

## FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS:

**Mon May 5 | 8:30 |**

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$10.00 [members \$8.00]

## **Juan Manuel Echavarría Coping with Violence, Defying Oblivion**

### ***Réquiem NN***

67 min, 2013, digital video

*Mejor Opera Prima Andina, Documenta 2013, Caracas*

preceded by:

### ***Bocas de Ceniza (Mouths of Ash)***

18:07 min, 2003–2004, digital video

A novelist-turned-artist, photographer and videomaker, Juan Manuel Echavarría screens two films in which peasants in his native Colombia devise original ways of coping with entrenched everyday violence—bloody conflict among guerrillas, army, paramilitaries and drug traffickers that has persisted for decades. In *Bocas de Ceniza (Mouths of Ash, 2003–04, digital video, 18 min.)*, subjects look directly to the camera and mourn the toll of violence in individually created folk songs. The second documentary, *Réquiem NN (2013, digital video, 67 min.)*, takes place in the town of Puerto Berrío on the Magdalena River—from which local residents regularly fish out the remains of the victims of violence. Burying the so-called “No Names” (“NNs”), the townspeople adopt the fallen as their own: they give them names, invent personal histories, decorate and visit their tombs.

**In person: Juan Manuel Echavarría, Margarita De la Vega-Hurtado**

“In this quiet, somber film, Echavarría documents the surprising cultural eddies swirling around these lost people.” – *Village Voice*

“Is this the state of the world? This endless cycle of violence? Echavarría hopes that it isn’t, despite the grim war in his home

country. Hope exists throughout the narrative... It is in these choices, in these celebrations against death, that we find our humanity. Through our actions, we defy oblivion.” – Daniel Guzmán, *Cinespect*

### **Director's Notes for *Réquiem NN***

With my photographic work in Puerto Berrío (2006–to date) I focused on documenting the tombs of the NNs. But then, I realized I needed to shift my attention to the townspeople to continue to piece together the story of Puerto Berrío and the adoption of the NNs.

As I got to know the people better, I was inspired to make this film about their lives. In November 2010, I was chosen to show my photographs of the NN graves at the inauguration of the town's cultural center. That exhibition allowed the community to realize the dimension of their ritual. It also opened doors for me in the town. In a society torn apart by a long history of violence, such as Puerto Berrío, people have a great need to tell their stories and be heard. Some of these are the protagonists of this film.

The shooting was accomplished over five visits to Puerto Berrío with a small professional crew. Most essential to the success of our work was that we were all thoroughly captivated by the stories we began to hear. Beginning to end, the film took two years to complete.

### **This film is dedicated to the people of Puerto Berrío who participated in its making:**

Luis Carlos Gaviria, a fisherman, who has navigated the waters of the Magdalena River for many years. He has lost two brothers to violence in Puerto Berrío.

Hugo Ramón Antonio Morales, the gravedigger and keeper of the cemetery.

Blanca Nury Bustamante, mother of seven children, takes in laundry at home and cleans houses. Her daughter Lizeth and her son Jhon Jairo have disappeared.

Hernán Montoya, the Soul Keeper, conducts a procession every evening during the month of November to pray for the Souls in Purgatory, especially the NNs.

Jair Humberto Urrego, a salesman, adopted an NN and baptized her Gloria.

María Dilia Mena De Fajardo adopted a female NN and baptized her María de los Angeles, asking her to be her daughter's guardian angel.

Martha Correa, a devout follower of the Souls, has an altar at home, with candles and saints, as well as photographs of friends and relatives who have died violently. She has also adopted NNs.

Jesús Enrique Valencia transported the dead on his tricycle in the '80s and '90s witnessing the peak years of violence in Puerto Berrío.

"In ***Mouths of Ash***, the artist again collects stories. This time they appear in the form of songs composed by individuals who have survived massacres, which, like bards of old, they sing in public. Here they sing directly into the artist's camera. Echavarría often speaks of his desire to give voice to the voiceless... These Afro-Colombians at the bottom of society compose songs of mourning. With great eloquence, each sings his or her own dirge of fear and despair. Rafael Mosquera pleads:

*Listen Mister President . . . Caramba! How are you going to govern  
Because this way, the peasants, Oh man! Are going to be wiped out. Listen  
Mister President . . . Caramba! Don't you feel pain  
With so many Refugees, Oh man! That are heard across the region. How the  
peasant runs . . . Caramba! Looking for a way to escape  
So that in the battles, Oh man! They won't be killed. And in this horrible  
storm, Oh man!  
That happened down on the lower Atrato, They were left without their  
parents, Oh man! Those poor children. For more than five years now . . .  
Caramba! Of this desperation  
And all over the place, Oh man!  
You hear suffering and pain. And all over the place, Oh man! You hear  
suffering and pain.*

... Juan Manuel Echavarría is creating a visual requiem to his own country... His mournful lament has many movements, opening with *Portraits*. Each addition, or series, expands the themes of the larger composition. And interestingly, just as the work can be understood as a requiem, each series takes its form from older, established art forms in music, theater, literature, the visual and popular arts. It is as though, in referencing ancient art forms to shape each movement, the artist conveys the timeless universality of the endless killing that

defines his own country. His killing fields of Colombia are the killing fields of human existence.” – North Dakota Museum of Art

**Juan Manuel Echavarría** was born in Medellín, Colombia in 1947. He lives and works in Bogotá and New York City. A writer before becoming an artist, he published two novels, *La gran catarata* (Bogotá: Editorial Arco, 1981) and *Moros en la costa* (Bogotá: Ancora Editores, 1991). His videos have been screened at many festivals and exhibitions throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and South America including Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; San Francisco International Film Festival; Toronto Film Festival; Flaherty Film Seminar; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; North Dakota Museum of Art; Casino Luxembourg; Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, UK; Tufts University; the Americas Society, New York; Berkeley Art Museum; and additional venues in Spain, Holland, France, the US, Colombia and Afghanistan. *Bocas de Ceniza* was included in the 2005 Venice Biennale and *Réquiem NN* was world premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Echavarría's video and photography work has focused on representing Colombian violence and its effects on ordinary lives. From 2006 to 2012, he expanded the photography series *Novenarios en espera*, which depicted the decoration of the NN tombs. Shot in the same locale, *Réquiem NN* is his feature debut.

**Margarita De la Vega-Hurtado** (executive producer) is an academic and independent media consultant, working with national and international festivals, after having spent several years as the Executive Director of Flaherty International Film Seminars. She began working as a film critic in Colombia in the late sixties, and has always been dedicated to advancing the cause of independent cinema in Latin America and in the United States. She earned a doctorate in American Culture at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where she became involved in the formation of the Latino Studies Program, eventually becoming the program director for several years and teaching the university's first course in Latino Cinema. She has also taught at the University of California in Santa Cruz, Merrill College. She has programmed, curated, and presented film programs in Latin American and Latino Cinema, Independent American Cinema and Documentary Cinema, as well as published papers on those subjects, plus Colombian cinema, Louis Malle, and Luis Buñuel. She currently lives in Houston, Texas, where she is on the Advisory Board of Houston Cinema Arts Society.

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