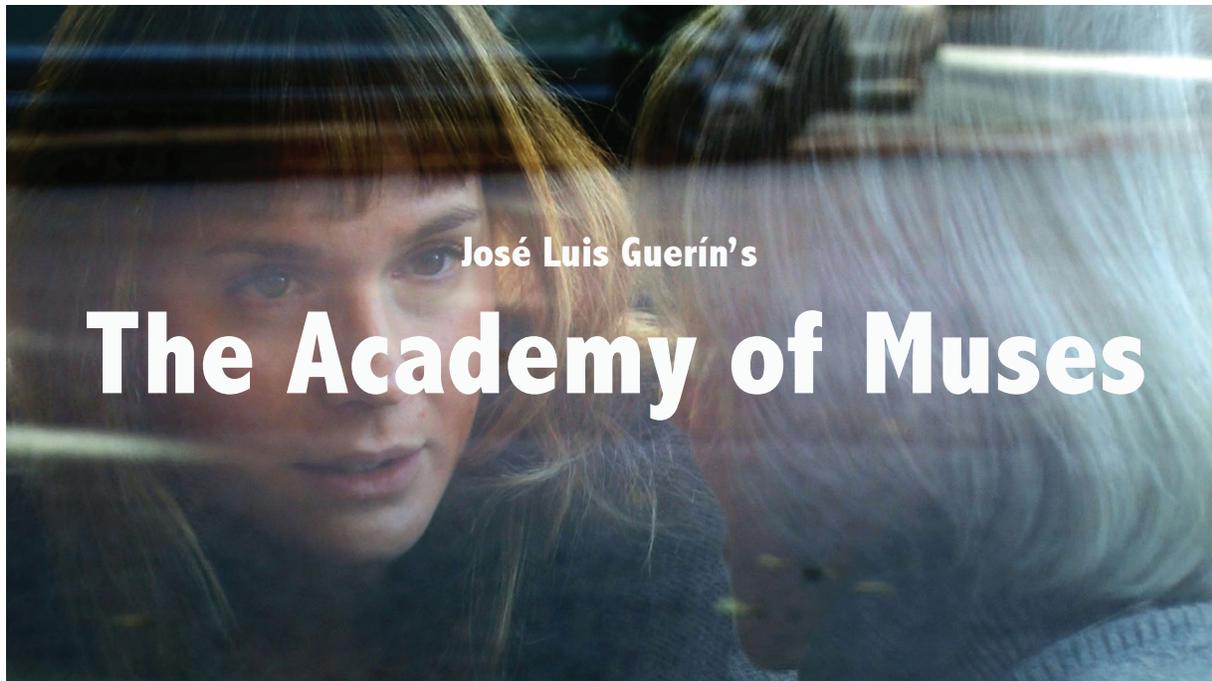


Acropolis Cinema and the Cinefamily present



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October 2, 2016 ~ 4:00PM ~ Cinefamily

## ABOUT THE FILM

Spanish filmmaker José Luis Guerín's first narrative feature since the beloved *In the City of Sylvia* is a work of both immaculate refinement and deceptive ambition. Centered on a married, middle-aged philosophy professor (Raffaele Pinto) who uses his theories on creativity and the role of the muse to intellectually seduce his female students, the film furthers Guerín's interest in the psychology underpinning the male-female dynamic, constructing a reflexive framework through which to interrogate the very process of artistic inspiration. Set in the world of academia yet bereft of the monotony suggested by such a setting, the film unfolds in the guise of nonfiction before flowering into a moral tale of literary expanse. Beautifully composed and intimately pitched, *The Academy of Muses* brings art and life into unique dialogue, stimulating the senses as readily as it prompts reflection.

92 min // Spain // 2015



### **The Academy of Muses** by Robert Koehler

"People ask me what I'm trying to do in my films," José Luis Guerín said to me in 2007 during a quiet moment in the middle of BAFICI, Buenos Aires' ridiculously ambitious annual international film festival. "I ask myself, but it's probably something about finding this realm in between fiction and non-fiction. It is a realm of maximum play, maximum discovery. Perhaps it's where most of us live, most of our days."

Guerín is one of the world's most creative filmmakers you may have never heard about, unless you saw his closest thing to an arthouse hit, *In the City of Sylvia* (2007), the only one of his seven previous features to receive a U.S. theatrical release. He has also made six short films; one 67-minute work, *Some Photos in the City of Sylvia* (2007), which served as a poetic footnote piece for the feature; and two episodes for larger omnibus works. It was telling that I met Guerín, who by 2007 had already made one masterpiece—for me, the greatest of post-2000 "in between" films, *En construcción* (2001), about the radical redevelopment of a blue-collar neighborhood in his home base of Barcelona—at a film festival. He made a film, *Guest* (2010),

about spending a year on the festival circuit screening both *Sylvia* films (he observed later that he could tell which festivals tended to be the most inventive, which were the ones that showed both works instead of just the more accessible “dramatic” one), and went on to accept a commission from the Jeonju International Film Festival in South Korea to make a stunning and seldom-seen mid-length film, *!Recuerdos de una mañanC* (2011), that captures Barcelona life on a street and inside various apartments in the way that’s the single most distinctive quality that unifies all of Guerín’s work.

It is this: More than any other living filmmaker—the only comparable artist is the sadly departed Abbas Kiarostami—Guerín makes movies that seem to discover themselves, that find their own meaning, their own purpose, their own reason for existing, while they are being made. His movies uncover their own inner secrets in the doing of them, in the watching and listening of them. They are the cinematic equivalent of going on a hike on an unknown trail, whose curves, dips, and grades catch you up in each surprising moment, whose full import isn’t apparent until the final destination is reached.

Now, this is a dangerous way to make cinema, this in-between stuff. You, the filmmaker, are pointing your camera at a photographic reality—regardless of your subject—and hoping to discover hidden truths and unexpected moments. Not in the way that documentary filmmakers typically want to nail that “gotcha” moment that reveals their subject in all their nakedness, but in ways that find the fictional narrative drama under the surface of apparent “reality.” You enter that realm that Guerín refers to, that place where an apparently actual situation slips into something else—not a standard three-act story, not a melodrama, not a psychodrama, but maybe a place where shards of all three of those modes (and others) can dribble in, sink down, and take root. Maybe something else replaces fiction and non-fiction at that point. Maybe that thing, whatever it turns out to be, becomes the movie.

In the case of Guerín’s newest, *The Academy of Muses*, it almost never became one. He had the idea to place Dante scholar and University of Barcelona professor of philology Raffaele Pinto in a classroom with mostly females “playing” as students, and have them kick around the idea of the male poet’s need for the female muse, with Dante and “The Divine Comedy” as primary subject. As Guerín shot this with his little camera (accompanied only by sound recordist Amanda Villavieja), he realized that he had something more than a series of shorts, or an installation—his original artistic plan. The frissons, the subterranean gender quakes that were bursting to the surface, the rise of “tension” (Pinto’s favorite word) between master and student took on a life of their own. Characters were forming. Guerín was watching this, as it happened, as we watch it happen. We are in exactly the same place as the filmmaker. His discovery is our discovery.

Guerín didn’t invent this. He fully credits the French ethnographic/documentary filmmaker Jean Rouch with establishing this pathway where the document (in Rouch’s case, the scientific structuralist document) becomes uncertain of its authority, and finds the characters—characters who may become fictional ones of their true selves or even truer than their true selves—in the people his camera is observing. Nothing is pre-scripted. Everything is allowed to happen. Perhaps it’s based on a simple idea, a notion, a phrase. Guerín has spent a lot of time teaching and discussing the ideas behind his cinema with students at the University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, which has produced several creative in-between filmmakers in recent years, such as Oliver Laxe. He has

in fact quietly fostered a movement that has turned out to be the most interesting development in post-millennial world cinema.

Most who watched *In the City of Sylvia* mistakenly assume that Pilar Lopez de Ayala, who plays the wandering title character, was Guerín's muse for that project. In fact, it was Pinto, whose Dante scholarship triggered the film's thematic and narrative concept. Pinto, again, is Guerín's muse in this "Academy." But a trap, perhaps subconsciously, is set within the emerging narrative: the filmmaker's muse, as the master, is undone by his supposed underlings, those women who have been object rather than subject through much of Western literature. Pinto celebrates the power, the essential nature, of the word and language, and Guerín celebrates this too: No recent film has presented a case so powerfully for the primacy of language in human existence and expression. But, listening to his words, the women—and, then, his wife (played by Pinto's intellectual peer Rosa Delor Muns, also a philology professor in Barcelona)—upend his position of authority and power. Fluidly articulated arguments in the film's first half gradually, almost imperceptibly, give way to bouts of jealousy and feelings of betrayal. Somehow, by the end, in this amazing adventure in in-between cinema, we are nearly at the border crossing leading to the land of Melodrama. Watching Guerín explore, you won't be able to detect how we got there.

## Upcoming Events

Acropolis  
www.acropoliscinema.com Cinema

October 11, 2016 ~ *Storm Children, Book One*  
Los Angeles premier of Lav Diaz's acclaimed documentary  
7:00pm ~ Veggie Cloud ~ 5210 Monte Vista, Los Angeles, CA. 90024

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