halfway through my life. I end this first half of my life in prison’*.

In the refugee camps Zúñiga continued his documentary work. Skilfully making a precarious enlarger, he photographed the activity there. He tried to go into exile in Mexico, like other companions in his scientific and cinematographic adventures, such as Carlos Velo and Enrique Rioja. However, his efforts were frustrated. He finally managed to leave the successive camps of Argelès, Bram and Montolieu to work in an arms factory in Tulle. France falls under Nazi occupation and Zúñiga joins the Resistance, enlisting in its armed wing, the Franc-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP). He is imprisoned in the Gurs concentration camp. He escaped when he was about to be deported to Germany and went underground, at which point he abandoned the name Guillermo Fernández and adopted the name Guillermo Zúñiga. The liberation of France caught him in Paris, where he barely survived until 1947². There he continued his photographic (he photographed the burial of Largo Caballero) and cinematographic activity. He met the great pioneer of scientific cinema, Jean Painlevé (author of the influential *Le Vampire*) and made contact with other members of the International Association of Scientific Cinema. In 1946 the

¹ There are 3,500 negatives in Guillermo Zúñiga's personal archive of Civil War photographs. These images were discovered among Zúñiga's papers bequeathed to ASECIC after his death.

² His address was 30 Rue Saint-André des Arts. Today, curiously enough, this building houses a cinema.

Unitarian Service Committee (USC)³ commissioned him to make the documentary *Spain in Exile* (1946), which features figures such as Pablo Picasso denouncing the impoverished conditions in which Spanish refugees live in France.

In 1947 Teresa Muñoz obtained government authorisation to accompany her brother on a pilgrimage to Fatima. Her intention was different: to meet her husband, 10 years after the last time they had seen each other face to face, in Lisbon. Teresa finds Guillermo Zúñiga, ill and weak, at the end of his strength. From the Portuguese capital they set sail for Argentina, thanks to the efforts of former colleagues such as the painter and set designer Gori Muñoz, the playwright and fellow missionary Alejandro Casona and the poet Rafael Alberti, who have interceded to get them visas and a job at the San Miguel Studios. He has not yet been able to meet his daughter María Teresa, who at the age of ten remained in Cuenca, cared for by her aunt and uncle.

ACT III – ACROSS THE OCEAN (1947-1956) – 20 min. approx..

Not as well-known as the more numerous exile in Mexico, Argentina brought together many Spanish artists and intellectuals. Castelao, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, Francisco Ayala, Rosa Chacel, Manuel de Falla, Elena Fortún, Rafael Alberti and the aforementioned Gori Muñoz and Alejandro Casona, personal friends and regular artistic collaborators of Guillermo Zúñiga, took up residence there, either temporarily or permanently.

Zúñiga arrived in Argentina in 1947 and lived there until 1956. His stay in the Argentinean Republic coincided with the first government of General Juan Domingo Perón. He began working at San Miguel Studios, the most important Argentinean commercial film production company of the time, owned by a Spanish expatriate, Miguel Machiandarena. Zúñiga started as a camera assistant, but soon rose to positions of greater responsibility until he settled as Head of Production at the studios. These were not easy years for Guillermo, exiled to the other side of the ocean, not yet physically recovered, and estranged both he and his wife from their daughter Teresa. Argentina was a troubled country, where the economic boom of the early Perón years (with major social advances such as women's suffrage in 1947) led to brutal clashes (the bombing of the Plaza de Mayo in 1955) and eventually to the general's downfall. Zúñiga worked very hard in Argentina, participating in the production of 23 commercial films. His friends Alejandro Casona (as scriptwriter) and Gori Muñoz (as set designer) collaborated in many of them. He produced seminal films of that period of Argentinean cinematography, mainly those in which the great national film star of the day, Hugo del Carril, took part (*Surcos de sangre*,

³ The USC was one of the leading refugee aid organisations in Europe. In 1946 it was the association that channelled international aid funds to refugees in France from its offices in Toulouse and Paris.

1950; *Las aguas bajan turbias*, 1952). However, Zúñiga did not lose his determination to get his life back on track and recover what he considered he had lost or had been taken away from him. In 1954 his daughter Teresa finally managed to join them. In 1955 he began to prepare what was to be his definitive return to Spain. Finally, it was during his time in Argentina that Guillermo Zúñiga resumed his work as a populariser and documentarist of scientific cinema, returning to the classroom as a teacher at the Instituto Argentino de Arte Cinematográfico (IAAC). Without the institutional support he had enjoyed in Spain two decades earlier, in Argentina, Zúñiga had to develop his vocation in an amateur, almost domestic way. Thus, with Teresa's help, he returned to film *Las abejas* (1951) sixteen years later and shot *La flor del irupé* and *Solo de quena*.

Finally, Guillermo Zúñiga returned to Spain in 1956.

ACT IV – COMING BACK (1956-1966) – 15 min. approx.

After a short trip to France and England in which he tried to establish the professional contacts he had made in Argentina, Zúñiga arrived in Spain at the end of August 1956. The opening up of the country following the acceptance of Franco's regime by the United Nations in 1955 generated, as it did for so many other exiles, the conditions for returning to the homeland. The country Zúñiga found on his return was nothing like the one in which he had worked in the 1930s. The foreign investment boost of 'desarrollismo' has not yet arrived, life in the city is difficult, salaries are miserable, the economy is anchored in autarky and the black market still prevails. The film industry is not worthy of that name: Spanish cinema is dominated by a few figures (Benito Perojo, Manuel J. Goyanes, Cesareo González), locally powerful producers who make a populist cinema, not much in conflict with the regime and devoid of artistic intentions. In this artistic wasteland, a production company emerged that sought a way to force the corsets of the regime (with its financial limitations and its censorship). It is the production company of ¡Bienvenido, Mr. Marshall! (Luis G. Berlanga, 1952): UNINCI. And it was there that Zúñiga went to work. First as production manager, then as managing director and finally as board member until the dissolution of the production company.

Zúñiga lived through the rise and fall of UNINCI and took part in the production of such important films as *El cochecito* (Marco Ferreri, 1960), *La mano en la trampa* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1961), *Viridiana* (Luis Buñuel, 1961) or *Sonatas* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1959) in which twenty-four years after shooting together *La vida de las abejas* he returns to work alongside his friend Carlos Velo, a man with many biographical similarities: entomologist, scientific film documentarist and exile.

After the demise of UNINCI, Zúñiga still worked on other commercial film productions, including Carlos Saura's debut, *Los golfos*, and *Nunca pasa nada*,

again with Bardem; he even shot a *spaghetti western*, *Gringo* (Ricardo Blasco, 1963). However, his interest is focused in a different direction to that of commercial film production.

Between 1958 and 1960, Zúñiga produced several short documentaries for UNINCI directed by such important figures as Pío Caro Baroja, Elías Querejeta and Joaquín Jordá. Together with some of the artistic collaborators who appeared in these films, such as Fernando Rey for the voice-over and Pablo G. del Amo for the editing, he restarted his career as a scientific film director with the short film *La aventura de Api* (1964), in which he returned to his interest in portraying the life of bees. This short film would be followed by others, always working alongside his usual collaborators: Federico Muelas, Fernando Rey, José Luis Alcaine, Teodoro Roa and Pablo G. del Amo, all of them already produced under his own label: Zúñiga Films.

ACT V - AN UNWAVERING VOCATION (1966-2005) – 10 min. approx.

Thirty years after the Civil War interrupted his career as a science teacher and film populariser, on 1 September 1966 Guillermo Zúñiga fulfilled a long-held wish and founded the Spanish Association of Scientific Cinema (ASECIC). From that moment onwards, his life was focused on popularisation, teaching and the production of scientific films. He was the Spanish representative in the International Association of Scientific Cinema. He started working as a teacher at the Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía de Madrid (the former IIEC-EOC), where he taught the course 'Scientific cinema and its techniques'. His students there were future filmmakers of the stature of Víctor Erice, Iván Zulueta, Antonio Drove and Cecilia Bartolomé.

He continued to make popular science documentaries (he made a dozen between 1966 and 1991) through his own production company and ASECIC.

In 2001, the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) awarded him an honorary mention for his scientific work.

Guillermo Zúñiga managed, with an extraordinary sacrifice, not to give up what had always been his passion. Unfortunately for him, as for so many others, his hopes, his artistic and professional dreams, were cut short by the course of the historical events of the 20th century. However, Zúñiga did not falter and returned, with less help and more struggle, to continue the work he had once, as a young man, started.

Guillermo Zúñiga died on Christmas Eve 2005, Teresa Muñoz died four years later. Both rest today in a small cemetery in the hills of Cuenca.