

**Los Angeles Filmforum presents**  
**Juan Sebastián Bollaín: A Most Wanted Idea of Utopia**  
**Saturday June 4 – Sunday June 19, 2022**  
**Online**

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest-running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2021 is our 46th year. [www.lafilmforum.org](http://www.lafilmforum.org)

**Two programs of works never seen in the US!**

**Online June 4-19**

**Live Conversation with guest curator Elena Duque on Sunday June 12, 1 pm Pacific Time**

**Register in advance for the conversation on June 12, free:**

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**After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.**

**U.S. premieres!**

Curated by Elena Duque

**JUAN SEBASTIÁN BOLLAÍN. A MOST WANTED IDEA OF UTOPIA**  
**By Elena Duque**

Self-taught filmmaker and architect, **Juan Sebastián Bollaín** has been making films since the 1960s, mixing his two study disciplines along the years in a series of films that reinvent the urbanism of the most traditional and religious city in Spain: Sevilla, Andalusia, the heart of the Spanish clichés, Holy Week and flamenco. At the end of the 1970s, using super 8 and various tricks and montage strategies, he made a series of imaginative visions of the city, delirious utopias full of humor, surrealist and poignant images, and lucid ideas that shake the core of the conceptions about the city. A cult figure of Spanish Cinema whose work has been recently digitized and restored by the Andalusian Cinematheque, a most wanted idea of utopia in these dystopian and strange times.

Born in Madrid in 1945 and *transplanted* to Seville when he was 9 years old, Bollaín took his first steps as a self-taught filmmaker at the age of 14, when he was given an 8mm camera. As he himself recalls, he started “inventing cinema” in the very act of filming, which led him to create his own visual language and procedures. Since then, cinema has been a big part of his life, from his psychoanalytical fiction films and the documentaries he made in his youth to the fiction features he made for television. At the same time, he developed a career as an architect and urban planner. Bollaín is a prolific author, whose work we wish to honor here with a selection of his films. We have curated a program featuring a series of films, mostly made in the ‘70s, and which represent a milestone in the history of Spanish cinema. In them, Bollaín’s eagerness to experiment comes together with his unparalleled creative vision.

JUAN SEBASTIÁN BOLLAÍN. A MOST WANTED IDEA OF UTOPIA revolves around his films related to the city, mostly Sevilla, but there’s also a film devoted to Cádiz, a coastal

city roughly 100 miles from Sevilla, located in an area that is the summer destination from a lot of Sevillians because of its beaches. To give some context to Bollaín's films, we have to mention a few things about the circumstances around them. Most of the films we are showing were made around 1978 and 1979, during the period that we call Spanish Transition to Democracy. The dictator Francisco Franco died in 1975, and the first democratic election was celebrated in 1977. 1978 marks the year in which the Constitution (the same which is in force nowadays) was approved. It was a time of change, and of dreaming about the future. Nevertheless, and as much as the Spanish Transition has been praised for being moderate and exemplary for reconciling both sides, francoists and "reds", we can not forget that it was somehow like "sweeping under the carpet" all the fascist crimes during dictatorship and all the abuses committed towards the Republican side (secular and in favor of culture) during the war. The Transition was a tense forgiveness that has brought a lot of issues to Spain identity and political climate, issues that are still alive today. This moment is brilliantly told through people's voice in the diptych of films *Después de...* (1983), by Cecilia and José Juan Bartolomé. On the other hand, there is Sevilla, and Andalusia. Andalusia has been historically a landowner region, and by the 20th century it was very impoverished because of the lack of industry. At the same time, and despite its cultural heritage being strong and impressive, Andalusia has been underestimated by the rest of the country as poor, ignorant and folkloric. By the time these films were made, the Andalusian Autonomy was about to be born, recognizing the "historical nationality" of the land, and reinforcing its identitarian sense. Sevilla, by then, was also an interesting place. On one hand, we have to consider that the weight of tradition and the immobility are somehow Sevillian traits. The overwhelming cultural heritage, religion and traditions like the Holy Week are engraved in Sevillian people: this makes Bollaín's films even more transgressive and utopic, considering how hard it is to change even the slightest thing in Sevilla. On the other hand, at the end of the 70s there was a strong contracultural movement there, especially in fields such as music. In Sevilla was born the flamenco's renovation (with artists like Lole y Manuel and the producer Ricardo Pachón, who produced the mythic Camaron's album *La leyenda del tiempo*) and the Andalusian rock (with bands like Smash, Veneno and Triana). This was the context in which the films we are going to watch were born, in which there were many reasons to rethink the status quo but still some fear inherited by the dictatorship. Bollaín's cinema, of course, was outside of the commercial circuits. Its underground, unpretentious and free character matched the times, with a somewhat punk spirit that make them rare and significant in Spanish film history. Because of what they narrate, but also because of their formal qualities.

The first program devoted to his films is an invitation to approach Bollaín's famous tetralogy *Soñar con Sevilla* (*Sevilla tuvo que ser*, *Sevilla en tres niveles*, *Sevilla rota*, and *La ciudad es el recuerdo*): four films shot in super 8 that are the result of a research project on cinema related to urban planning that was funded with a scholarship granted to the author by the Spanish foundation Fundación Juan March. This research project also led to a published work, *El cine y el hecho urbano*. *Soñar con Sevilla* offers a compilation of inventive images that portray a utopian Seville through performative actions, creative collages, and special effects. As we said, Seville is a city where tradition plays a major role, and whose urban landscape goes back many centuries. In this light, Bollaín's visions are doubly iconoclastic: his films called for pleasure and citizen participation, and ridiculed the dictations of capitalism and conservative doctrines. Bollaín went back to this approach many years after with *Sevilla 2030* (2003), with incipient digital special effects, and going back to the false news report formal approach that he used in some of the tetralogy's films. This time the film was commissioned by the council's urban

management office. Not surprisingly, , a film that proposed things such as installing public pools in the churches, was ultimately [or: “in the end”] cast into oblivion by the authorities who commissioned it. A film that also invited Sevillians to participate in the decisions made in their city, and that wanted to be a wake up call in the face of Sevillian passiveness.

The second program includes two films that were commissioned by the associations of architects of Cádiz and Seville. The first, *La Alameda '78* is a film that was intended to record the configuration and idiosyncrasy of the eponymous Sevillian neighborhood, which was back then threatened by an aggressive urbanistic plan that –if it would have been successful– would have ended up with the eviction of its inhabitants, leaving the area unrecognizable for good. With a creative editing that departs from the usual sound/image relationship in film, Bollaín presents the accounts of the neighbors, who speak about community and marginality in the area –a place that had been known for hosting flamenco parties in the past, and which had become a red-light district and a home to the lower classes. But *La Alameda '78* goes beyond mere documentation: the film lets us see the process of its very making and successfully integrates allegorical resources in the way it depicts a model of the neighborhood –a model that, at the beginning of the film, is sold to the highest bidder in a flea market (as was expected to happen with the real neighborhood) and is then subjected to adverse conditions that generate striking images. The second film of this program, *C.A. 79. Un enigma del futuro* is also the result of a commission, this time related to an urbanistic expansion in the city of Cádiz (which isn't an easy task –the city is located on an isthmus) that did not happen in the end. The tools that Bollaín chooses for this film are quite different from the strategies put into practice in *La Alameda*. Instead of focusing on the past or the present, he puts together a science fiction film where the discussed matter is approached from the perspective of a fictional future (the year 4000), when a group of archeologists discover what for them are a bunch of enigmatic remains of a mysterious ancient city. This allows Bollaín to delve into contemporary matters in a creative, open-minded way.

Finally, I would like to remark on a couple of things about Bollaín's films. One is their humanistic approach: most of his utopian ideas are hedonistic, in favor of the communitarian spirit and citizen participation but always taking into account individual happiness and fulfillment. There is a sense of joy and pleasure that lives together with the critical spirit: these films tell us “how we live and how we might live”, quoting the title of the text by Bollaín's kindred spirit, William Morris. Another thing I would like to mention again is the films' self consciousness: most of them show us their own making, and the reflexive process of the filmmaker behind them. A humble gesture that matches the questioning spirit that Bollaín keeps up to these days.

**Thanks to:** Juan Sebastián Bollaín, Felipe Bollaín, Andalusian Cinematheque, Junta de Andalucía, Ramón Benítez, Adam Hyman, Kate Brown, Marta Fernández Gómez, Rocío Mesa, and L.A. OLA

Notes by guest curator Elena Duque.

## Screening:

### PROGRAM 1- SEVILLE, THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE

In this first program, we will see four films devoted to imagining a brave new crazy and marvelous city. Sevilla: the best place to live in the world.

#### **TETRALOGY “DREAMING OF SEVILLE”**

##### **Composed by the films:**

**Sevilla tuvo que ser (Juan Sebastián Bollaín, 1979, 10 min.)** Tetralogy “Dreaming of Seville” part 1 U.S. premiere!

**Sevilla en tres niveles (Juan Sebastián Bollaín, 1979, 9 min.)** Tetralogy “Dreaming of Seville” part 2 U.S. premiere!

**Sevilla rota (Juan Sebastián Bollaín, 1979, 12 min.)** Tetralogy “Dreaming of Seville” part 3 U.S. premiere!

**La ciudad en el recuerdo (Juan Sebastián Bollaín, 1979, 14 min.)** Tetralogy “Dreaming of Seville” part 4 U.S. premiere!

This foundational tetralogy shot in super 8 depicts a delirious and amazing Sevilla, in a subversive response to the living conditions in the city at the end of the ‘70s. Using various styles, such as mockumentary, avant garde and surrealist fiction and also more impressionistic visions, a compendium of what the city is and could be. *Sevilla tuvo que ser* is a “found” reportage of the American television telling to the world the progressive vision of Seville citizens: from the broadcast of the porn week in the billboards of the city to the monuments devoted to the “café con leche” (coffee with milk) and to the glass of beer. *Sevilla en tres niveles* is also a fake reportage that depicts the illusory division in the city in three levels: the outsiders and criminals live in peace in the roofs of the city, the workers and capitalism slaves, stressed and fast, live at the street level. In the underground, there is a Seville of the past, with people of ancient times still living there. *Sevilla rota* is a surrealist new wave-like fiction in which marvelous montages take us to a place where you can see the sea at turning a corner, or in which the cars circulate in the sidewalks and people are drinking in the middle of the street. Finally, *La ciudad es el recuerdo* begins as a “symphony of the city”, showing its rhythms and light in poetic time lapses, ending with a tough critique on marketing and capitalism taking over the city.

**SEVILLA 2030 (Juan Sebastián Bollaín, 2003, 28 min.)** U.S. premiere!

Twenty years later, Bollaín comes back from an Ugandan satellite to revise the Utopian Seville he described in his tetralogy. In this new city everything can happen: turning the Seville Cathedral in an olympic pool, or living in a city in which citizens participate actively in making it the funniest and most liveable place in the world.

### PROGRAM 2. THE CITY TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Two films in which Bollaín reflects on urgent urban planning problems using different and imaginative approaches.

**LA ALAMEDA ‘78 (Juan Sebastián Bollaín, 1978, 40 min.)**

La Alameda is an emblematic place of Seville, a popular neighborhood degraded but at the same time full of life. In the face of an urban project that planned to destroy the neighborhood to build new apartments (the menace of gentrification before the term was a common place), Bollaín received a commission from the Architecture School to document La Alameda before the disaster (that finally never happened). In an intelligent montage of sound and image, Bollaín reproduces the life of the neighborhood, its history and idiosyncrasy, mixing it with some bold cinematic movements: depicting the making of the films, and imagining and showing metaphorical performances that talk with eloquence of the problems of the city, and criticizes the predatory politics over the lives of the citizens.

### **C.A.7.9. UN ENIGMA DE FUTURO (Juan Sebastián Bollaín, 1979, 30 min.)**

After the commission related to La Alameda, Bollaín received a new commission to revise yet another urban plan through cinema. This time, he deals with the expansion of Cádiz, an Andalusian coastal city near Seville. The city is located in a very thin isthmus, making it difficult to respond to the growth of the population because of the lack of terrain. This time he uses a sort of science fiction approach: in the year 4.000, when the city of Cádiz has already disappeared a long time ago, a group of archeologists try to reconstruct what happened to the city using “old” documents, trying to grasp what lead the city to the disaster.

### **Elena Duque - Guest Curator**

Spanish-Venezuelan Elena Duque is a filmmaker, programmer, writer and teacher. She currently programmes and directs the editorial department of (S8) Mostra de Cinema Periférico in A Coruña and she is an associate programmer at the Seville European Film Festival. She is a professor at the Camilo José Cela University in Madrid and she teaches workshops and gives lectures in different institutions and master degrees. She has also made several animated and experimental short films.

## Filmoteca de Andalucía



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