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**UFO** 2019



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2019

JONAS FILMS  
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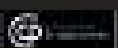
# TROPICS

## PRESS KIT

PRODUCTION  
[elsa@jonasfilms.fr](mailto:elsa@jonasfilms.fr)

DISTRIBUTION - PROGRAMMING

A FILM BY  
**Mathilde Lavenne**



## **PITCH**

*TROPICS draws an orbit around a Mexican farm. Scattered voices seem to revive and disturb the memory of the place. Crossing the matter, the film attempts to stop time and men, and reveals the ghost of a lost paradise.*

## **SYNOPSIS**

*In the 19th century, a French community crossed the Atlantic to settle in Jicaltepec along the Nautla River, in the Veracruz region of Mexico. These French families, who were mostly just farmers, were able to build large agricultural operations over generations despite the hostile tropical environment and climate. Since the Spanish conquest, Mexico has embodied a western mythological reverie: Amazons guiding the Conquerors in their quest for a new land, but also, the idealization of a new world filled with lush vegetation, the development of medicine through the use of new plants, and the evangelical ambition of a better world. If part of the European fantasy made sense as of the first contact with the New World, it also destroyed a great deal of "primal" knowledge by merging with the pre-Columbian peoples.*

*Taking the form of a 3D archaeological expedition, TROPICS draws an orbit around these territories from which arise scattered voices expressing their secret stories and their relations with the ghosts of past time. Confronting a conception of the world with advanced technology ironically creates a visual matter akin to constellations of information—reminiscent of our connection to the cosmos, but also of a certain mathematical essence common to each and every thing.*

*At the pace of a pulsating sound resonating within a space without end or gravity, the film attempts to stop time and men, and reveals the ghost of a lost paradise.*



## FILM CREW

**Mathilde Lavenne** - Direction, edition and VFX

**Léonore Mercier** - Sound design

**Majordome** - Sound composition

**Christian Cartier** - Sound mixing

**Martin Delzescaux** - Recorder

**Lucie Baratte** - Graphic design

**Rodrigo Suarez** - Assistant director

**FabLab of Mexico team / Anahuac Norte University** - VFX Coordination

**Ing. Ivan Hernandez Sanchez, Ing. Jose Florencio Marin Rodriguez, Dr. Eduardo**

**Garduno** - Engineering team

**Jonathan Pepe, David Ayoun, Cédric Flazinski** - Engineering help

**Francisco Hebrard Franco Pancho** - General manager

**Elsa Klughertz / Jonas Films** - Production

**Fanny Béguély / Jonas Films** - Production assistant

**Carlos Couturier / Fundacion Casa Proal** - Executive production

**Michel Blancsubé** - Production coordinator



## TECHNICAL SHEET

Duration: 13 min 40s

Year: 2018

Country of production: France

Genre: Documentary, Experimental

Shooting location: San Rafael, Veracruz, Mexico

Projection format: DCP, HD digital final

Shooting support: Scanner 3D FARO

S6 Compositing : SCENE

Files: .DXF .FLS

Language: Spanish

Subtitles: English, French

Sound: 5.1 Dolby Digital, stereo

Ratio: 16/9

b&w



## CONTEXT

In recent years I have made films and digital installations.

While writing them I have wondered about the new recording tools and then about what can these tools tell us about what surrounds us or what new perceptions of our environment we can produce with them. My work is part of a landscape practice I have long been interested in the anthropological dimension of the societies I meet during my travels. What always makes me aware is their relationship to myths and beliefs. But behind this interest, it is the depth of the landscapes where people live that attracts me.

In January 2017, I went to explore this tropical area in order to meet these families and their natural environment. Living for several months in this tropical area was the experience of feeling connected to a whole. The humidity and the heat gives the impression that there are no boundaries between inside and outside.

I was also confronted with the region's colonial past, strongly rooted in the exploitation of land and the development of a strong and ubiquitous agriculture, based on the western model imported.

While exploring the area, I was struck by people's will to convey a pre-Columbian past, which was literally asking to rise out of the ground.

Every year during the rain season, the Rio Filobobos that surrounds the area violently floods the lands and villages. For years, it has carted mundane objects of the pre-Columbian period from the mountain and regional territory: pottery, painted statuettes and other artifacts and objects of worship that the inhabitants collect and keep in their homes. These ancestral remembrances literally wash up on the banks, and sometimes kneeling to the ground is enough to pick something up: fragments and other snippets of time past.

Knowing the rules of the cosmos in order to find one's place in the world was at the heart of Amerindian wisdom— and this form of wisdom was inseparable from the knowledge of agriculture (the rules of nature, lunar calendars, Season cults...). In my sense, Mexican magic works with this vital force of Nature that humans have always sought to observe.

The film speaks of this memory, of a moment frozen in time at the heart of Mexico, of a tropical microcosm that takes us through a form of archaeo-astronomy....<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Term used by Michel Onfray in *Cosmos, vers une sagesse sans morale*, 2015, éd Flammarion.

**THE VOYAGE THROUGH  
APPEARANCES**

**2** Philosopher and essayist Gilles A. Tiberghien teaches aesthetics at Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. He is the author, among others, of *Land Art*, Editions Carré, 1993 [Revised and augmented edition, Fall 2011]; *Land Art Travelling*, ERBA, 1996; *Nature, art, paysage*, Actes-Sud/ENSP, 2001

*Mathilde has long been interested in the anthropological dimension of the societies that she is brought to encounter through her work, but also in their relationship to the myths and cosmogony at the foundation of some of their beliefs. Behind all this is the depth of the landscapes where live the men that require it—a depth both physical and psychological, and completely unfathomable, as one could already tell from her 2013 film with the evocative title: Focus on Infinity.*

*Here, the question of landscape is again central but is reconsidered by the artist who uses, for part of it, relatively diverse technical means. With TROPICS (“an allusion to the control tower, to space observation, and to the need for control that the human being develops in an environment like that of the Casa Proal,” she wrote), Mathilde Lavenne carries out a sort of transduction of the landscape.*

*Working from digital data, she uses a FARO scanner, a tool used in architecture to scan buildings. She installs this device on various sites and follows certain routes on the map, some of which she has tracked by foot to produce these stratified images, likened to “a kind of phantom map of the chosen site.” Then, from the myriad of points thus obtained, she renders a three-dimensional landscape. Thanks to this process, Mathilde has obtained a superimposition of layers that gives her progression along these paths lined with banana trees the appearance of a voyage through appearances, in the most literal sense. Nature looks like a laminate of finely meshed films that connect different surfaces of reality, which are not necessarily related to one another in our ordinary experiences.*

*The black and white shots could give the impression that the images were taken at night with infrared goggles except that here, the reversal of values and the greenish tone that characterize such images are precisely absent. The images give us the feeling of penetrating the structure of matter and reaching what usually remains invisible—with this work, we aren’t invited to discover a landscape that we don’t know but the very strangeness of the world of which it is only one element.*

**Gilles A. Tiberghien<sup>2</sup>**

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This project was born after my first visit to Mexico and the dream I had whilst in the middle of the tropical zone, north of Veracruz.

The place I chose for the film location is at the center of a banana plantation in San Rafael. In this area, many agricultural operations hire workers to farm different types of fruit (banana, watermelon, lemon), thereby sustaining a part of the local population thanks to the work of land and the harvests.

For the fossil peoples, culture was linked to agriculture. Initiation to the knowledge of the cosmos was essential to understand the earth; knowledge of the sky map was inseparable from that of the functioning of matter (the plantations). These peoples therefore questioned the sky in order to understand life on Earth, to find their place in the universe and to answer certain metaphysical questions (life and death, meaning, life cycle, perpetual movement...).

In this film, I'd like to reveal this conception of the world thanks to advanced technology, which paradoxically seems to keep us away from our natural environment.

I therefore wish to confront two visions: that of the 3D digital scanner, which enables me to develop a new concept through the digital image, and that of the ancient people who advocate a return to the earth and to empirical knowledge.

At the end of his book *The Mexican Dream*, JMG Le Clézio wondered what our world would have been like, if this destruction had not taken place, if the Indian peoples had not been silenced? If the violence of the modern world had not eradicated this magic?

**3** Le Clézio, JMG, *The Mexican Dream or The Interrupted Thought of Amerindian Civilizations*, 1993, University of Chicago Press. Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan.

The power of the "dream" described by Le Clézio lies within Mexico's secret strength—that of its landscapes, its volcanoes, its deserts, and the natural and sacred magic that emanates from it all. This dream was confronted with the Western world, which still exercises its economic and cultural domination over the world today. I believe that this magical and natural connection to a certain sacred "primitive" state is buried in the memory of matter and of Mexico's natural strength; the film refers to this particular memory.

While the "modern" world tried to bury these peoples' supernatural values during the 17th century, could ultra modernity—thanks to its scientific discoveries and its digital revolution—enlighten us on the meaning of these practices, and even spur their rebirth under a different form?

Nowadays digital technology opens the door to a different perception of time and a potential for omniscience (brain increase). Could these new forms of intelligence, or transhumanist perspectives, reconnect us to the spiritual conceptions of these extinct peoples? Or, on the contrary, would they urge us to reconnect with the natural material forces from which we have strayed?

In my artistic approach, I question the relationship between technology and nature, the digitization of our environment and its re-appropriation through the use of creative tools. I believe that the emergence of new video recording tools allows the inception of new concepts—new worlds capable of shaking up or re-enchanting our own.



LOCATION SCOUTING



## TECHNOLOGY

I wanted to explore another way of making cinema, of making pictures.

I decided to use a scanner 3D because this technique allowed me to literally capture a memory of the place. A spatial data mapping allowing me to reproduce this space virtually. The point clouds thus formed using the different mathematical coordinates allowed me to aesthetically reflect a different reality, made up of layers, different dimensions and stratas of memories.

I also wanted to break with the linearity of time, this technology gave me the possibilities to report on a different notion of time, as if memories mixed in a more organic space-time, completely connected to a whole. That's why I also wanted to preserve this black aesthetic of the cosmos.

Black and white was also imposed to reinforce the ambiguity of space time and this ghostly presence that the film transmits. The arrival in the banana plantation like a satellite which arises at the beginning of the film calls an imaginary, a universe of science fiction. I could never have done this with a "classic" image technique.

Use and especially divert a technique as the scanner was highly interesting confronting to human. The laser beam is used to provide an unfailing rendering on an architectural source. In the film, the living, the human being, creates both sonic and visual disturbances.

It creates errors in the shooting system.

The human appears as an error or a possibility of destabilization of the machine. The point of view here is disturbed because we do not know who is observing and on which side we are located.

## GHOST SOUND

The work of sound has also been thought of as a living organism, an organic memory made up of apparitions. The movie's structure is like a Ghost map that we cross without knowing if we are on the other side of this world capturing the voices of the living, if we cross this space through our thoughts or if we are travelling in a spaceship.

I chose to scan the Mexicans who crossed this zone, with whom I shared my daily life and who lived close to the riverside ecosystem. They had stories to share with me, all of which spoke of memories, of links with their ancestors, of a very strong relationship with death, with premonition.

The sound work also highlights their stories, the sounds of the forest mixed with the scanner beep, Mexican folk music, llorona for example, which evokes a famous local superstition about a ghost woman searching for her dead children mixed with the flute sound of musicians from the papantla archaeological site. All the sounds come from Mexico City and particularly from the sound atmosphere in the tropical zone, which combines a strong Mexican musical tradition with the abundant natural sound of the territory. They each have a deep and culturally rooted meaning in memories.

## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Mathilde Lavenne was born in 1982, in France. In 2011, she began focusing her artistic approach on emerging technologies and digital tools by writing short films and creating digital installations. In 2016, she graduated from Fresnoy, Studio National des Arts Contemporains, after two years of research into image. In 2015, his film Focus on Infinity received the Francois Schneider Foundation's Contemporary Talents Prize. Her work has been presented in France at the Palais deTokyo, in Italy at Villa Medici, and in Madatac in Spain where she continued her research as a member of the Casa de Velázquez, Academie de France in Madrid. In 2018, she was awarded the Golden Nica Prize by the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria.

## **PRODUCTION**

### **JONAS FILMS**

Jonas Films is a cinema production company for short films and feature films created by Elsa Klughertz.

## **PARTNERS**

### **FUNDACION CASA PROAL**

Located in San Rafael in the province of Veracruz, Mexico, the Casa Proal Foundation has been developing its activities since July 2015. Since its inception, it has been supporting the project by providing assistance in its location and writing phase in Mexico. An exhibition at the Casa del Lago Gallery in Mexico City is planned once the project is completed to bring together the work of the various past residents.

### **FABLAB MEXICO I UNIVERSAD DE ARQUITECTURA ANAHUAC NORTE MEXICO**

The FabLab of Mexico City and Anahuac University supported the project by mobilizing a team of architects during the film shoot in the tropical zone as well as the scanning instrument, the FARO Scanner available within the school.

### **LIGHT CONE I ATELIER 105**

Founded in 1982, Light Cone is an association whose purpose is the distribution, promotion and preservation of experimental cinema in France and abroad. The project received support from the post-production residency at Atelier 105 in its editing phase.

### **LE FRESNOY, STUDIO NATIONAL DES ARTS CONTEMPORAINS**

The prestigious Fresnoy hosted us in its auditorium mixing sound Dolby Digital for the film's final mix.

### **SCAM**

The project was selected for the grant «Brouillon d'un rêve - Écritures émergentes» of the SCAM, which supports digital art, experimental and / or documentary projects.

### **CHRONIQUES, MARSEILLE**

The project was supported by the «Biennale Chroniques». After theater in Avignon, photography in Arles, cinema in Cannes, Seconde Nature and ZINC organize a festival named «Arts and Digital Cultures» in Provence Alpes Côtes d'Azur.

### **CNC DICRÉAM**

The project received support from DICRÉAM, which helps experimental works with innovative writing specifically using multimedia and digital technologies.

