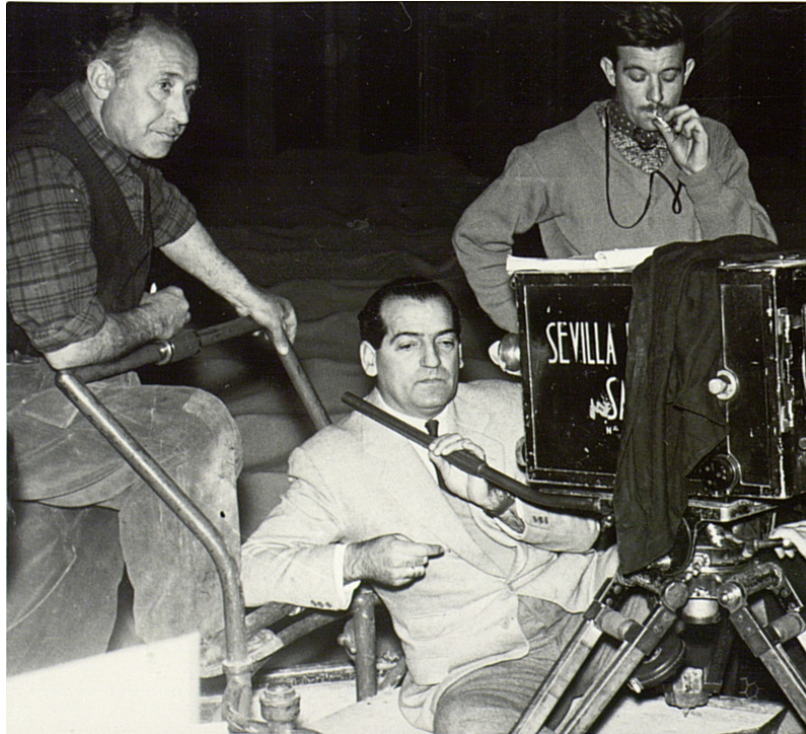


## ARTURO RUIZ-CASTILLO

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Arturo Ruiz-Castillo circa 1958

The transition from silent to sound cinema in Spain, which began in 1927 coinciding with important industrial developments in distribution and exhibition, featured eventful public debates which would transcend the cinematographic scene. In this sense, we must keep in mind that the implementation of sound cinema would coincide with a far-reaching political crisis, epitomized by the appointment of three different Presidents of the Government, and the transition from the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera to the democratic regime established by the Second Republic.

Within this context characterized by profound political and social changes, those involved in filmmaking in Spain would become entangled in a controversial debate: What to do with cinema? This question ranged from creative to ideological perspectives, but it also linked to a more specific question: how to make cinema within an industry -the Spanish film industry- which characterized itself by its perennial chaotic situation and ruinous state, especially when compared to other European film industries. The first outcome of this situation will bring all film production to a halt, to the extent that in 1931

the Spanish film industry will struggle to release just two feature films, and it would produce only five features in 1932.

Under such circumstances in the film scene, a new generation of filmmakers would emerge to either replace and/or complement their predecessors. The former had supported the Spanish silent Cinema in the 1920s, and among their many names, we must cite some of them: León Artola, Francisco Camacho, Fernando Roldán, Luis Marquina, José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, and of course, Arturo Ruiz-Castillo.

Many of these filmmakers would pledge their commitment to promote a modest small group of cultural industries. This group would thus come to make films from very diverse fields such as advertising, press, radio, record production, and book editing. From these fields would come people like Ricardo Urgoite, who would employ his family's press and publishing house to start his own film production company, along with a film theater exhibiting company, a record company, and above all the most important radio station of the country, Unión Radio, the seed of current radio station SER.

Arturo Ruiz-Castillo, son of José Ruiz-Castillo and founder and owner of publishing house Biblioteca Nueva, would also try to expand his activities to other cultural spheres, although the majority of his attempts would be fruitless. Arturo Ruiz-Castillo began working for Biblioteca Nueva when he was hardly twenty years old. He worked as a cover artist with such a dedication that his name became frequently mentioned within cultural circles and his services would even be contracted by other publishing houses. He also combined this work with his career both as an actor as part of La Barraca (the university student theatre company under the direction of Federico García Lorca), and a member the cinematographic division of *Misiones Pedagógicas* (a governmental educative project led by film critic Rafael Gil).

Other members from this group would also devote their energies to filmmaking. Among them was Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal, son of the prestigious philosopher and historian, who despite his young age had already published interesting theoretical essays. There was also José Val del Omar, the oldest member of the group, a prominent inventor fascinated by film technology and a famous expert in audiovisual applications for educational purposes. Along them there was also Cecilio Paniagua, a famous photographer linked to Photo-Secession.

The project *Misiones Pedagógicas*, which laid its foundations on the aspiration for the modernization of the national educational system and its teaching methods by aspiring to eradicate illiteracy in Spain, played an instrumental role in the shaping of Arturo Ruiz-Castillo's personality. During his work at *Misiones*, he learned to give importance to film structure and aesthetics, both in the short and documentary film formats. He approached international trends that aimed to combine sophisticated visual elements of the radical vanguard with narrative aspects that were linked to folklore. This would somehow manifest itself in his first short films, which were deeply influenced both by his liberal ideology and his efforts to be part of trends that advocated for experimental projects, such as *La ruta de Don Quijote* (Ramón Biadiu, 1934), *Ciudad encantada* (Antonio Román, 1935) and *Vibración de Granada* (José Val del Omar, 1935).

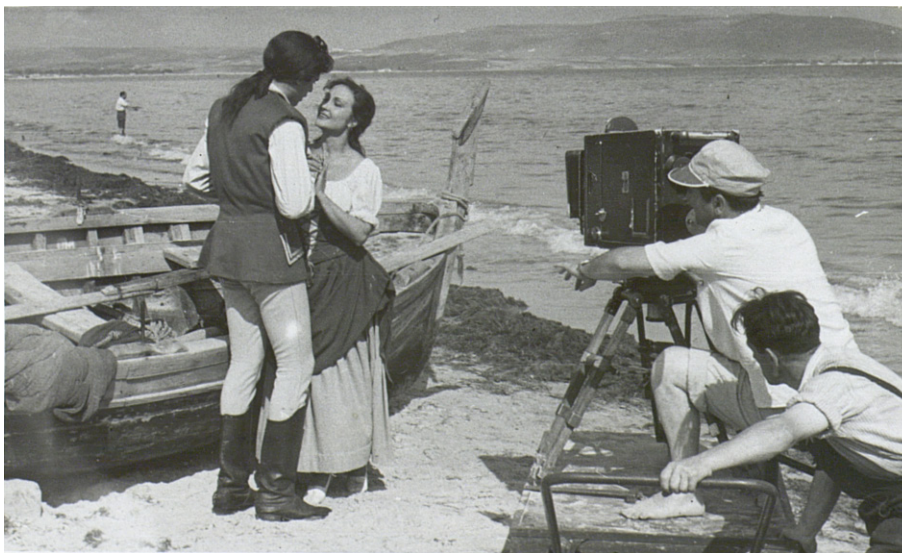
The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 would ruin his trajectory, as it did with other artists and filmmakers who had shared the same dream of synthesizing nationalism and modernism in a common goal. The war and its propagandistic needs will barely leave room for creative fancy and/or attempts to change the general conception of Spain that fascinated with her landscapes and culture, but ignored modernity. In this context, Ruiz-Castillo would make several propaganda short films in the service of the Second Republic and its cause, a cause in which, as it happened to many other intellectuals of the time-, he never believed completely. Notwithstanding, Ruiz-Castillo belonged to a family that on several occasions had showed its liberal intellectual, pro-European profile, in which the barbaric Spanish Civil War could not fit with its aesthetic and ethical beliefs.



Arturo Ruiz-Castillo at the shooting of *Las Inquietudes de Santi Andia* (1947)

At the end of the war, unlike what happened to other members of his generation that had no choice but to leave the country, Ruiz-Castillo had the opportunity to remain in the country. Having passed the usual process of ideological purification imposed by Francoist authorities, he had the opportunity to join the filmmaking industry. He would become a very active member and would make quite a start with what can be interpreted as his statement of purpose: the cinematographic adaptation in 1946 of Pío Baroja's *Las inquietudes de Shanti Andia*, a commercially successful feature film that would be widely praised by film critics. Baroja, who had, with his usual hoarse tone, condemned any coup d'état as well as any sort of empty simplistic nationalism – i.e. Francoism-, had been out of the Spanish cultural scene for a while. His rejection of any form of war (defined by him as a failure), had turned him into an expatriate, and in the 1940s he had published many of his works in Buenos Aires. In this sense, the film by Arturo Ruiz-

Castillo will become one of the first steps for the recovery of the work of Pio Baroja to the Spanish intellectual scene, as limited as it may be. Indeed, a clear example of the difficulties entailed by his return to Spain under Francoist rule was the publication of his *Complete Works*. Published in Biblioteca Nueva by José Ruiz-Castillo between 1948 and 1952, many passages and titles of Baroja's work would be deleted because they showed all too well the condition the country was in. Such is the case of his novel *Miserias de la guerra* or the eighth of his memoirs, *La guerra civil en la frontera*, which had to wait until 2006 and 2005 respectively to be published.



Arturo Ruiz-Castillo while shooting *Las Inquietudes de Santi Andía* (1947)

Driven by how well the audience received *Las inquietudes de Shanti Andía*, Arturo Ruiz-Castillo, will not cease to grant interviews in which he will show his intention to carry on his career as a filmmaker, but he will also show proof of his interest in stimulating the renewal of a creative ideology that clashed with what it sought to do: to make entertaining films for the popular masses, films that would have more developed aesthetic features than the average national cinema, and above all, a real intellectual goal. Somehow his cinematic approach linked to that of foreign filmmakers, such as Joseph L. Mankiewicz and Albert Lewin who were able to reach large audiences without giving up on their cultural ambitions. Yet, after the release of *Obsesión* (1947), Arturo Ruiz-Castillo would have no choice but to get involved with ideological and political quagmire of Francoism in order to keep his professional career. That is the reason for Ruiz-Castillo to make titles such as *La manigua sin Dios* (1948), a missionary film linked to the most conservative sectors of Francoism, which paradoxically would become one the best films of his career. In the same spirit, he also shot *El santuario no se rinde* (1949), a pious pamphlet of for the greater glory of Francoism and which was inspired by an episode of the Spanish Civil War.





Arturo Ruiz-Castillo with the cast of *Obsesión* (1947)



Arturo Ruiz-Castillo with the cast of *La Manigua sin Dios* (1948)



Arturo Ruiz-Castillo with the cast of *El Santuario no se rinde* (1949)

The confusion created by this apparent change of ideological positioning would not see an end, not even years later when, in 1953, Ruiz-Castillo made *Dos caminos*, a film which was generally perceived both as a film homage for the for the losing side of the war, and as an example of the new trend in film policy auspicated by the brief mandate of la Dirección General de Cinematografía by José María García Escudero.

Still, it is likely that the true creative intentions of Arturo Ruiz-Castillo were imprinted in other films by him, such as period film *Catalina de Inglaterra* (1951) or, above all, *María Antonia la Caramba* (1950), which was the culmination of his well known wish to approach the cultural and pictorial universe of Francisco Goya.

The cinema of Arturo Ruiz-Castillo in the 1950s will end up mirroring his difficulties to fit into the creative context of those years. Having increasingly set himself apart both from the historical film genre promoted by Francoism and represented by directors such as Juan de Orduña, Luis Lucía, or his old friend Rafael Gil, and others from the more modernizing trend epitomized by filmmakers like Luis García Berlanga, Juan Antonio Bardem, or Manuel Mur Oti, his career would gradually decline. His works would turn more and more conventional due to the nature of projects that allowed him to show his professional aptitude but did not challenge him creatively, insofar as these films would limit him to continuing the same conventions of genre –musical comedies, westerns, etc- without great aspirations, without influencing Spanish cinema.

As many other discouraged filmmakers, who had unsuccessfully attempted to get their creative work off the ground with some intellectual pretensions within a hostile environment, in the 1960s Ruiz-Castillo made the most of the job opportunities that TV began to offer. In the 1970s he finished his career and returned to his early origins by directing documentaries for pedagogical purposes which, despite not leaving him room

for visual innovation, would turn out to be an outstanding platform to show the changes experienced in Spain in the recent decades, as well as keeping the intellectual trend that linked the intellectual movements that had advocated for change in the 1920s to the desire for change of the young generations that foretold the inevitable changes that the upcoming end of Francoism would bring.

Translation by Miguel A. Zárate

List of pictures (edited by Miguel A. Zárate)

- Arturo Ruiz-Castillo circa 1955. Located at Archivo General de la Administración, Alcalá de Henares (AGA) IDD (3) 89-90 F-2321-02-001
- Arturo Ruiz-Castillo during the shooting of *Las Inquietudes de Santi Andia* (1947). Located at AGA, IDD (3) 89-90 F-2482-34-001
- Arturo Ruiz-Castillo while shooting *Las Inquietudes de Santi Andia* (1947). Located at AGA IDD (3) 89-90 F-2503-27-01
- Arturo Ruiz-Castillo with the cast of *Obsesión* (1947). Found at AGA, IDD (3) 89-90 F-2526-43-001
- Arturo Ruiz-Castillo with the cast of *La Manigua sin Dios* (1948). Found at AGA IDD (3) 89-90 F-2502-14-001
- Arturo Ruiz-Castillo with the cast of *El Santuario no se rinde* (1948). Found at AGA IDD (3) 89-90 F-2562-57-001.