THE SALT OF THE EARTH

a film by

Wim Wenders and Juliano Ribeiro Salgado
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SYNOPSIS

For the last 40 years, the photographer Sebastião Salgado has been travelling through the continents, in the footsteps of an ever-changing humanity. He has witnessed some of the major events of our recent history; international conflicts, starvation and exodus. He is now embarking on the discovery of pristine territories, of wild fauna and flora, and of grandiose landscapes as part of a huge photographic project which is a tribute to the planet's beauty.

Sebastião Salgado's life and work are revealed to us by his son, Juliano, who went with him during his last travels, and by Wim Wenders, himself a photographer.
INTERVIEW WITH WIM WENDERS

For how long have you known Sebastião Salgado, and where you already struck by his work before you met him?

I have known Sebastião Salgado’s work for almost 25 years. I’d acquired two prints, a Genesis exhibition called ‘Lélia (his wife) in Vitória, the city where they live, or inside the Instituto Terra: I had to let

What was the catalyst for the project SALT OF THE EARTH?

Once you’d decided to co-direct the film with Juliano, Sebastião Salgado’s son, did you work from a script for SALT OF THE EARTH, or was the film structured during the shooting?

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You’re presence in the film is warm and discreet: where and when did the interviews with Sebastião take place? And what governed the choice of photographs that were used?

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During the first interview I opened a camera. But on our collaborative progress, I increasingly had the feeling I should ’de-objectify’, and I should give the whole space over to Sebastião and allow all of his photographs. The way you deal is not to speak for itself. I had the idea of a documentary approach using a sort of dark room. Sebastião would choose moving images from all his photographs, and afterwards my assistant and I would show them on the screen. So the camera was behind the screen, filming through his photographs – if that’s how I can put it – thanks to a semi-transparent mirror, which meant that he was looking through his own photographs. At the same time he did not have the photographic and the spectator perspective which was the most intimate recording style for the work of the Salgados. He wanted to watch the images. So we had a grand panoramic image for our audience in the cinema rooms. We chose the photographs together, and those choices were mainly dictated by the stories that Sebastião told me and which are in the film. We had hours and hours of rushes at our disposal.

Did you encourage him to comment on his photographs by taking him back to the time and place where they were taken?

I jotted the main outline of the film down on paper, and in the end, the ’black rooms’ were a central device. But that said, with any documentary, you have to start by shooting and building the rhythm. Did you work from a script for SALT OF THE EARTH, or was the film structured during the shooting?

Very few photographers manage this. The majority of them arrive somewhere, fire off a few photographs, and get out. Sebastião doesn’t work like that. He spends time with the people he photographs to understand their situation, to hear from them, to communicate with them, and so chances are he will be more passive. And he finds empathy for them. He does not use his camera as a weapon. Pictures manage to transform and photograph in a documentary style cannot convey the same things. The more you make a real effort to obtain a ’good photo’, which means you think really carefully and carefully about all those people!

The last, we...
Throughout the film, the patient, and the importance of his wife, Lélia Wanick Salgado. She is on the film and work of Séraphine. Did she play an active part in the making of SALT OF THE EARTH?

They’ve been working together for 50 years. Lélia brings a new energy to Salgado, which he needs for his work and his exhibitions, and sheunderstands his deepest photographic projects together. As a result, one obvious fact that the work would appear at the start of the film. She is an amazing woman, very strong, very forthright, honest and adorable. And very funny. The Salgados laugh a great deal.

The last part of the film is an unexpected journey at the same time intimate and powerful: the Salgados’ family return to the family ranch in Aimorés in Brazil, a breathtaking landscape devastated by deforestation, and the Salgados’ incredible gamble – as we see, already starting to pay off – of replanting two million trees. For Salgado the man and for the photographer of the most dramatic human conflicts, could we speak of a happy ending?

From the start, I knew that I had to tell two stories at the same time. One could say that the reforestation project they have set up in Brazil, and the near-miraculous results they have achieved, is a tremendously ecological: the Salgado family’s return to the family ranch in Aimorés in Brazil. A breathtaking landscape devastated by deforestation, and the Salgados’ incredible gamble – as we see, already starting to pay off – of replanting two million trees. For Salgado the man and for the photographer of the most dramatic human conflicts, could we speak of a happy ending?

From the start, it seemed essential for us to take into consideration the fact the Salgados – father and son – were right to bring me in to avoid any risk of not keeping that segment in the final edit. I felt that this aspect of his work could not be left out of the film. The salgados offer a touching study of the father-son relationship. Was this dual undertaking as important as Sebastião’s photographs. As a result, I felt that we were making two documentaries at the same time, which we then had to edit into a single film.

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INTERVIEW WITH JULIANO RIBEIRO SALGADO

You were born in Porto Alegre 40 years ago. You are a film and documentary maker, and your first short film, SUZANA, made for Arte, dealt with the use of anti-personnel mines in Angola. That could easily have been a subject for your father’s career…

TRUTH’S TRUE. I WAS 23. AT THE TIME, I WANTED TO BE A PHOTOGRAPHER, AND I WAS DETERMINED TO HEAD OFF ALONE TO AFGHANISTAN. FOR HER PART, MY MOTHER WAS VERY WORRIED. I WANTED TO GO ON MY OWN, TO BE IN DENIAL OF THE DANGER!”…

WHEN I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH MY GRANDFATHER ON HIS RANCH IN THE NORTHERN COMERS OF BRAZIL, I FOUND THAT MY FATHER HAD A “NORMAL” LIFESTYLE. WITH ALL DUE MODesty, AND IN MY OWN WAY, I WANTED TO FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS. I THOUGHT THAT WIM WENDERS AND MY FATHER WOULD SIT EITHER SIDE OF A LITTLE TABLE AND WOULD START TALKING ABOUT THE “NORMAl” LIFE THEY HAD BEEN LIVING, IN EXTREME SITUATIONS, THAT HE HAD WITNESSED HUMANITY CONFRONTING SOME TERRIBLE EVENTS. TO ME, THAT WAS A “NORMAL” LIFE!

IT WOULD BE THROUGH EXPLORING HIS STORY, HIS MEMORIES, THAT WE WOULD COME TO POSE THIS QUESTION: WHAT CHANGES A MAN? WHAT CHANGED IN SEBASTIÃO SALGADO? I KNEW THE ANSWER.

WHEREAS THERE WAS A DISTANCE BETWEEN US. I JUDGED HIS PATHS. I THOUGHT THAT WIM WENDERS AND MY FATHER WOULD SIT EITHER SIDE OF A LITTLE TABLE AND WOULD START TALKING ABOUT THE “NORMAl” LIFE THEY HAD BEEN LIVING, IN EXTREME SITUATIONS, THAT HE HAD WITNESSED HUMANITY CONFRONTING SOME TERRIBLE EVENTS. TO ME, THAT WAS A “NORMAL” LIFE!

IF YOU HAD TO DIVIDE UP THE WORK?

THE PROCESS WAS ALREADY UNDERWAY. THERE WERE ALREADY TRIES, AND A FILM ABOUT OTHER PHOTOGRAPHERS. BUT IT WASN’T THE ONE THAT MAKING A FILM ABOUT A PHOTOGRAPHER HAD ITS LIMITATIONS; IT WASN’T THE ONE THAT THE FATHER HAD PERSONALLY SPENT HIS ENTIRE CAREER IN AFRICA, IN 1969, TO BE ENROLLED ON A LAND-LONG PROJecT AoAFRICA. THIS GadGET WOULD NOT WORK. THE RESULT WOULD HAVE BEEN A FASCINATING STORY, BUT I NEEDED TO BE IN DENIAL OF THE DANGER…

“I SHOWED WIM WHAT I HAD FILMED DURING THE TRIPS WITH MY FATHER, AND EXPLAINED HOW I FEEL ABOUT THE PEOPLE WE HAD MEETED, THE PLACES WHERE WE HAD BEEN…”

THE PEOPLE WERE PHOTOGRAPHERS, THE PEOPLE WERE PHOTOGRAPHERS, THE PEOPLE WERE PHOTOGRAPHERS. WE HAD SEEN SO MUCH DEATH THAT I FELT MYSELF DYING. “TO BE ESPECIALLY AWARE OF HAVING THE NECESSARY DISTANCE TO ACHIEVE THIS…”

BUT IT WASN’T THE RIGHT APPROAcH. THIS FILM SHOULD COME OUT OF SEBASTIÃO’S OWN STORY: FROM HIS PROJECTIONS, FROM HIS EXPERIENCES, THAT FEW PEOPLE HAD SHARED; FROM THE FACT THAT FOR 40 YEARS HE HAD FOUND HIMSELF AT THE CENTER OF CRUCIAL EVENTS, WHERE TRAVEL AND CAREER WERE NOT ALWAYS ALONG. WE SAW EACH OTHER A LOT, WE WERE IN TOUCH, BUT IT WASN’T THE SAME PROFESSIONS…”

“IT WOULD BE THROUGH EXPLORING HIS STORY, HIS MEMORIES, THE SITUATIONS IN WHICH HE HAD FOUND HIMSELF. THIS DISCUSSION WOULD HELP US TO LINK THESE IMAGES TO SEBASTIÃO’S TRAJECTORY SO THAT WE COULD LEARN FROM HIS CAREER, A MULTIPLE STORY – I KNOW LIKE THAT WORD…”
What did the return to the family ranch represent for you, given the huge rehabilita-
tion project for its environment which is underway? A mission? A utopia? A future?

Nobody could believe it, me less than anyone given the state of the ranch and the desola-
tion of the surrounding landscape. In Brazil, it was a modest project, the idea being to
regain a few trees around this childhood house where we would return for vacation. But
my parents are clearly driven by something, and once again, they throw themselves into
it body and soul. The project, which was supposed to remain on a family scale, suddenly
became a monumental ecological undertaking: “OK, we’re going to replant the whole
forest.” They set up the Instituto Terra, which has become the leading employer in the
region. Their brand new project and the Instituto, which is an eco-museum, and another million more on the surrounding land. It’s
an insane project, huge and magnificent.

You are preparing your first fiction feature film. Can you talk about it?
It is set in Brazil, in São Paulo. It’s at the writing stage, but I can tell you it will be a psy-
chological thriller built around a powerful theme in Brazilian society: upward mobility.

Juliano Ribeiro Salgado was born in 1974 in Paris, where he grew up in a Franco-Brazilian environment. In 1996, he made his first do-
cumentary for Arte, Suzana, on the use of anti-personnel mines in Angola. Other documentaries followed: made in Ethiopia, Afghanistan
and Brazil. At the same time, he made news reports for Canal+ in France and for TV Globo in Brazil. Salgado then entered the London Film
School, from which he graduated in 2003. He later worked on his first feature-length film that is to be filmed in São Paulo, Brazil.
Sebastião Salgado was born on 8 February 1944 in Aimorés, Minas Gerais, Brazil. He lives in Paris, France. Having previously worked as an economist, Salgado began his career as a professional photographer in 1973 in Paris, working with the French agencies Sygma, Gamma, and Magnum Photographs until 1994, when he and Lélia Wanick Salgado formed Amazonas Images, an organization created exclusively for his work.

Salgado has travelled to over 100 countries for his photographic projects. Most of these works, as well as appearing in numerous solo and group exhibitions, have also been presented in books such as *Other Americas* (1986), *Sahel—L’homme en Détresse* (1986), *An Uncertain Grace* (1990), *Workers* (1993), *Terra* (1997), *Migrations* (2000), and *Portraits* (2000), and *Africa* (2007). Touring exhibitions of this work have been, and continue to be, presented throughout the world in leading museums and galleries.

In 2004, Salgado began the *Genesis* project, aimed at presenting the unblemished face of nature and humanity. *Genesis* consists of a series of landscape and wildlife photographs, as well as photographs of human communities that continue to live in accordance with their ancestral traditions and cultures. This body of work was conceived as a potential path to humanity’s rediscovery of itself in nature.

Two books *Genesis*, published by TASCHEN, with international distribution in six languages, came out in Spring 2013. At the same time, the *Genesis* touring exhibitions started to be presented.

Since the 1990s, Salgado and Lélia have also worked on the restoration of part of the Atlantic Forest in Brazil. They succeeded in turning the area into a nature reserve in 1998 and created the Instituto Terra, an environmental NGO dedicated to a mission of reforestation, conservation, and education.

In 2012, Salgado and Lélia received the Prize e from Instituto e, UNESCO Brasil and Rio de Janeiro Municipality, as well as the “Personalidade Ambiental” Prize from the World Wildlife Fund, Brazil. These awards were given in recognition of their work with Instituto Terra.

Salgado has been awarded numerous major photographic prizes in recognition of his accomplishments. He is also a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, and an honorary member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences in the United States.
PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SEBASTIÃO SALGADO

Other Americas
Sahel, The End of the Road
An Uncertain Grace
Workers
Terra

Edited by Lélia Wanick Salgado and published by:
Phaidon, United Kingdom and USA, 1997.

Exodus
Edited by Amazonas images and published by:

Africa

Taschen, (international) 2007.

Taschen, (international) 2010. 2nd edition
EXHIBITIONS

- Sebastião Salgado has exhibited in the world’s most prestigious venues, including the Corcoran Gallery in Washington in 1992.
- The exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 1986 set the attendance record for the museum.
- He was the first photographer to have exhibited at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo in 1993.
- The exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, USA in 1990, set the attendance record for the museum.
- The exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall in London in 1993, set the attendance record for the museum.
- The exhibition at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, Japan in 2009 drew record attendance for the museum.

In 2013 // Springs
- London – Natural History Museum April 11th 2013
- Rio de Janeiro – Jardim Botanico May 2013
- Toronto – Royal Ontario Museum May 12th 2013
- Milan – Centre Cultura del Mondo May 2013

Autumn
- Paris – Maison Européenne de la Photographie 13 September 2013
- São Paulo – MASP September 2013
- Seoul – National Art Museum of Seoul September 2013

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

In 2014 // Springs
- Singapore – National Art Museum April 2-4 2014
- New York May-September 2014
- Seoul or Tokyo April 2014
- Standard Museum of Photography Summer 2014

In 2015
- Berlin – Martin Gropius Bau Museum
- Montreal – Ottawa – Montréal June-September 2015