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International Film Festival  
3-12 October, 2019



FESTA  
DEL CINEMA  
DI ROMA

OFFICIAL  
SELECTION 2019

# VALLEY OF SOULS

(TANTAS ALMAS)

Written & Directed by Nicolás Rincón Gille

2019 | COLOMBIA, BELGIUM, BRAZIL, FRANCE  
137 MN | COLOR | 1:2.39 | 5.1 - SPANISH

## SCREENINGS IN BUSAN

FRI. 4, 7:30 PM @ CGV Centum City 4 (WORLD PREMIERE)  
SAT. 5, 10:00 AM @ CGV Centum City Cine de Chef A (P&I)  
MON. 7, 2:00 PM @ CGV Centum City 4 (PUBLIC)  
THU. 10, 2:00 PM @ Lotte Cinema Daeyoung 1 (PUBLIC)

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## SYNOPSIS

Colombia, on the banks of Magdalena Medio, 2002.

José returns home deep in the forest after a long fishing night to discover that paramilitary forces killed his two sons, Dionisio and Rafael, and threw their bodies into the river.

José begins a lonely journey to retrieve and provide a proper burial for his boys, in order to prevent their tormented souls from being stuck in this world. Aboard his canoe, José discovers the magic of a country torn into pieces.





## COLOMBIA IN 2002

**T**he story of **Tantas Almas** is not an old one. It takes place in 2003, a pivotal year of paramilitary violence, long hidden internationally. Where does it come from?

In Colombia, in the late 1980s, drug lords, landowners, regional politicians and high-ranking soldiers decided to form right-wing militias to strengthen their power.

Very quickly and everywhere, under the name of Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), these militias started to attack the peasant population and any progressive civil organization, with the unofficial support of the government through the president of the time, Alvaro Uribe.

Their systematic killings and the horror of the survivors eventually created the largest internal displacement of population in the world (9 million people according to UN).

The lands left behind were recovered by a warrior elite who saw and keeps seeing in the mining and the exploitation of the biofuel new business opportunities. Nobody could stand against so much profitability. However...

# INTERVIEW WITH NICOLÁS RINCÓN GILLE

## What was the starting point for the film?

The desire to make this movie was born at a specific moment. When I was doing the fieldwork for my documentary film *The embrace of the river* in 2008. I had travelled many places near the Magdalena River, collecting testimonies and, above all, receiving emotions. The paramilitary violence had devastated the area (and the people) ten years ago in a horrific and effective way. Honestly, it was enough to go crazy, to lose all hope.



However, those who told me about their experiences managed to put their life in order, despite all this pain. It was not just about survival; it was about the necessity of finding a new meaning to life that could transcend terror. Telling the stories was a way to rearrange the world and gain ground against violence. **Tantas Almas** tries to convey the beautiful strength that arises from a man who has lost everything except his ability to believe.



**The film involved only non-professional actors, how did you work with them, and especially with the main character?**

It is perhaps one of the most important aspects of **Tantas Almas**. I wanted to shoot it in a place marked by the story that I wanted to tell, and with people who have experienced closely what the film proposed. The shooting took place in Simití, Bolívar, a Colombian Caribbean municipality devastated by violence 20 years ago. We did a casting based on my documentary experience, on the certainty that people can play a role in a strong and fair way as long as they do not stray from their true nature. We did not look for fixed characters (neither physical nor psychological) and simply tried to see who could, in front of the camera, maintain that almost mystical quality called presence. I decided to rehearse as if they were professional actors, nourishing the characters with what they brought to them and accepting the changes. I didn't want to improvise, nor freeze the dialogues. It was about finding a middle ground in which the people acting appropriated the story while seeking to preserve some of the documentary energy.

**Is it based on true events?**

**Tantas Almas** is based on a script I wrote about many testimonies heard. At some point I learned that a fisherman had left looking for the body of his two children, and that became the starting point. From the beginning, it was clear to me that the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) will be present as actors of the conflict, but I was not interested in giving a clear and global vision of it. I wanted to recreate the environment of terror, that horrible hazard that means being killed in a war situation directly (and almost exclusively) affecting the civilian population. It was more about rebuilding that environment than giving explanations. **Tantas Almas** seeks to render the paramilitary war rather than explain it as a narrative element.

**It's your first fiction after several documentaries. What changed in the way you work?**

It is my first feature film, but I wanted to see it as a projection of my previous work. In a way, it is a natural consequence. As I see it,

my three previous films are about the “aftermath” of paramilitary violence. **Tantas Almas** tells the “before”: what happened in the middle of the war, how did people manage to save their humanity without falling into despair, sadness, madness. I wanted to work with local people, in a place affected by violence, to project ourselves emotionally on a difficult but necessary ground: grief. What do we do to live with our dead if they are all over the landscape?

**The film has a rare beauty; can you tell us a bit more about the photography?**

Photography was a fundamental ally to expand the entire spiritual part of the film. Juan Sarmiento, a Colombian DOP based in Berlin, has great sensitivity in this regard. All scenes should be able to express the beauty of a landscape brutalized by war, but in which there is a possibility of projecting. Even in the cemetery.

**How about magic and reality on the film?**

I wanted **Tantas Almas** to be a realistic film about a magical belief. I wanted the viewer to attend José’s fight without being able to project himself completely into his life. To represent his belief without showing it. To render the way the environment, visible and audible, contains and surrounds him. To force the viewer to listen to José talking to his dead children, in vain. It is precisely because the viewer is not José, that he can marvel and approach his emotion as if he was going, little by little, on a journey, a discovery.



**Tells us about the shooting conditions?**

It was really an immense pleasure. We had many difficulties: the social context, the possible presence of armed forces in the area, the flow of a capricious river at night. But the production managed to shelter me with a solid team that was entirely dedicated to the film. **Tantas Almas** had to be done and we showed strength when we had to force, in order to achieve a warm and beautiful working environment. Each of the people who acted in the movie took part in a long and arduous work process. And I loved being able to work that way. I kept something from the documentary and took from fiction what seemed fundamental to me.

## Bio-Filmography of the Director

After receiving a bachelor's degree in Economy in Bogotá, Nicolás Rincón Gille studied in Belgium at the INSAS. He worked as a cinematographer on a few films and directed three short films before embarking on his trilogy project CAMPO HABLADO dedicated to the richness of oral tradition in Colombia's countryside.

The first part, *THOSE WAITING IN THE DARK* (2007), received the Joris Ivens Award at Cinéma du Réel, followed by the second part, *THE EMBRACE OF THE RIVER* (2010), which was awarded the Montgolfière d'Or Prize at the Festival des 3 Continents. *WOUNDED NIGHT* (2015) is the last part of the trilogy, awarded Special Mention from the International Jury at Cinéma de Réel and Best Film in the Colombian Competition at FICCI in 2016.

*VALLEY OF SOULS (TANTAS ALMAS)* is his first fiction feature.



**CAST**

Arley de Jesús  
Carvallido Lobo

**CREW**

**Written and directed by**  
Nicolas Rincón Gille

**Director of Photography**  
Juan Sarmiento G. (ADFC)

**Sound**

Vincent Nouaille

**Editor**

Cedric Zoenen

**Art Director**

Laís Melo

**Sound Design**

Edson Secco

**Producers**

Hector Ulloque Franco &  
Manuel Ruiz Montealegre

**Coproducers**

Aurélien Bodinaux  
Oualid Baha  
Larissa Figueiredo  
Rafael Urban

Produced by

**MEDIO DE CONTENCIÓN PRODUCCIONES** (Colombia)

In co-production with

**NEON ROUGE** (Belgium), **STO LAT FILMES** (Brazil), **TACT PRODUCTION** (France)

International Sales – **Best Friend Forever**

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