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# 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 long time back, which really struck a chord with me and moved me. I framed them, and ever since, they have hung over my desk. Inspired by these photographs, I visited an exhibition called *At Work* soon after that. Ever since then, I've been an unconditional admirer of Sebastião's work, even though I only met the artist in person five or six years ago.

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

We met in his Paris offices. He took me on a visit round his studio, and I discovered *Genesis*. This was an exciting new departure in his work, and as always, a project of huge scope that would unfold over a long period. I was fascinated by his involvement in his work and his determination. Then we met again, and we discovered we both love soccer, and we started talking about photography in general. One day, he asked me if I would be interested in accompanying him and his son Juliano on a journey without any precise goal on which they had started out, and for which they thought they needed another point of view, that of an outsider.

Once you'd decided to co-direct the film with Juliano, Sebastião Salgado's son, did you have to resolve any problems? The sheer volume of material, or the choice of photographs? Beyond the sequences of Juliano filming his father, did you fall back on any other archive footage?

The biggest problem was, in fact, the abundance of material. Juliano had already accompanied his father on several trips around the world. So there were hours and hours of documentary images. I'd planned to accompany Sebastião on at least two «missions» — in the great north of Siberia and in a balloon expedition over Namibia — but we had to cancel that because I fell ill and so I couldn't travel. So instead, I started to concentrate on his photographic work, and we recorded several interviews in Paris. But the more I

discovered his work, the more questions I had. And of course, I had access to a plethora of archive images.

Your presence in the film is warm and discreet: where and when did the interviews with Sebastião Salgado take place? And what governed the choice of photographs that you discuss together?

During the first interviews I appeared on camera. But as our conversations progressed, I increasingly had the feeling I should «disappear», and that I should give the whole space over to Sebastião and, above all, to the photographs. The work should be left to speak for itself. So I had the idea of a directorial approach using a sort of dark room: Sebastião was in front of a screen, looking at the photographs, whilst answering my questions about them. So the camera was behind this 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 at the same time at his photographs and the spectator. I thought it was the most intimate setting for the audience to hear him express himself and at the same time discover his work. We more or less cut out all the «traditional» interviews, of which only a few bits remain. But they turned out to be a great preparatory stage for our sessions in the «dark room». 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? A Brazilian gold mine, famine in the Sahel, the genocide in Rwanda, and so on. They are, for the most part, tragic images. Did you ever find them "too beautiful", as some have reproached him?

In the «dark room», we ran through Sebastião's entire photographic oeuvre, more or less in chronological order, for a good week. It was very difficult for him – and for us too behind the camera – because some of the accounts and journeys are deeply disturbing, and a few are genuinely chilling. Sebastião felt as if he was returning to these places.



and for us, these internal journeys «to the heart of darkness» were also overwhelming. Sometimes we'd stop and I had to go out for a walk to get a bit of distance on what I'd just seen and heard. As for the question of whether his photographs are too beautiful, or too aestheticized. I totally disagree with those criticisms. When you photograph poverty and suffering, you have to give a certain dignity to your subject, and avoid slipping into voyeurism. It's not easy. It can only be achieved on condition that you develop a good rapport with the people in front of the lens, and you really get inside their lives and their situation. 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, he lives with them, he sympathizes with them, and he shares their lives as far as possible. And he feels empathy for them. He does this job for the people, in order to give them a voice. Pictures snapped on the hoof and photographed in a «documentary» style cannot convey the same things. The more you find the right way to convey a situation in a convincing way, the closer you come to a language which corresponds to what you're illustrating and to the subject in front of you, the more you make a real effort to obtain a «good photo», and the more you give nobility to your subject and make it stand out. I think that Sebastião offered real dignity to all those people who found themselves in front of his lens. His photographs aren't about him, but about all those people!

#### Did you work from a script for SALT OF THE EARTH, or was the film structured during editing?

I jotted the main outline of the film down on paper, and in the end, the «dark room» was a conceptual device, but overall, as with any documentary, you have to try and shoot footage in the moment and not miss what's happening in front of you because of some prior decisions. That was specially the case when I went to Brazil and I filmed Sebastião and Lélia (his wife) in Vitória, the city where they live, or inside the Instituto Terra: I had to let myself be guided by the unexpected and be ready to shoot images on the spot. That's the other aspect of my contribution to this film: seeking to draw a link between the Salgados' extraordinary "other life" and the photographic body of work. In a way, their ecological

commitment and their efforts to regenerate the tropical Atlantic Forest are, in my opinion, 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.

The documentary offers the portrait of a man and brings to life his work. It also offers a touching study of the father-son relationship. Was this dual undertaking obvious from the start?

Yes, from the outset, our film had several dimensions. The father-son relationship was also clearly part of it from the start. It could have turned out to be a pitfall for the film, and I think that the Salgados – father and son – were right to bring me in to avoid any risk of that happening. But ultimately, it's a very moving side of the film.

One of Salgado's trademarks is his exclusive use of black-and-white. Does he explain this? In your own films (KINGS OF THE ROAD, the perception of our world by the angels in WINGS OF DESIRE, THE STATE OF THINGS), you use it to great effect: did this bring you closer?

Yes, I can totally identify with his use of black-and-white. What's more, the part of the film that I filmed myself is also in black-and-white so that it sits better alongside his photographs. At one point, we touched on this question in our interviews. But we ended up not keeping that segment in the final edit. I felt that this aspect of his work could be understood without needing any additional explanation.

Photography is something you have in common, since you yourself are known and acknowledged as a photographer (and like Salgado, a long-standing fan of the Leica), and many of your movie characters (Philip Winter in ALICE IN THE CITIES, Tom Ripley in THE AMERICAN FRIEND, or Travis in PARIS, TEXAS) have a link with photographs or photography. Did Salgado know your work the way you knew his?

Sebastião took quite a lot of photographs while we were filming, including of the crew. So I might have the honor of appearing in some of his photographs. But I don't think he knows my films as well as I know his photographs, which was the very reason behind me making this film. *He was* the subject of *my film*, and not the other way round.

Throughout the film, the presence, and the importance of his wife, Lélia Wanick Salgado, in the life and work of Salgado is tangible. 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 real energy to Sebastião, which he needs for his works and his exhibitions, and they undertake his biggest photographic projects together. As such, it was obvious that she too would appear at the heart of the film. She's an amazing woman, very strong, very forthright, honest and adorable. And very funny. The Salgados do laugh a great deal!

The last part of the film is an unexpected journey, at the same time intimate and powerfully 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 have another life besides photography: their commitment to ecology. And from the outset, I knew that I had to tell two stories at the same time. One could say that the reforestation program they have set up in Brazil, and the near-miraculous results they have achieved, concluded in a happy ending for Sebastião, after all the misery he has witnessed and the depression into which he slipped when he came back from Rwanda for the last time, and after the unbearable episodes that he has lived through. He not only dedicated his latest monumental work, *Genesis*, to nature, but one can also say that it is nature which allowed him to not lose his faith in mankind.

#### BIOGRAPHY OF WIM WENDERS

Wim Wenders was born in Düsseldorf in 1945. After two years of studying medicine and philosophy and a year-long stay in Paris as a painter, he attended the University of Television and Film in Munich from 1967 to 1970.

One of the most important figures to emerge from the "New German Cinema" period in the 1970s, he was a founding member of the German film distributor Filmverlag der Autoren in 1971 and he established his own production company, Road Movies, in Berlin in 1975. Alongside directing atmospheric auteur films, Wenders works with the medium of photography, and his poignant images of desolate landscapes engage themes including memory, time and movement. His photography series, "Pictures from the surface of the Earth" and "Places, strange and quiet", have been exhibited in museums and art institutions around the world. Wim Wenders has published numerous books with essays and photographs.

Wim Wenders became a member of the Academy of Arts Berlin in 1984. He was awarded honorary doctorates at the Sorbonne University in Paris (1989), the Theological Faculty of the University of Fribourg (1995), the University of Louvain (2005) and the Architectural Faculty of the University of Catania (2010). He is a founding member and president of the European Film Academy and member of the order Pour le Mérite. Currently he is teaching film as a professor at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg. Wim Wenders co-authored the book «Inventing Peace» with Mary Zournazi, published by I.B.Tauris, London.

Wenders is currently in post-production with his upcoming 3D feature film EVERY THING WILL BE FINE, starring James Franco, Charlotte Gainsbourg and Rachel McAdams.

He lives in Berlin, together with his wife, photographer Donata Wenders.

### FILMOGRAPHY OF WIM WENDERS

FEATURE FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES

**2011** Pina (3D)

2008 Palermo Shooting

2005 Don't Come Knocking

2004 Land of Plenty

2003 The Blues Series: The Soul of a Man

2002 Ode to Cologne

2000 The Million Dollar Hotel

1998 Buena Vista Social Club

1997 The End of Violence

1996 A Trick of the Light

**1995** Beyond the Clouds (with Michelangelo Antonioni)

1994 Lisbonne Story

1993 Faraway, So Close!

1991 Until the End of the World

1989 Notebook on Cities and Clothes

1987 Wings of Desire

**1985** Tokyo-Ga

1984 Paris, Texas

1982 Hammett

1981 L'Etat des choses

1980 Nick's Film – Lighting over Water

1977 The American Friend

1976 Kings of the Road

1975 Wrong Move

1973 Alice in the Cities

1972 The Scarlet Letter

**1971** The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty

1970 Summer in the City



#### INTERVIEW WITH JULIANO RIBEIRO SALGADO

You were born in Paris 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 your father tackled...

That's true, I was 23 then. At the time, I was about to become a dad for the first time. and I absolutely had to work. So I guit studying law, having realized that sitting behind a desk is not for me. As a young child, I already knew my father had a fantastic profession; he traveled the world, he was at the center of crucial events. There were always people at our house who had come to talk about these events. I listened to them, and without really realizing it, I developed an interest and a passion for geo-political affairs at a very young age. I wanted to go out an get to grips with the world, and without knowing exactly how, try to communicate what I was going to learn and discover, I started to work for Canal+, and for the Brazilian channel Globo. I made my first short film, SUZANA, in 1996. When I went with my father to Angola, but we weren't often together there. He took photographs. I filmed, and from that moment on, I understood that we were going to travel in different worlds. I then went to Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, and Brazil, where I took the opportunity to spend some time with my grandfather on his ranch. He was 96 at the time. I filmed him, and ves, he appears in SALT OF THE EARTH, As a child, almost subconsciously I wanted the same kind of life as my father. He was often absent, coming back from dangerous countries, heading off to denounce injustices, and so on. To me, that was a "normal" lifestyle. With all due modesty, and in my own way, I wanted to follow in his footsteps.

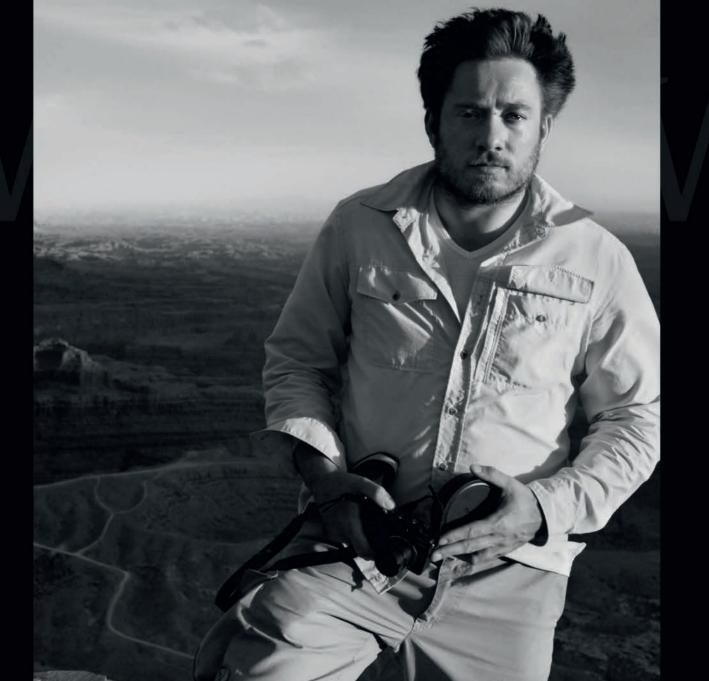
#### Did your father encourage you in the early stages?

Yes, with fantastic confidence, maybe close to recklessness. For example, he thought my plan to head off alone to Afghanistan was great! For her part, my mother was very worried, but since she had chosen to put up with my father's perilous trips to theaters of war, and to be in denial of the danger, she accepted it. I was very lucky to have been able to start my career as a documentary maker very young, and to have fulfilled this. My father, that distant hero, when he was home, our relationship wasn't always easy. From my

adolescence, there was a distance between us. I pursued my path, I made some more documentaries, and then I moved to London to go to film school. It was at that point that our paths really went their separate ways. When, in 2004, he embarked on his latest long-term project, Genesis, this quest for unspoilt paradises which took up eight years, he suggested that I accompany him. I was reticent, I didn't know how my work would fit in with him. But our first trip turned out to be incredible. It took us to Brazil, to the heart of Amazonia, some 300km from the nearest town, to meet an isolated tribe, the Zo'é, with whom we stayed for a month. These are people who still live in the Paleolithic era. I experienced that as a privilege, a moment suspended in time. And a dialog formed between my father and I; or rather, reformed. We then went to Papua New Guinea, to Irian Jaya, to stay with another isolated tribe, the Yali, then to an island in the Arctic Circle, Wrangel, home to walruses and polar bears. During these journeys, we talked about a lot of things which we'd never talked about before, and that's when I found a clear purpose to the footage I had been filming since I started accompanying him. When my father saw the first raw edits I had done with those pictures, he got very moved, to the point of having tears in his eyes.

### Was that when you had the idea that an outsider's point of view should be added to your own to flesh out the film ?

That process was already underway. There were already films on Sebastião, and films about other photographers. But it seemed to me that making a film about a photographer had its limitations: a man prepares to take a photo, and the story is over when the photo is taken. Except that he takes a second one, then a third, and so on. So in my opinion, it wasn't the right approach. This film should come out of Sebastião's own story: from his experiences, that few people have shared; from the fact that for 40 years he found himself in extreme situations, that he has witnessed humanity confronting some terrible events. 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. I'd seen him live with Indians and the Papuan people. He sees people and does not judge them. He puts himself on the same level as them, no doubt because he too comes from a tiny, very violent village in a remote part of Brazil, cut off from the world. I think the



people he photographs are sensitive to the benevolence of his viewpoint. I think about what happened between Sebastião and them before and after taking the photographs, and how these exchanges can nourish us. Yes, even us, in our privileged and indifferent societies. That was the film. But for it to take shape, we needed someone other than me, less involved than I am, to speak freely to Sebastião, to tackle what should be the core of the film. In other words, to show the evolution of his gaze over the years, everything that we could learn from his career, in a militant way – I know he doesn't like that word – as he becomes increasingly aware that his photographs can, to some extent, change things for the people he photographs.

#### Is then when Wim Wenders became involved?

Wim Wenders was the ideal person. He already knew Salgado's work, they had already met a few times. At the time, Wim was already nursing the idea of making a film about Sebastião. We saw each other a lot, we talked a lot, and it was quite natural that we decided to make this film together. Not only did he understand the project, but he immediately adhered to it and was totally committed to it. It was really wonderful to see this man respecting the intimacy of this project, but adding a host of essential elements, bringing his own particular sensitivity, his own talent in terms of images.

#### How did you divide up the work?

I showed Wim what I had filmed during the trips with my father, and explained how I felt these images had to be linked to Sebastião's trajectory so that we could learn from his testimony, his memories, the situations in which he had found himself. This discussion resulted in the emergence of the structure of our film, but for my part ... I was incapable of having the necessary distance to achieve this. Wim Wenders was now there to pull together this story of a man who had grown weary of the suffering he had photographed, who himself bears the scars of what he has seen and experienced, and who said: "After years working in refugee camps, I had seen so much death that I felt myself dying." To begin with, I thought that Wim and my father would sit either side of a little table and would

talk. Not so. Working with a great artist like Wenders changes things, and the idea he came up with to confront Sebastião visually with his memories is much more ingenious. At the end of these very fertile confrontations, we shut ourselves away in the editing room for a year and a half. That enabled us to eliminate certain complicated narrative threads, and to be more simple and direct.

### Susan Sontag spoke of the "inauthenticity of the beautiful" in Salgado's work. How do you respond to that ?

There are two aspects to Sontag's reproach: the supposed fascination with poverty — or death, in fact — that the photographer felt, and the fact that the subjects are not identified, unlike the photographer, who is revered at their expense. In her critique, Sontag also denounces the cynicism of the media which commission and publish these photographs. I think it's very unfair to associate Salgado with all that. He would spend several weeks, even several months in countries that were often torn apart, which he was drawn to by his urge to bear testimony. He needs to create a relationship with the person he's going to photograph, and says that it is the subject who ends up "giving" him the photo. The emotion, the empathy guide him. I think that comes across very well in the film.

### Your mother, Lélia, was 17 when she met your father. She has always been the fixed point in his life. How far was she involved in SALT OF THE EARTH?

Lélia did not get directly involved in the film, and in a way, you could say that Sebastião wasn't involved either! They put their faith in Wim and me. Lélia and Sebastião is a long story; they have always taken their decisions together, and SALT OF THE EARTH belongs to both of them.

What did the return to the family ranch represent for you, given the huge rehabilitation 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 desolation of the surrounding landscape. To begin with, it was a modest project, the idea being to replant a few trees around this childhood house where we would return on vacation. But my parents are clearly driven by something, and once again, they threw 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. They have already planted out 2.5 million trees on my grandfather's former ranch, which is now an ecological reserve, 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 Sao Paulo. It's at the writing stage, but I can tell you it will be a psychological thriller built around a powerful theme in Brazilian society: upward mobility.

### BIOGRAPHY OF JULIANO RIBEIRO SALGADO

Juliano Ribeiro Salgado was born in 1974 in Paris, where he grew up in a Franco-Brazilian environment. In 1996, he made his first documentary 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.

Juliano Ribeiro Salgado has made a number of short films and documentaries for French television. His 2009 film, *Nauru an Island adrift.*, made for the Grand Format documentary unit of Arte, was selected by numerous international festivals (Hot Docs in Toronto and Le Festival Dei Populo in Florence).

He is now working on his first feature-length film that is to be filmed in São Paolo, Brazil.



### BIOGRAPHY OF SEBASTIÃO SALGADO

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 photo 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 print publications, have also been presented in books such as *Other Americas* and *Sahel-l'Homme en Détresse* (1986), *An Uncertain Grace* (1990), *Workers* (1993), *Terra* (1997), *Migrations* 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 exhibition 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 UNICEF 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

**Exodus** 

Africa Africa Pantheon Books, USA, 1986.

University of California Press, USA, 2004.

Aperture, USA, 1990.

Aperture, USA, 1993.

Edited by Lélia Wanick Salgado and published by :

Phaidon, United Kingdom and USA, 1997.

Edited by Amazonas images and published by:

Aperture, USA, 2000.

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 Modern Art Museum of 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 Centro Della Culture del Mondo May 2013

#### Autumn

- Paris Maison Européenne de la Photographie 13 Septembre 2013
- São Paulo SESC Belenzinho Septembre 2013
- Séoul National Art Museum or Tokyo Septembre 2013

### **UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS**

#### In 2014 // Springs

- Singapore National Art Museum April 24th 2014
- New York May-September 20144
- Seoul or Tokyo April 2014
- Swedish Museum of Photography Summer 2014

#### In 2015

- Berlin Martin Gropius Bau Museum
- Montreal Foton (Le Vieux Port) June-September 2015



### **CREW**

**Directed by** Wim Wenders

Juliano Ribeiro Salgado

Screenplay Juliano Ribeiro Salgado

Wim Wenders

David Rosier **Photography** Hugo Barbier

Juliano Ribeiro Salgado

Sound Régis Muller
Editor Maxine Goedicke
Rob Myers

Music Laurent Petitgand
Executive Producer Wim Wenders

**Producer** David Rosier

**Coproduction** Amazonas images

Solares delle arti

**Production manager** David Rosier

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With support of Les Amis de la Maison Européenne de la Photographie





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