

## BIOGRAPHY

Patricia Plattner, born in Geneva (Switzerland) in 1953, studied art history at the University of Geneva before obtaining a degree in mixed media at Geneva's Fine Arts College (ESAV) in 1975. Working in the visual arts from 1975 to 1983, she put on exhibitions and performances in Switzerland and abroad. In 1979, after travelling around the world for a year thanks to a fine-arts grant from the federal government, she spent several months in Vancouver as an artist-in-residence at the "Western Front" artists' centre. The same year, she and a couple of artist friends founded "Les Studios Lolos" in Carouge (Geneva), focusing on the graphic arts and photography. In 1982, she published an artist's book entitled "L'âme du cochon" (The Pig's Soul – Publ. Benteli). Since founding "Light Night Production S.A." in 1985, Patricia Plattner has devoted herself to filmmaking, and to producing and co-producing numerous films. From 1989 to 1993, she sat on the Suissimage Cultural Commission. In 1993, she conceived the book "Le hibou et la baleine" (The Owl and the Whale – Publ. Zoé) in collaboration with Nicolas Bouvier, as a follow-up to the film of the same name. That year she also received the UBS Jubilee Foundation Award. From 1994 to 2000, she sat on Pro Helvetia's Board of Trustees and the Advisory Committee of the Federal Office of Culture in Berne. Winner of the UBS Award (Solothurn Film Festival) in 2000, Patricia Plattner is currently writing the screenplay for her next film.

## LIGHT NIGHT PRODUCTION SA

Light Night Production SA is a company producing films for cinema and television. Since its foundation in 1985, Light Night has produced or coproduced numerous fiction and documentary films. Since 1993, the director Christophe Marzal works regularly with Patricia Plattner in Light Night Production SA. Light Night Edition also publishes a selection of DVD and video tapes of the films produced. ([www.lightnight.ch](http://www.lightnight.ch)).

# PATRICIA PLATTNER



## A preference for light

One day, or was it a night, in her early thirties, Patricia Plattner decided to make movies. She started up a production company called *Light Night*, a symbol of her artistic vision of *light*: meaning both *bright* and *subtle*. There are no nightmares in the work of this filmmaker. Misfortune for her is simply part of life, like joy and friendship. She says she loves day as well as night. Let's add that she expresses her own preference for *gentle lightness*. From the start, Patricia Plattner has felt that she is not one to teach

people lessons or make examples; she is not out to impress or intimidate. The light she infuses into her fictional and documentary work is intended to guide, tenderly and delicately. She prefers stories with a happy end – should they really need an ending at all. She prefers to document what is encouraging rather than depressing. She believes that an hour and a half of film is more useful if it brightens rather than darkens the audience's mood. "I have no need to be *against*. I need to be *for*." *Light Night*, both bright and subtle.

## A rainbow of desires

Her aesthetic position grew up with her. As a teenager – she was born on the 22nd of January 1953 – Patricia Plattner saw herself as a theatre director or an architect. Making movies, in the days of Antonioni, was merely a dream. A girl like her would tremble at the magic of *The Red Desert* or *Profession: Reporter*, yet that she would ever be behind the camera...? In Switzerland there was not even a film school. The Tanner and Goretta from the *Group of 5* had gone to London to study. She would have had to leave... No doubt the time had not yet come for the passionate traveller she was to become. As a filmmaker, Patricia Plattner, who describes herself as a "firmly rooted nomad", was also committed to travelling and discovering other worlds.

At first, Patricia dedicated herself to art history and painting at Geneva Fine Arts School. Painting, then, was already more than painting: photography, performances, installations, conceptual art and video were all beginning to find their way. A year of travelling around the world, a grant in Vancouver, Canada, and there she was, holding a video camera, learning about moving images in the context of contemporary art.

Then, for a few years, in Carouge, Geneva, where she still lives, she cut and stuck texts and photographs, devoting herself to graphic design with the studios she had launched in 1979 with artist friends (*Les Studios Lolos*).

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 2005 **Carnets de valse: Vienne-Paris-Lima** (documentary)
- 2004 **Les dieux ne meurent jamais** (film for tv)
- 2002 **Les petites couleurs** (fiction)
- 1999 **Maestro, Maestro! Herbert von Karajan** (film for tv)
- 1998 **Made in India** (documentary)
- 1997 **Une histoire qui enjambe les alpes** (film for tv)
- 1996 **Hôtel Abyssinie** (documentary)
- 1994 **Le livre de cristal** (fiction)
- 1993 **Le hibou et la baleine, Nicolas Bouvier** (documentary)
- 1991 **Le sismographe, la lune et le léopard, David Streiff, 10 ans de Locarno (1981-1991)** (film for tv)
- 1990 **Des tableaux qui bougent, Georges Schwizgebel** (film for tv)
- 1989 **Piano Panier ou la recherche de l'équateur** (fiction)
- 1986 **La dame de pique** (short film)

## BOOK

- 1982 **L'âme du cochon – Etat des lieux** (éd. Benteli)

## PATRICIA PLATTNER

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**Rhymes, pastels and sketches**

Her first experience of cinema was soon to come. A friend of hers was shooting a film and she was taken on as *Jill of all trades*: scenery, location and office work, production and catering. She got a glimpse of what filmmaking is about: professionalism, learning to cope, human and financial management and, above all, if things go well, art too. Discovering that she had the makings of a director, she decided to make her own film. This was **The Queen of Spades** (1986), a short black-and-white film, a wink to Satyajit Ray's *Music Room*, which brought her into the profession. "A promising sample of her qualities as a filmmaker", commented one Geneva newspaper on seeing these twenty minutes about the life of a Russian prince exiled on the banks of lake Léman, whose death turned the life of an unemployed man upside down. The wheel is turning.

Three years passed until her first full-length film. An unexpected meeting with French-Portuguese producer Paulo Branco, a symbolic financial contribution to *The Cannibals* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1988) and a collaboration was settled. Co-productions followed

such as *Abraham's Valley* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1993), *Modern Life* (Laurence Ferreira Barbosa, 2000) or *That Day* (Raul Ruiz, 2003). And here she comes with **Piano Panier or In Search of the Equator** (1989): low budget, shot in Portugal, professional actors, a subtle, connivent cameraman, Matthias Kaelin, who was to remain her loyal accomplice; a talented editor, Loredana Cristelli and an emerging style: light, leisurely scenes in the lives of two young girls faced with love and uncertainty – with no moral ending. Life as it is, simple ordinary life, between bursts of emotion. Light, *light*, no burden!

"A journey needs no symbols. It does not take long to prove that it is enough in itself. You believe that you are making a journey, but soon it is the journey that is making – or unmaking – you."

Nicolas Bouvier

**Light and music from real life**

Patricia Plattner is not trying to seduce or bamboozle anyone: presence and action are what matters. This is the fantastic challenge on which she has founded her work. She has grasped the possibilities offered by cinema – narrative, image, sound, attentive listening, actors' direction, editing – to stimulate whatever exists or whatever is created by an artist. Whether in documentary or fiction, her position is that of the *author* of a reality, both the one she encounters and the one she invents. As an author with a light touch, she won't force her point.

Amongst all the documentaries she has made, three masterful portraits illustrate her skills. With Nicolas Bouvier, (**The Owl and the Whale**, 1993), she remains at a distance behind the poet, a fragile man whom she allows to unveil himself through a long conversation, respecting his silences. They were close. From him, through her desire for restraint, she received this overwhelming story of a writer's torment as he seeks words to tell his truth.

## AWARDS

- 2002 Les petites couleurs**  
Nomination Swiss Film Prize  
2002 (best fiction film)
- 1999 Made in India** International Prize of the Independants, Médias Nord-Sud Film Festival, 1999; Quality Award (Swiss Federal Office of Culture, Bern), 1999
- 1996 Hôtel Abyssinie** Quality Award (Swiss Federal Office of Culture, Bern), 1996
- 1994 Le livre de cristal** Jury Award, Minsk, Bielorussia; International competition (Locarno International Film Festival, 1994)
- 1993 Le hibou et la baleine, Nicolas Bouvier** Quality Award (Swiss Federal Office of Culture, Bern), 1993; Prize from the Swiss Society of Authors (SSA), 1993; Quality Award (Canton of Geneva, Public Instruction Department), 1993
- 1989 Piano Panier ou la recherche de l'équateur** Prize Max Ophüls (award for the best young actress Anne Laure Luisoni), Saarbrücken 1989, Germany; Public Prize, Saarbrücken Film Festival 1989, Germany; Quality Award (Swiss, Federal Office of Culture, Bern), 1989; International competition (Locarno International Film Festival, 1989)
- 1986 La dame de pique** Study Award (Swiss Federal Office of Culture, Bern)

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With Herbert von Karajan, (**Maestro, Maestro**, 1999), she faces the opposite challenge: to set aside the noise that surrounds the director, to ignore his riotous celebrity and do justice to the power of the musician, the toil and vision of a man whose gift had been veiled by his reputation of wealth and fulfilment. He had died ten years before, so that archives and witnesses alone spoke for him. Some spoke well of him, and others did not. There were choices to be made. "I am here for the better", says Patricia Plattner. Light takes precedence over darkness.

With **Made in India** (1998), the filmmaker has chosen to shine her light on the Untouchables of India who have formed themselves into a trade union. This certainly was a political and moral choice, but it was also a characteristic one: Nicolas Bouvier was able to lighten his night through his words and images. So why should these women from India not lighten their own darkness by joining forces to demand dignity and fair treatment? It was a different situation, and a different method, but the same need to emerge from a tunnel.

"Inconsolable, but joyful", says Patricia, who always lives in hope, wherever her cinematographic journeys around the planet take her.

**Red yellow and blue**

Fiction, like documentary, is all about tunes. The tune of the Swiss cinema during the sixties and seventies, as part of a political culture of opposition, was gradually altered during the following decades. While documentaries, including those by Patricia Plattner, continue in a Swiss tradition of expertise, relevance and originality, fictional films are isolated and disconnected. Each filmmaker has his own inspiration and takes his own chances.

When she presented her second fictional film, **Crystal Book**, to compete at the Locarno Festival in 1994, Patricia Plattner faced some uncompromising criticism. She was accused of being ambitious. This was an international film, shot in Sri Lanka, with a script that was as a little Swiss as it could possibly be. So it was judged according to the criteria of international cinema: glamour, surprise effects and effectiveness. Jean-François Balmer and Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi were not yet the celebrated actors they are today. It was a commercial failure. Not all the audiences got her point. Weaknesses were emphasised. There was no understanding of this war between Tamils and Sinhalese threaded in the story nor of the Buddha's secret message recorded on transparent crystal plates. Nevertheless, the photography is splendid, the music inspired, and the commitment of her whole European and local crew overwhelming! Is the audience more demanding when it comes to fiction?

Joëlle Kuntz writes editorials for the French language Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* and has written several works including *Terminus, Réflexions sur les frontières d'un monde globalisé* (Hachette-Littérature, 2004), *L'histoire suisse en un clin d'œil* (Zoé /Le Temps, 2006).

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Patricia Plattner went back to work, creating a documentary in Ethiopia and Eritrea, drawing from the shadows some of those old men, forgotten by history, washed up by the Italian colonial war (**Hotel Abyssinia**, 1996). This unexpected, glowing experience was an encouragement. More documentaries followed.

2002 was a turning-point: with her new fiction **A Little Colour**, she brought a beautiful simplicity to the theme of solidarity between two women (played by Anouk Grinberg and Bernadette Lafont). Although the subject of the film was quite profound, Patricia Plattner gave it a rather comical treatment, introducing a film within the film, *The Ranch of Love*, a soap opera: she alone believed in it at the time the script was written, joined by Jacques Robellaz, her constant musical companion. This time her film found an audience. It has something Swiss about it, a rhythm, a sense of workmanship, a firm root in the landscape (although it is a *no man's land!*). It was a successful film. With large audiences in Switzerland, France, Germany and even Japan, this film found its place in the box office and the festivals. It even made money. The challenge was met.

### A full rainbow

After the tunnel of uncertainty, what remains is to continue, like her heroine, the hairdresser in **A Little Colour**. For ever "inconsolable but joyful", Patricia Plattner repeats. "Cinema is the most beautiful job in the world. Each film is an adventure, a journey."

In her last documentary, **Waltz Diaries: Vienna-Paris-Lima** (2005), Patricia Plattner sheds light on the charm and turbulence of this overly sparkling music. Behind the waltz, in Vienna and in Paris, hearts meet or break. Behind the waltz, in Lima, there are stories of exile, cross-cultural mix and rebirth. The wheel keeps on turning.

She is encouraged by the success of Swiss directors. "If anyone can reach an audience of a hundred thousand in this country, things may get moving again". With a generous, sharing approach and a love of teamwork, she supports (mainly through her efforts as a producer) the work of the technicians and directors that surround her, such as Christophe Marzal, who works with her at *Light Night*.

On a Swiss budget, however, it is difficult to make headway in the international landscape. She ends up complaining about this, gently, by the way. Though accepting to be a filmmaker in today's Switzerland, she does not isolate herself but builds networks, crosses borders if necessary and moves forward. Patricia Plattner's night is never completely dark, for the day will be bright, for

SURE. Joëlle Kuntz