

# STUDY GUIDE



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## LA SOLEDAD (LA SOLEDAD)

a Film by JORGE THIELEN ARMAND  
VENEZUELA/2016/89 MIN  
Spanish with English subtitles

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## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

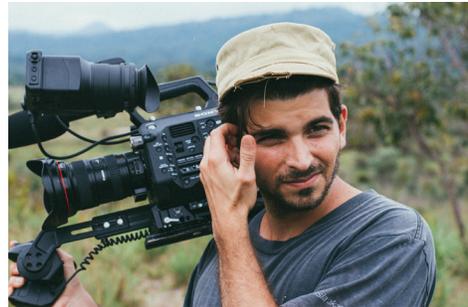
### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country where that film comes from. Find two or three articles on Venezuela's crisis and write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the country. Please use reliable sources.

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### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

I remember discovering the vast gardens of great-grandma's house with José and my cousins; the stories of uncle Gonzalo had transformed La Soledad into a surreal place for us, and my encounters with the spirit of my great-grandfather drew me to this place all my life. I hadn't visited the house since I left Venezuela. I was away in North America for a while, but when I learned the house was going to be demolished I decided to return to Caracas. I wanted to make a film about my memories and the present of this dilapidated mansion with those who still live there. My father brought me to the house, and I saw José for the first time in eleven years; he lives in La Soledad with his family. I proposed we make a film together and he agreed.



The question of why my family had ceased the ritual of gathering weekly and on holidays interested me. The answer can be simple: it is common that the family nucleus breaks up after the senior family figure dies. But haven't the challenges, imposed on us by our broken country, impacted our relationships as well? Fascinated by what was left behind in La Soledad, I had a desire to conduct a kind of familial archaeological investigation.

I find our vestiges coexisting with the belongings of a new family—cement barbells conquer the antique sewing table, garden fountains have turned into fire pits, and motorcycles obstruct a six-foot painting in the once luxurious family room. The house is more than a metaphor for my family's dispersal, it encapsulates the reality of today's Venezuela, forgotten in time, inhabited by people who have hope but who are not provided with opportunities. Amidst the economic chaos that plagues the country, moral values are also fading. In the film, we see this through José's eyes, when he ventures into a hostile Caracas that provides no solutions to his real-life quest for a better future.

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### INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key characters in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format.

Read this official synopsis for *La Soledad*:

Capturing the life of real people amidst the Venezuelan crisis, *La Soledad* is the story of José, a young father who discovers that the dilapidated mansion he occupies will soon be demolished. Desperate to save his family from homelessness, José begins a search for a cursed treasure that has long said to be buried in the house.

- From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-economic and political background to the film.
- How does the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Can you make any assumptions on the film just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)?



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## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- Keeping in mind wardrobe, dialogue, and behaviors, how are the characters introduced to us at the start of the film?
- There are several close up and medium shots that focus on José's ("Negro") expressions throughout the film. What emotions can you detect from these shots? Are they different from those emotions displayed by other characters?
- The camera gives the audience a very detailed look at the mise-en-scène<sup>1</sup>, allowing the house, named "La Soledad," to become a character with a distinct personality. What do you think the house represents? How has the house changed over the years?
- The sound in this film also transforms into a character, intertwining the sounds of the environment, the voices of the country, and the diegetic and non-diegetic<sup>2</sup> music in order to create a national soundtrack. In the scene where José sees the 'Old-man spirit' for the first time, the director makes use of non-diegetic sound (42:59-44:24). What kind of emotion does this use of sound trigger for the audience? Connect this triggered emotion to the narrative, paying close attention to the emotions portrayed by the characters
- The filmmaker blurs the line between fiction and documentary - the actors star as themselves in a mansion where they really live; "La Soledad" is a real place. Why didn't the filmmaker just make a documentary? What is the purpose of making a fiction film of real people, real events?
- There is little dialogue in *La Soledad*. Instead, the characters use facial expressions and silent looks to communicate emotion. Why do you think the filmmaker decides to use this restrained, quiet style for the movie? How does it reflect the themes or the narrative of the film?



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<sup>1</sup> "Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound."

"Term Index." *The Columbia Film Language Glossary*. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

<sup>3</sup> "Diegetic music is 'produced within the implied world of the film'...The sound of a mother's voice as she is shown singing to her infant is clearly diegetic, and the faint sounds of a music box might be assumed to be coming from inside the nursery, even if the source is not shown on screen. In contrast, non-diegetic music refers to music that accompanies a scene but is external to the fictional world, such as dissonant orchestral chords sounding as a figure appears in a deserted alley or throbbing music punctuating a car chase."

Tan, S.-L., Spackman, M., & Wakefield, E. (2017). The effects of diegetic and nondiegetic music on viewers' interpretations of a film scene. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 34(5), 605-623.

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## NARRATIVE

- What is the significance of the home movie clip in the first scene (00:20-1:56)? Who do you believe is narrating?
- What assumptions can you make about the film from the opening minutes? What do you think the film is about? Do these assumptions evolve or stay the same as the film continues?
- How was José introduced to the audience in his debut scene (02:25-04:28)? Explain how he develops throughout the narrative.
- The film focuses on the different generations' perspectives on the difficult situation they face. What are the differences and similarities between the perspectives and attitudes among the grandmother (Rosina), José, the mother (Marley), and the daughter (Adrializ)?
- Explain the relationship between José and Jorge. How does it change? What complicates the relationship?

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## NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- Why do you think the director included scenes of Marley's place of work? What can you conclude just by looking at the mise-en-scène of the house where Marley works?
- Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene?
- What do you think happens to the family after watching the final scene (1:18:46-1:23:11)? Do you think they stayed, without access to shelter, medicine, or even adequate food, or do you think they moved to Colombia or Ecuador for work? Why does the filmmaker leave this question unanswered?
- What do you think the beach and the flashback clip symbolize in the final scene (1:18:47-1:23:45)? Keep in mind Adrializ's obsession with the beach that is mentioned throughout the narrative.
- What is the symbolism behind José floating in the water alone (1:22:08-1:23:12)?
- Think about your responses to the characters. Did you like them? Is there one character in particular that you identify with? Why?

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## THEMES

- The Guardian notes that *La Soledad* was filmed "in the crumbling mansion in Caracas owned by [Jorge Thielen] Armand's own family...starring the struggling residents who live there..."<sup>3</sup> Explain how the personal becomes political in this narrative.
- The major theme of this film is crisis. How does the first scene (00:20-1:56) introduce the film's theme of crisis? Select other scene(s) that demonstrate these political, economic, and social crises in Venezuela.
- This family is dealing with a crisis of their own; yet, it is connected to the political, economic, and social crises that are ongoing in Venezuela. Connect the theme of familial crisis in the film to the Venezuelan crisis.
- How does this film comment on past and present race relations in Venezuela? How does this speak to racial politics in Latin America in general? Compare and contrast the race relations in Latin America to that within the United States.
- Think about which characters in the film are white, and think about José's nickname, "negro". What does this suggest about race in Venezuela?
- What are the images and associations that come to mind when you hear the word family? What do you think the most important part of being a family is? Do you see your idea of family represented in this film? How does the Latin American concept of family differ to that of the United States?
- Explain the significance of the song "The Little Mammoth," connecting it to the political context (23:55-24:25).
- What role does nostalgia play in this film and how does it connect to Venezuela's collective memory of Chavez? Think about the narrative techniques, such as the clip of the home movie and the photographs, and connect this to Venezuela's political history.
- Explain the narrative in connection to the rise and (ongoing) fall of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela.
- Can you assess the filmmaker's political view on Venezuela's past and present? Analyze his intentions using key scenes throughout the film.
- Does the last scene (1:18:46-1:23:11) give the audience a concluding message regarding the film's theme(s)? Why or why not?
- If you were a character in this story, would you stay in Venezuela with your family who could not leave, or would you take the risk to seek economic opportunities in neighboring countries? Explain why, using characters in *La Soledad* as a reference.



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<sup>3</sup> Felperin, L. (2017, August 17). *La Soledad* review a flower of a film amid the ruins of Caracas. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/aug/17/la-soledad-review-caracas-jorge-thielen-armand>