

NECO PRODUCTIONS & PERSPECTIVE FILMS PRESENT



CAMÉRA D'OR
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



ARMANDO ESPITIA EMMA DIB AURELIA CAAL

NUESTRAS MADRES

a film by CÉSAR DÍAZ

NEED PRODUCTIONS & PERSPECTIVE FILMS

present



CAMÉRA D'OR
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2019
PRIX SACD

OSCARS

**BEST INTERNATIONAL
FEATURE FILM – BELGIUM ENTRY**

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION



92ND
ACADEMY AWARDS



77TH
GOLDEN GLOBES



ARMANDO ESPITIA EMMA DIB AURELIA CAAL

NUESTRAS MADRES OUR MOTHERS

a film by CÉSAR DÍAZ

US PUBLICIST

MEDIAPLAN PR

www.mediaplanpr.com

Tatiana Detlofson

tatiana@mediaplanpr.com

INTERNATIONAL SALES

Pyramide International

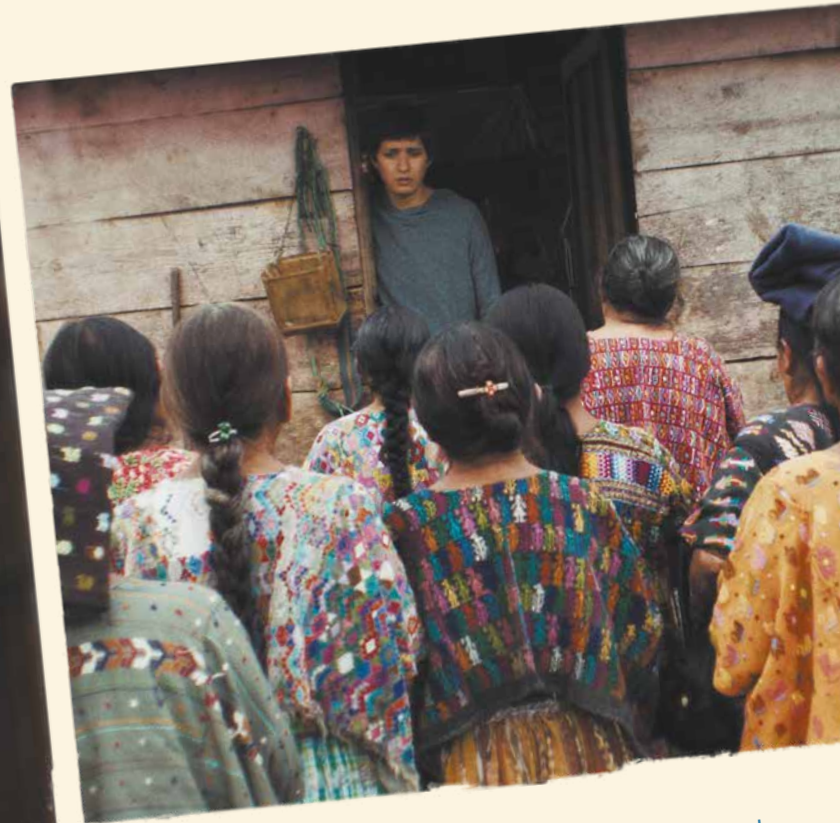
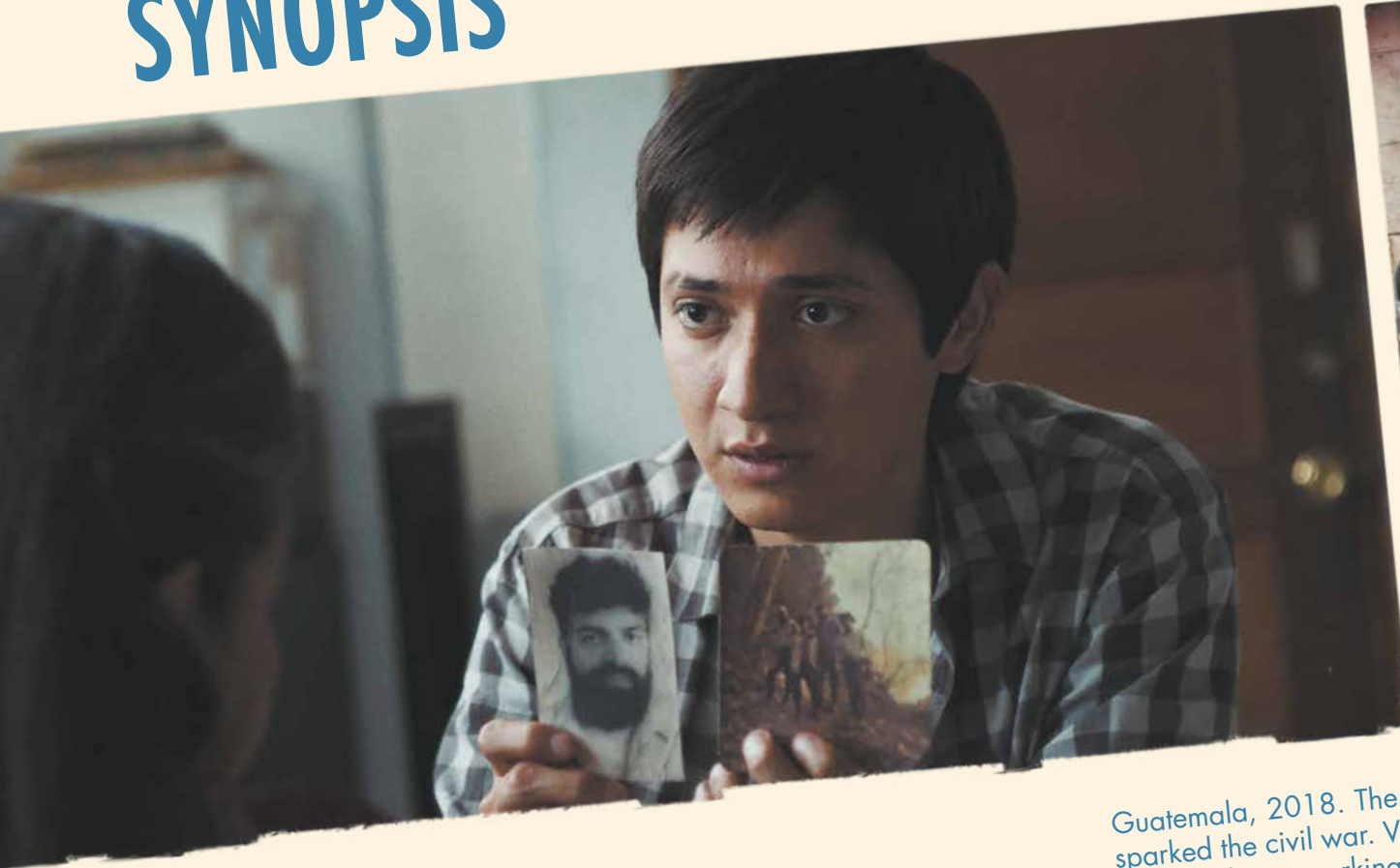
(+33) 1 42 96 02 20

32 rue de L'Echiquier, 75010 Paris

film duration : 1h17

Photos and press kit downloadable on www.pyramidefilms.com

SYNOPSIS



Guatemala, 2018. The whole country is immersed in the trial of the soldiers who sparked the civil war. Victim statements come one after another. Ernesto is a young anthropologist working for the Forensic Foundation; his job is to identify the missing. One day, while hearing the account of an old woman, he thinks he has found a lead that might guide him to his father, a guerrillero who went missing during the war. Against his mother's wishes, he flings himself body and soul into the case, looking for truth and resilience.

INTERVIEW WITH CÉSAR DÍAZ, DIRECTOR



HOW DID NUESTRAS MADRES COME ABOUT?

I was location scouting for a documentary film in a village called Uspantan, which was the site of a huge massacre during the military dictatorship. I was there to record the words of a family that had survived this tragedy. In Guatemalan Indian oral tradition things must be spoken for them to exist. When a newcomer arrives in a village, that person is told what happened at this place so that it is never forgotten. He or she is projected into the intimacy of a story that is sometimes extremely violent. The testimonies of these villagers upset me deeply and awoke in me the desire to make a film about them, to speak of Guatemalan history with a capital H. From a more personal point of view, for a long time, I thought that my father had been "disappeared", a guerilla fighter at the peak of the dictatorship, between 1978 and 1984. One day, I gathered together all his friends for an evening of reminiscence about my father and I realized that what my mother had told me and their memories often did not correspond. I thought that my mother had lied to me and invented many stories for myself: that she had been arrested, raped, I imagined the suffering she might have been through. I finally confronted her and it turned out that I was the fruit of a more ordinary story, less violent but nevertheless painful, which obviously marked and defined me. And so I wanted to explore in this film, the personal and emotional path of a character with whom I could identify.

IT IS A RESILIENT FILM...

I am overwhelmed by the strength of the survivors of the Guatemalan genocide. When one hears what these women went through, one cannot help but think that it would be enough to stifle anyone's will to live. But they forge ahead. It is a huge life lesson.

THE GUATEMALAN CIVIL WAR IS STILL LITTLE KNOWN...

I don't know why. The country was the pioneer of the Latin American continent in several fields, with one of the first agrarian reforms and one of the first Nobel Prizes for literature. It is also the site of one of the CIA's first black operations. The first American invasion of the continent took place in 1954, with the setting up of a military dictator. The United States controlled banana trade, which they did not pay for; they developed the rail and electricity network to transport it. Even as they asked the State for money. One day, a revolutionary movement demanded the expropriation of everything the Americans had seized. The Americans responded by sending in planes, placing a dictator in power, and triggering a civil war that lasted until 1996. It resulted in 200,000 dead, 45,000 disappeared, a documented and judged genocide, about which we know nothing. I think that if the 200,000 dead had not been Indians, but whites or mixed race, the world would have spoken more about these events.

WHERE ARE THE TRIALS AT IN 2019?

The trial in the film is a mixture of several trials. Others are ongoing. One of the most important ones was the trial for genocide of the dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who took power in 1982. He was tried and convicted in 2013 to 80 years in prison (50 for genocide and 30 for crimes against humanity). A few days later, the Supreme Court overturned the conviction and gave him back his freedom. The trial had to start again from square one. He died at his home in 2018. The sense of injustice is huge. It was clear who still held the reins of power. Generally speaking, it is very hard to take legal action, for those who acted directly must be found (soldiers who perpetrated the murders in the villages for example), then follow the chain of command from there. And there must also be some survivors.

HOW IS THE WORK OF RETURNING THE BODIES OF THE DISAPPEARED TO THE FAMILIES GOING?

It is painstaking work, carried out by a single, independent association, which never wanted any ties with the State, and which works with American, Dutch and Canadian funding. The work is expensive and unending, for the location of the mass graves is not known. They are only discovered when villagers decide to speak about them. The biggest mass grave that the association has found thus far is situated in a military base, and it was very difficult to gain access to. 165 bodies were found there. What is needed is a national effort, with each Guatemalan giving a DNA sample, to build up a huge database. It is estimated that to this day, 1% of the disappeared have been identified, after 20 years of searching. There is no political will for this undertaking. If access could be gained to military files, the work would go much quicker. The peace agreements were signed on the basis of national reconciliation that makes it impossible to make progress. "I tell you nothing, you tell me nothing, I don't judge you, you don't judge me... and nothing moves".

ARE THE EXCAVATION SITES AND THE MASS GRAVES IN THE FILM GENUINE?

I was inspired by existing places, but the mass graves in the film were entirely reconstructed, with the help of the Foundation, who were constantly at our side to provide a scientific point of view. We had training with them in order to manipulate bones and to know where to start in reconstructing a body.



PRECISE TECHNICAL GESTURES THAT BRING ABOUT A REBIRTH ON SCREEN...

It never ceases to move me. I have seen many bodies reconstructed and I always get the same feeling: I see the body being rebuilt and when the skull is put in place, a person is revealed. That is why I wanted to film these reconstructions from above. From there, you see the person emerge.

DID ALL THE WOMEN FILMED IN CLOSE-UP ACTUALLY GO THROUGH SUCH EVENTS?

That's why I chose them, including Nicolasa, whose portrait I do in the film. When I arrived in this village, through the Foundation, these women told me their stories and I felt their will to offer themselves up. The difference between reality and the story I have written is that the men weren't killed on the spot but were kidnapped and executed on a military base. Several of the women had already retrieved the remains of their relatives. For them, it was very moving to replay these events. They were impressive and everyone was full of respect for them on set. Silence reigned.

THE WOMEN, "OUR MOTHERS" AS THE TITLE SAYS, ARE THEY THE TRUE DEPOSITARIES OF GUATEMALAN MEMORY?

They hold the country together. If they let go, it will collapse. They hold memory, everyday life, and education. They transmit knowledge, continuance and values. Usually, under dictatorship it was the men who were killed and the women were abused so that some trace would remain. Today, the men still hold power and the women still endure violence on an everyday basis. They are mistreated, more so in cities than in the countryside. It is incomprehensible. There are very few complaints made, for the patriarchy is so deeply anchored that it leaves no room for any other system. It will take generations for this to change.



DOES ANYONE KNOW HOW MANY CHILDREN WERE BORN FROM RAPES DURING THIS DARK PERIOD?

In Guatemala, fathers are absent as a general rule. Many children born of rape think that their father left at some point, is in some neighboring village. Given the number of missing fathers, one more or less is lost in the mass. Rape is not something a person finds easy to admit to, it is not a subject one talks about. But the truth can only truly exist if it is public. I therefore wanted the mother to reveal her secret during the hearing, because it is a way of accepting and living with the consequences of what has happened in front of everyone. In a post-dictatorship, post-war situation, I think there must be collective acceptance, which can then be followed by individual moving on.

WERE YOU ABLE TO FILM EASILY AND WHEREVER YOU WANTED TO?

I had trouble with the daily violence in the city. When we were filming, be it outdoors or in, we had armed guards with us constantly, with several circles of security, including the national police.

Otherwise, generally speaking, I was able to film wherever I wanted, even in court. Ahead of shooting, I had worked underground, the script had not been passed around, the crew leaders were from abroad... So my project and its subject matter were not known to the authorities. And the powers that be are pretty ignorant of the power of the image and cinema. If they had realized what was happening, they wouldn't have let me film. Cinematographic creation, collective imagination was of no interest to them, they do not know what impact a film can have.

THE IMPACT IS LIKELY TO BE GREAT WHEN THE FILM IS SHOWN IN GUATEMALA...

Yes, in as much as *Nuestras Madres* is, to my knowledge, the first film to deal with this subject head-on. We hope that the film will be premiered in the village where we filmed, in the presence of the families of the victims. We will give back to them all that they have given us.

DID THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE LIVED FAR AWAY, ABROAD, HELP YOU TO TELL THIS STORY?

I think it allowed me to avoid being too political. If I had stayed there, I would have used the cinema as an ideological tool, because I see what is happening with the people of my generation. Having left, having seen many films, having studied in Paris and Brussels made me aware of the importance of the artistic gesture and the human journey. All films are political. But when the aim is solely to defend an ideology, it does not sit well with me. I have therefore acquired some distance on the one hand and, on the other, the feeling that what was needed was to create and deepen a point of view.

HOW DID YOU CONCEIVE OF THE FILM IN TERMS OF IMAGE AND STAGING?

The challenge was not to beautify the dead, or the subject matter, but to make a film close to real life, close to the colors we saw, close to historical documents. With my Director of Photography, Virginie Surdej, we worked a great deal on the light so that it never appeared artificial. I treated the sound in the same way. We had to remain faithful to that which we were filming. Reality is visible. We had to respect that.



HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT AUDITIONING?

At first, I didn't want any professional actors. But when I realized what I had written for the two main characters, I reckoned that non-professionals would not be able to do it. The way I wanted them to work was a veritable journey and required professional actors, with particular techniques and constructions. But there are no acting schools in Guatemala. I did auditions in the associative world and in theater, but I found no one. I found Armando Espitia and Emma Dib in Mexico.

But for the other characters, I wanted real people, from the Foundation, from the village, etc. Even the actress who played Nicolasa is not a professional. I started out in documentaries and it taught me to figure out such relationships and manage the human side, the language and filming in real situations.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE ARMANDO ESPITIA TO PLAY ERNESTO?

I did an audition in Mexico, but without scenes from the film. I met Armando, who I had seen in "Heli" by Amat Escalante. He told me his rather complicated personal story and suddenly, quite naturally, he told me about a novel he was busy reading, in which an Italian general in Libya is looking for the bodies of a massacre carried out by the Libyans. His fragility, his honesty and his very direct way of talking to me touched me and made me believe he could be Ernesto.

AND EMMA DIB WHO PLAYS HIS MOTHER?

For the role of Cristina, I did mother/son trials. There was a strong connection between Armando and Emma Dib, who is very well-known in Mexico. They had never met before. They played several scenes, including the one at the seaside. In the script I had given them to read, the central question of the father was not dealt with, but they did not follow the text and did a spontaneous play on the theme. "Do I have his eyes?" "You have his way of looking at things." "Do I have his beard?" "You are like him." If they were able to create this intimacy in just a few minutes, I thought we would be able to get on. So I chose them together.

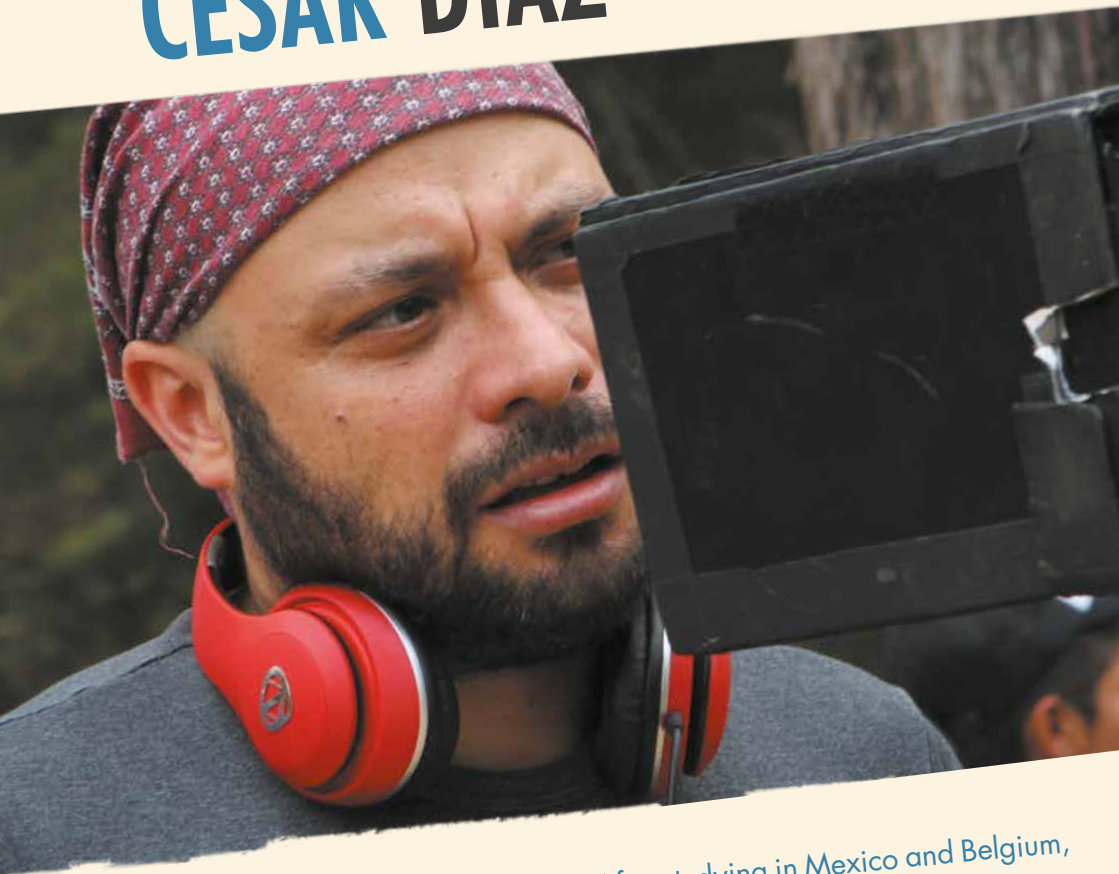
NUESTRAS MADRES EXISTS THANKS TO A EUROPEAN PRODUCTION...

Yes, it is a Belgo-French co-production. I have dual Guatemalan and Belgian nationality and it is important to me that Belgium supported this film. I was also attached to France, where I spent one year at the FEMIS script workshop. The two producers, Géraldine Sprimont in Belgium and Delphine Schmit in France are used to working together and that is how our trio came about. They were truly motivated to working with Latin America and both participated in the EAVE PUENTES workshop. From one commission to the next, the film received the support of Belgian, French and European funds and that of a French international seller and distributor, Pyramide. I think that beyond the language of film, *Nuestras Madres* also defends a certain idea of human rights and justice, which hit home with the commissions. I think it is interesting to understand how our European societies are evolving and transforming and for me, the fact that Belgium and France supported a film shot in Guatemala and in Spanish shows that one can integrate people without erasing their difference.

ARE THERE ANY PRODUCTION COMPANIES BEING FOUNDED GUATEMALA?

Yes, but they mainly do executive production for foreign production companies, which doesn't necessarily encourage the professionalization of the industry. I would like the industry to move beyond this logic. We cannot simply be implementers. Guatemala should also be able to create and develop local productions, so as to encourage decent salaries and create skills. Otherwise, there will never be Guatemalan cameramen, set designers, sound engineers. There will just be helpers, who do little things. The moment has come for Guatemala to say that it can create films, and I hope that *Nuestras Madres* will encourage reflection in the Guatemalan government and spur it on to develop the film industry in the country.

CÉSAR DÍAZ



César Díaz was born in Guatemala in 1978. After studying in Mexico and Belgium, he joined the screenwriting workshop at the FEMIS Film School in Paris. He has been working as a fiction and documentary film editor for more than ten years. He has also directed the short documentary films *Semillas de Cenizas*, which was screened in about twenty international film festivals, and *Territorio Liberado*, which won the IMCINE Award in Mexico. *Nuestras Madres (Our Mothers)* is his first feature film.

OSCARS

BEST INTERNATIONAL
FEATURE FILM – BELGIUM ENTRY



GOLDEN CAMERA – SACD AWARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES
CRITIC'S WEEK



FIFF
NAMUR
CRITICS' PRIZE



BEST PHOTOGRAPHY
AWARD

FESTIVAL
INTERNACIONAL
DE CINE DE SANTANDER
Bucaramanga – Colombia
BEST FILM AWARD



SSIFF Donostia Zinemaldia
Festival de San Sebastián
International Film Festival
SPANISH COOPERATION AWARD



PYIFF
平遥国际电影展
Pingyao

ROBERT ROSSELLINI
BEST DIRECTOR AWARD

BUSAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL | JERUSALEM FILM FESTIVAL | MELBOURNE FILM FESTIVAL
LIMA FILM FESTIVAL | SANTIAGO FILM FESTIVAL | REYKJAVÍK INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
HAMBURG FILM FESTIVAL | WARSAW FILM FESTIVAL | OULAN BATOR FILM FESTIVAL
CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL | MORELIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
TAIPEI GOLDEN HORSE FILM FESTIVAL

CAST

Armando Espitia Ernesto
Emma Dib Cristina
Aurelia Caal Nicolasa
Julio Serrano Echeverría Juan
Victor Moreira Freddy

CREW

Screenplay and direction César Díaz
Photography Virginie Surdej
Editing Damien Maestraggi
Sound Vincent Nouaille, Gilles Benardeau, Emmanuel De Boissieu
Music Rémi Boubal
Sets Pilar Peredo
Make Up Eva Ravina
Costumes Sofía Lantán

Producers Need Productions (Belgium), Perspective Films (France)
Coproducers Proximus (Belgium), Cine Concepcion (Guatemala)
Produced by Géraldine Sprimont, Delphine Schmit
Coproduced by Joaquin Ruano, Pamela Guinea
Associate producer Anne-Laure Guégan

With the support of

Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles
Proximus
Eurimages
Aide aux Cinémas du Monde du Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée
et de l'Institut Français
Inver Tax Shelter
Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge
SACEM

French release Pyramide
World sales Pyramide International



