



LIGHT MEMORIES

A film by Misha Vallejo Prut
& Mayfe Ortega Haboud



A close-up photograph of a person's back and neck. The skin is a pale, yellowish-tan color. A projection of a landscape is visible on the lower back and shoulders. The landscape features a dark, silhouetted figure standing in a field of tall, dry grass or reeds. The background of the landscape is a hazy, light blue and white, suggesting a distant shore or sky. The overall lighting is soft and even.

Photography, fractured memories and family secrets
converge in a visually poignant exploration that digs
into the effects of absent father figures
throughout a family tree.

Logline



Misha, a photographer, uses his grandfather's camera to recreate a family album, bridging the gap to a man he never met. Exploring absent father figures, he reclaims spaces once denied to his family. Through his lens, secrets and violence surface, yet memory's fluidity offers a chance for redemption.

Synopsis

Director:	Misha Vallejo Prut
Producer:	Mayfe Ortega Haboud
Co-producers:	Ecuador - Caleidoscopio Cine
	Germany - Tiempo Filmproduktion
Associate Producer:	Registro Aurora
Countries of Origin:	Ecuador, Germany
Genre:	Creative Documentary
Format:	16:9, 4K

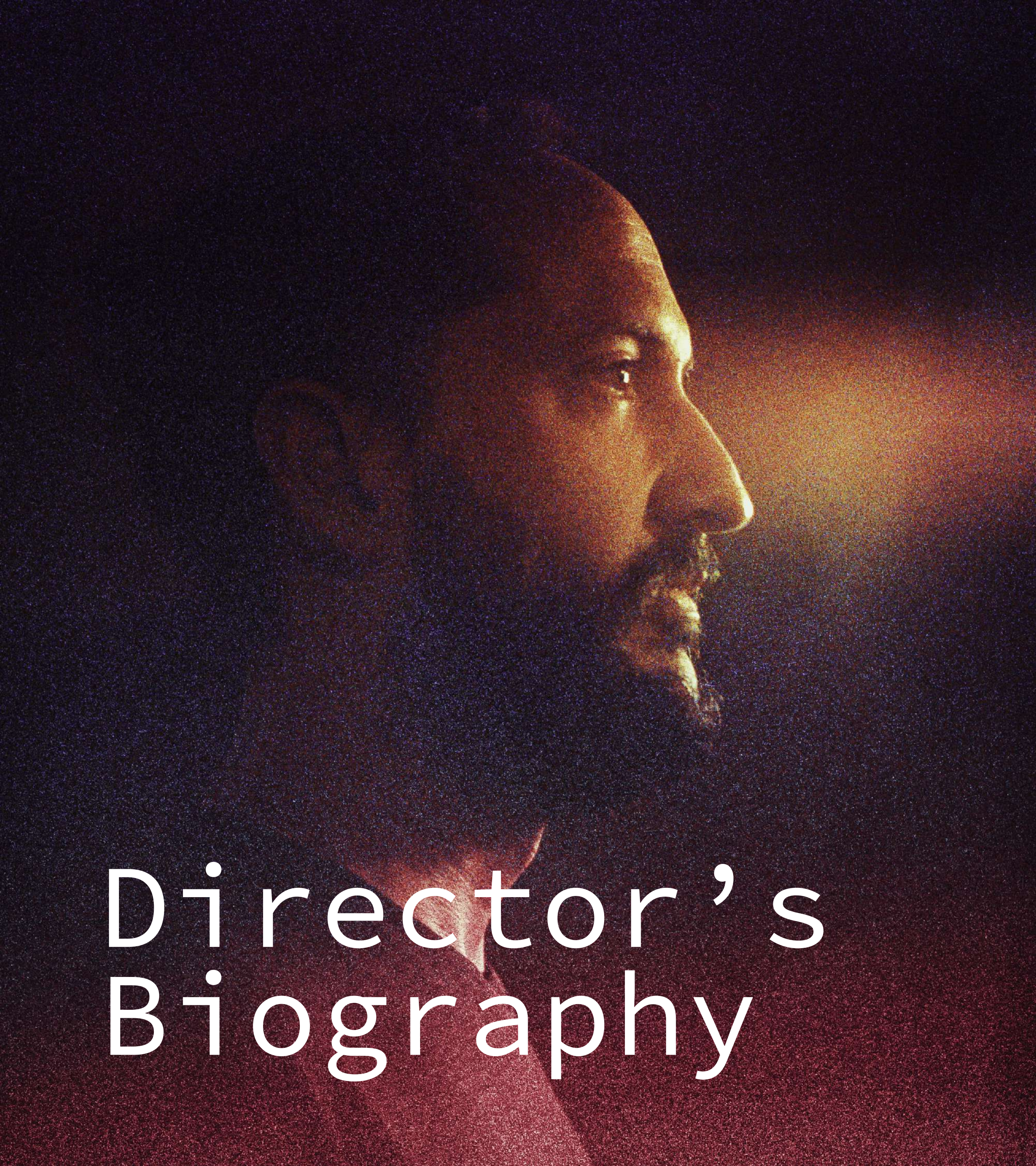
Duration:	80 min
World Premiere:	IDFA 2024
Section:	International Competition
Nomination:	Best First Feature Award IDFA 2024
Languages:	Spanish, Russian
Subtitles:	English
Sales & Distribution:	Taskovski Films Ltd.

Technical Details



Photography
Memory
Alzheimer's Disease
Family Secrets
Intergenerational Trauma
Paternal Absence
Masculinities
Patriarchy
Racism
Social Discrimination

Themes



Director's Biography

Misha Vallejo Prut, Riobamba - Ecuador.

He is an audiovisual artist and storyteller whose work blurs the line between documentary and art. His projects explore glocal issues: themes that appear local but reveal global dimensions through his lens. With an MA in Documentary Photography from the University of the Arts London, Misha is the author of acclaimed photobooks *Al otro lado* (2016), *Siete punto Ocho* (2018), and *Secreto Sarayaku* (2020), each recognized with international awards. His interactive documentary, secretsarayaku.net, has drawn over 20,000 visitors since its release in 2020.

Misha's photography has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, VICE, GEO, Stern and Marie Claire, among others. His exhibitions have traveled globally, with recent shows at the Biennial for Contemporary Photography (Germany, 2022), PHOTO 2022 Festival (Australia, 2022), Rencontres de la Photographie in Arles (France, 2018), and the First Latin American Foto Festival at the Bronx Documentary Center in New York (2018).

Among other honors, he has received the Dom Phillips grant from the Pulitzer Center (2023), the IDFA Bertha Fund (2020), Prince Claus Fund grant for Cultural & Artistic Responses to the Environmental Crisis (2018), the Photo Europe Network Prize (2018), and the National Arts Prize Mariano Aguilera (2015). His debut documentary *Light Memories / Eco de Luz* was selected for the International Competition at IDFA 2024 and nominated for Best First Feature Film. He has participated in film workshops including LABED (Barcelona, 2024), IDFAcademy, and IDFA Project Space (Amsterdam, 2023).

Misha is currently based in Ecuador, where he continues to develop new audiovisual projects.

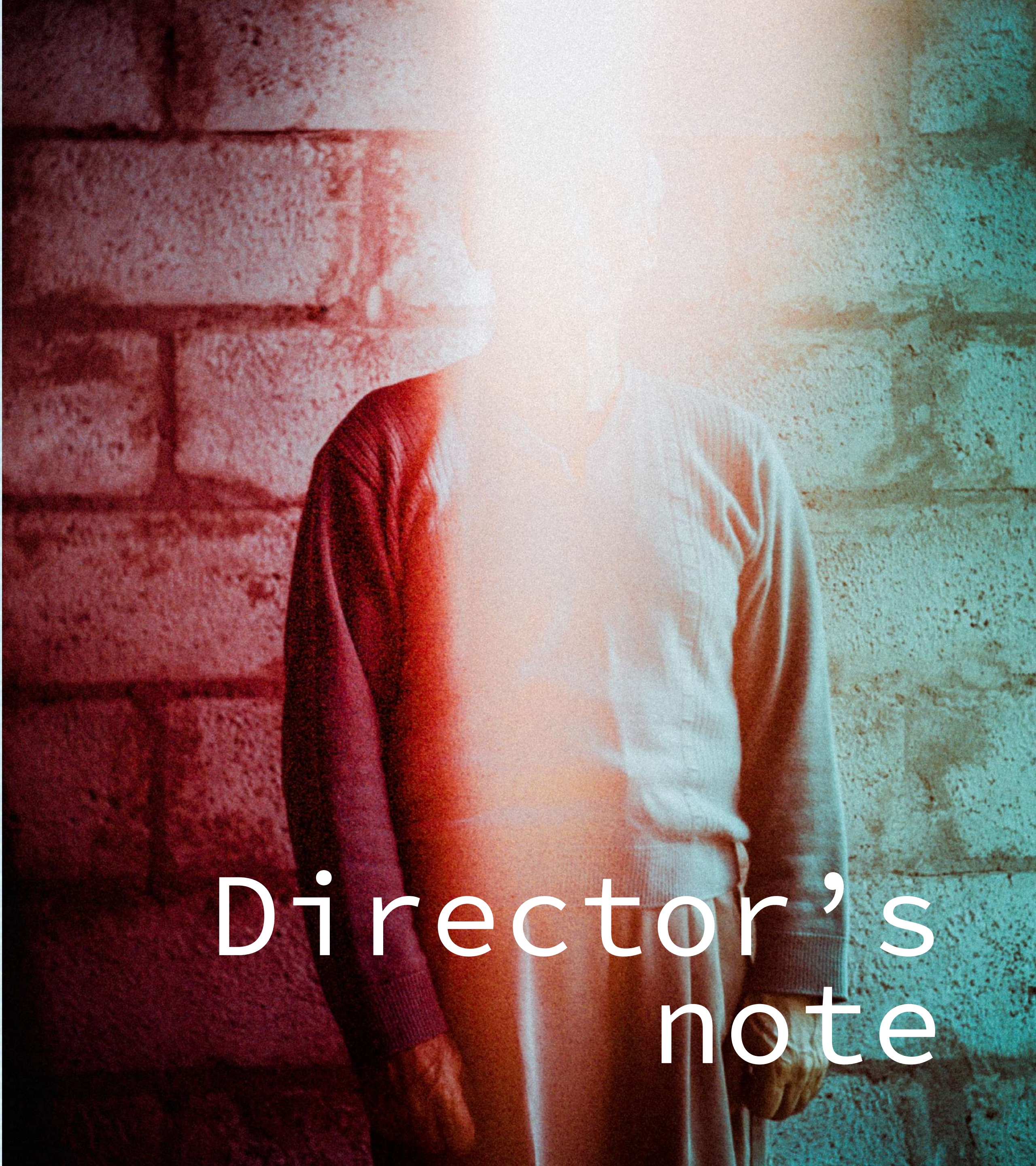
This film began when I discovered a troubling lack of photographs documenting my grandmother's life and my father's childhood, even though my grandfather, like me, was a photographer. This visual void raised questions about the role of photography in constructing family memory and how its absence shapes our understanding of the past.

Though it emerges from a personal story, the film explores universal questions about family structure, paternal absence, and the role of mothers in sustaining these foundations within our society. My grandmother, Mamita Luz, raised her "illegitimate" children alone in a small, conservative Andean village in the 1950s. My grandfather, her neighbor, never acknowledged them due to their Indigenous origins and lower social status. The social and racial discrimination they faced remains prevalent in our society today.

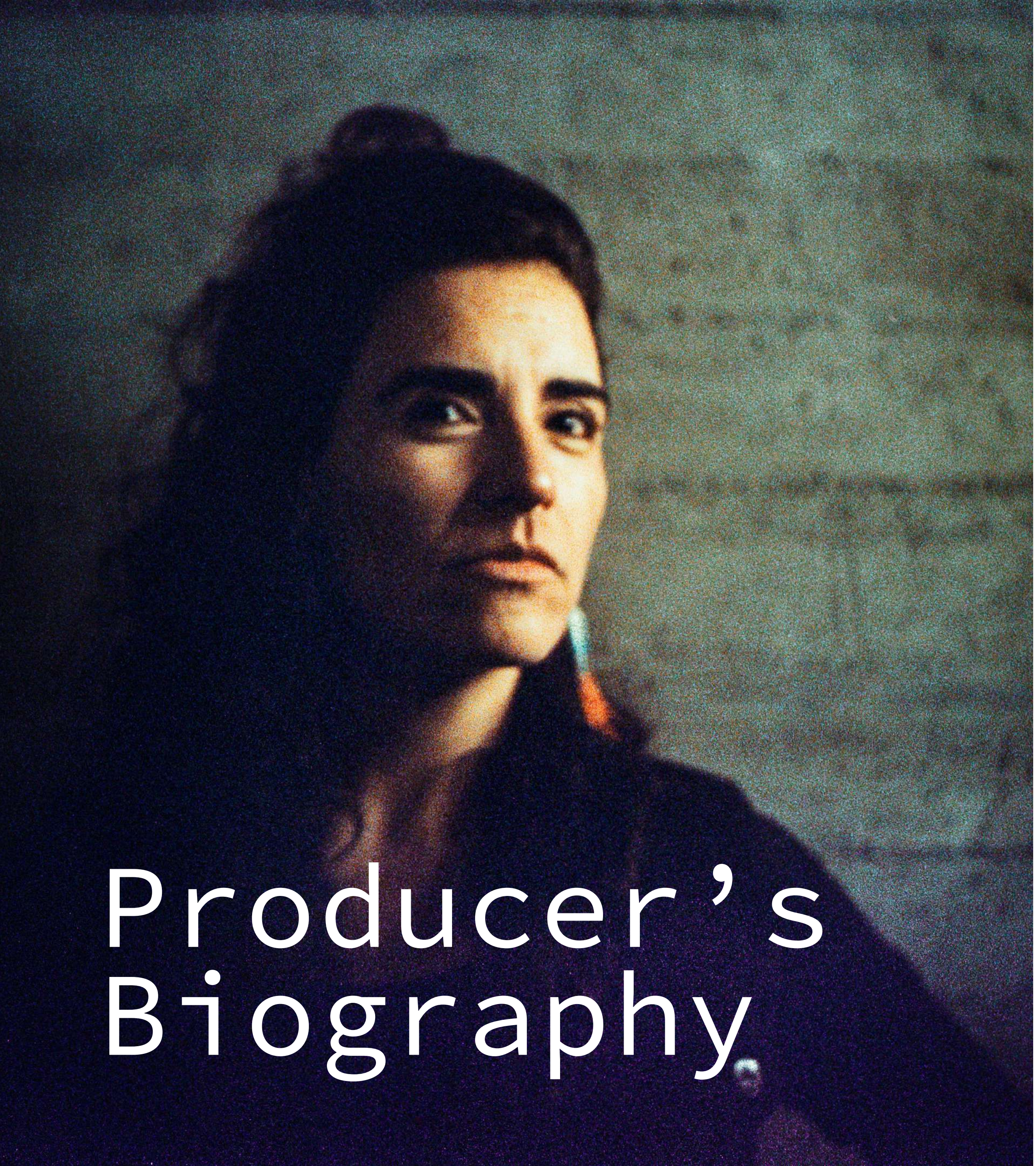
In attempting to recreate the missing images and compel my grandfather's gaze through his camera, I came across my grandmother's memory loss. At first, this was discouraging, as I feared all of the essential memories would fade away with her. However, through simple, shared activities like knitting with Mamita Luz, I began to see that life is an ongoing process of crafting and unraveling stories. This process demands patience, observation, and perseverance. Only through such connections can new images and memories take root in our minds and hearts.

In recent years, I have reflected on what it means to be a father, yet in observing my own family, I feel lost due to the absence of male figures. This absence is largely because those who came before me also grew up in an environment marked by paternal absence.

In essence, this film is built upon three pillars: paternal absence, photography, and memory. Through them, I unravel a personal story that reflects broader, universal social dynamics, resonating across both Latin American and global contexts.

A person wearing a white sweater stands against a brick wall. The image is overlaid with a gradient of red and blue light, creating a moody, artistic atmosphere. The person's face is not visible, and their hands are clasped in front of them.

Director's note



Producer's Biography

Mayfe Ortega Haboud - Quito, Ecuador.

Mayfe's portfolio showcases thought-provoking documentaries, effective educational campaigns, vibrant festivals, and engaging printed publications. Notable projects include *Así dicen mis abuelos* (2008), a community-based, multilingual, and intergenerational cultural initiative; the first Deaf Film Festival for Ecuador (2012); and award-winning documentary *El Secreto de la Luz* (2014). She's also created and directed series for children, such as *Atrapasueños*, *El Equipo Invencible*, and the documentary series *El Diván*, exploring everyday intercultural experiences in a multicultural country as is Ecuador.

Recent projects include *Oficios y Andares* (2022), an interactive documentary on artisanry and gentrification in Quito's historic district, and *Juégate la Calle* (2022-2023), a TV program on road safety. Currently, She has produced the feature-length documentary *Eco de Luz / Light Memories*, premiering at IDFA 2024 in the international competition and honoured to be nominated for best first feature.

As a producer and director with over 20 years of experience in the film and audiovisual industry, and a passion for cinema, anthropology, and education, Mayfe has collaborated with diverse populations, from children to adults, addressing local wisdom, cultural heritage, and disability experiences. She hopes for the projects she engages with to be innovative and socially impactful, to spark conversation, inspire, and transform.

Misha called me out of the blue one day to share a story about a medium-format camera that had once belonged to his father’s father, a complete stranger. With this camera, he photographed his family and exhibited the pictures in his grandfather's house—a powerful symbolic gesture that doubled as an art installation - seeking collective healing I thought.

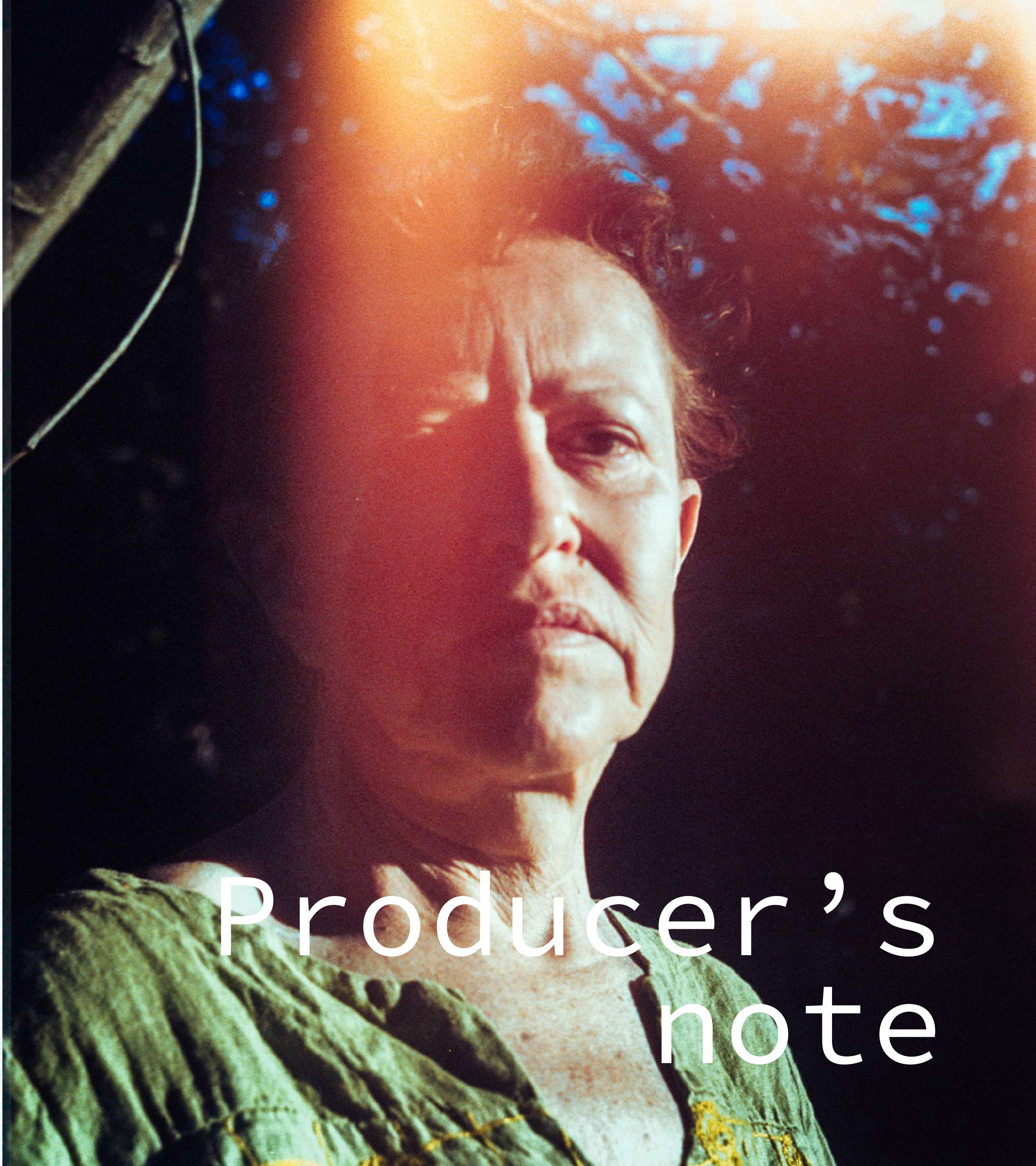
He then showed me some photographs he took where he projected his grandfather's portrait onto his family members, I was struck by the beauty of the visual experiment. What I liked the most is I could reflect upon these images layers, they captured a temporal fold that united two impossibilities. I then asked him if he was really willing to confront his own fears and vulnerabilities. I myself wondered how he, coming from a photography background, would navigate the demands of a moving narrative.

Joining *Light Memories*, I helped secure funding and workshops, but more importantly, I encouraged Misha to delve into memories and pains. Working together, we formulated questions to connect ideas and visuals. Andrés Cornejo's feedback and editing expertise were instrumental in shaping the narrative.

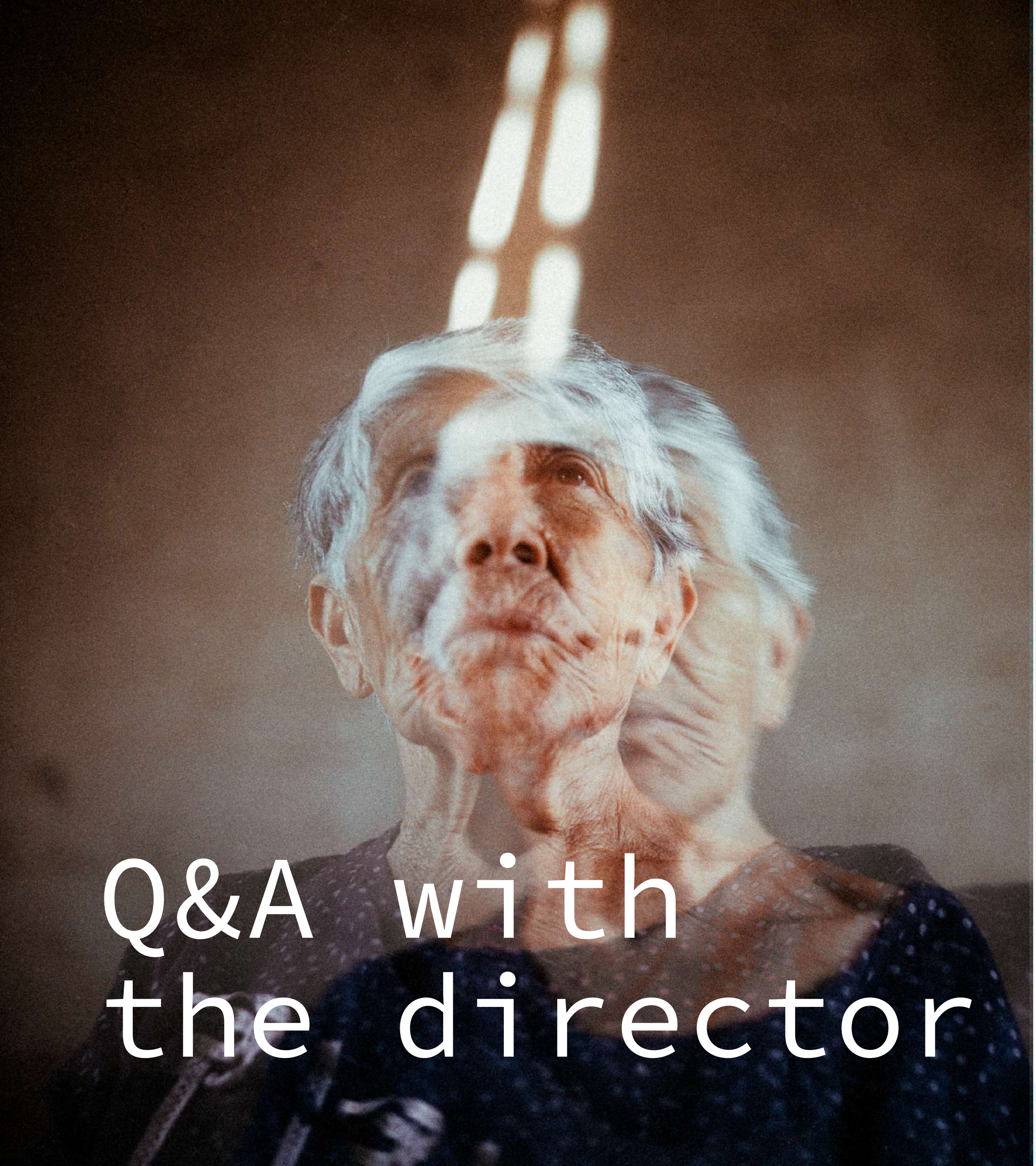
As a producer, for *Light Memories* I've had the joy of exploring the topics that resonate with me as well as doing what I love: translating emotions and perceptions into rich content that sparks multiple readings for diverse audiences. This while keeping the spectator in mind, I consider the time they'll invest and their takeaways. We did tackle profound themes, challenging the toxic effects of patriarchy on masculinity. Rather than glorifying single mothers' achievements, we highlight the loss and generational pain caused by absent father figures. We hope to shed light on normalized social behaviours, violent actions that perpetuate pain and silence, often perpetuated by systemic structures.

Misha's courage in overcoming his fears demonstrates the urgent need for dialogue to break these cultural patterns. This film transcends personal boundaries, opening an intimate space for every family to reflect on their own experiences.

By intertwining paternal absence, racism, and violence with photography, we create a poignant narrative. Characters like Luz remind us that documentary cinema has the power to portray harsh realities, provoke discomfort, and inspire change.



Producer's note



Q&A with the director

Misha, what motivated you to make this film?

My artistic and documentary projects always stem from the concept of 'glocality.' I explore themes that, at first, seem local but reveal their global relevance as I delve deeper into them. This film was no exception: I wanted to tell a local story, which in this case is my own family's story. As I progressed in the research and personal journey, I realized that this theme goes beyond the personal, as it is present in many families around the world. Questioning absent fatherhood seems essential to me for a better understanding of the role we, as men, play within the family, especially in raising children.

You're a photographer, so why did you decide to switch mediums?

In reality, the shift in medium wasn't that drastic. For me, photography has always been a way of telling stories, and I've never felt confined to a single discipline. My approach has always been that each project, through its context and needs, determines the best way to be narrated, whether that's through documentary photography, photojournalism, artistic photography, etc. In this case, due to the complexity and nuances of the story, the transition to film emerged organically. Film became the most fitting vehicle to convey the intricacies, details and depth of what I wanted to tell.

How did you find the themes that the film covers?

It was a long, collaborative process, accompanied by experienced colleagues, friends and family. Initially, the film was headed in a different direction, but over the seven years of work, we discovered the themes as we filmed. Starting the editing process before fully defining what the film was about was also essential. In that phase, along with Andrés Cornejo and Mayfe Ortega, we worked on the narrative structure, which helped me see where it needed to go, what was missing, and which aspects required more depth. I think the key ingredients in uncovering the themes were, without a doubt, the time invested and the team I was fortunate to work with.

At what point did you understand that it wasn't a film about your grandfather but about your search for your own father?

I think that idea was present from the beginning, but I resisted accepting it because it was painful and I didn't feel I had the courage to face it. However, the support of my team during the writing, filming and editing process was fundamental. Through our conversations, the "elephant in the room" became increasingly evident. In the end, I understood that I couldn't talk about paternal absence without confronting my own story.

What were the most difficult moments for you while making this film?

The transition from photography to film was a significant challenge because, while a photograph captures a moment, cinema becomes a matter of time: you have to hold the image, frame it well and know when to press 'record', but most importantly, when to stop. My initial tests were a total disaster; everything was moving and the image would cut out at the most crucial moments. Everything went wrong! And when you add audio issues and interviews to the mix, the situation became even more complicated.

Additionally, filmmaking is a collective adventure that requires a team, and at first, I resisted allowing others to delve into the intimacy of my family, so I tried to do everything alone. Unsurprisingly, the results were not the best. I remember an interview with my mom where, absorbed in the conversation, the camera's battery died without me noticing because I wasn't looking at the viewfinder. Fortunately, the audio recorder kept working, but I lost the spark in her eyes while she answered my questions.

In terms of content, the most difficult part was confronting the absence of my own father, especially with a camera involved. That was one of the last scenes I managed to film because I always found an excuse to postpone it.

How was the editing process?

Working on the editing of this film was a real challenge. Along with the editor Andrés Cornejo and creative producer Mayfe Ortega, we did extensive work on structuring the story on paper before we started editing. However, it was a process of a lot of trial and error: some things that seemed to work well on paper did not translate well in the edit, while others that we didn't expect to work turned out to be very effective once put together visually.

One aspect that I think worked really well was starting the editing process while we still had scenes left to film. This allowed us to refine the story and understand what was necessary to tell it better. Honestly, the editing was one of the most difficult processes of this entire journey and required a lot of time, effort, nerves, joys, and sorrows.

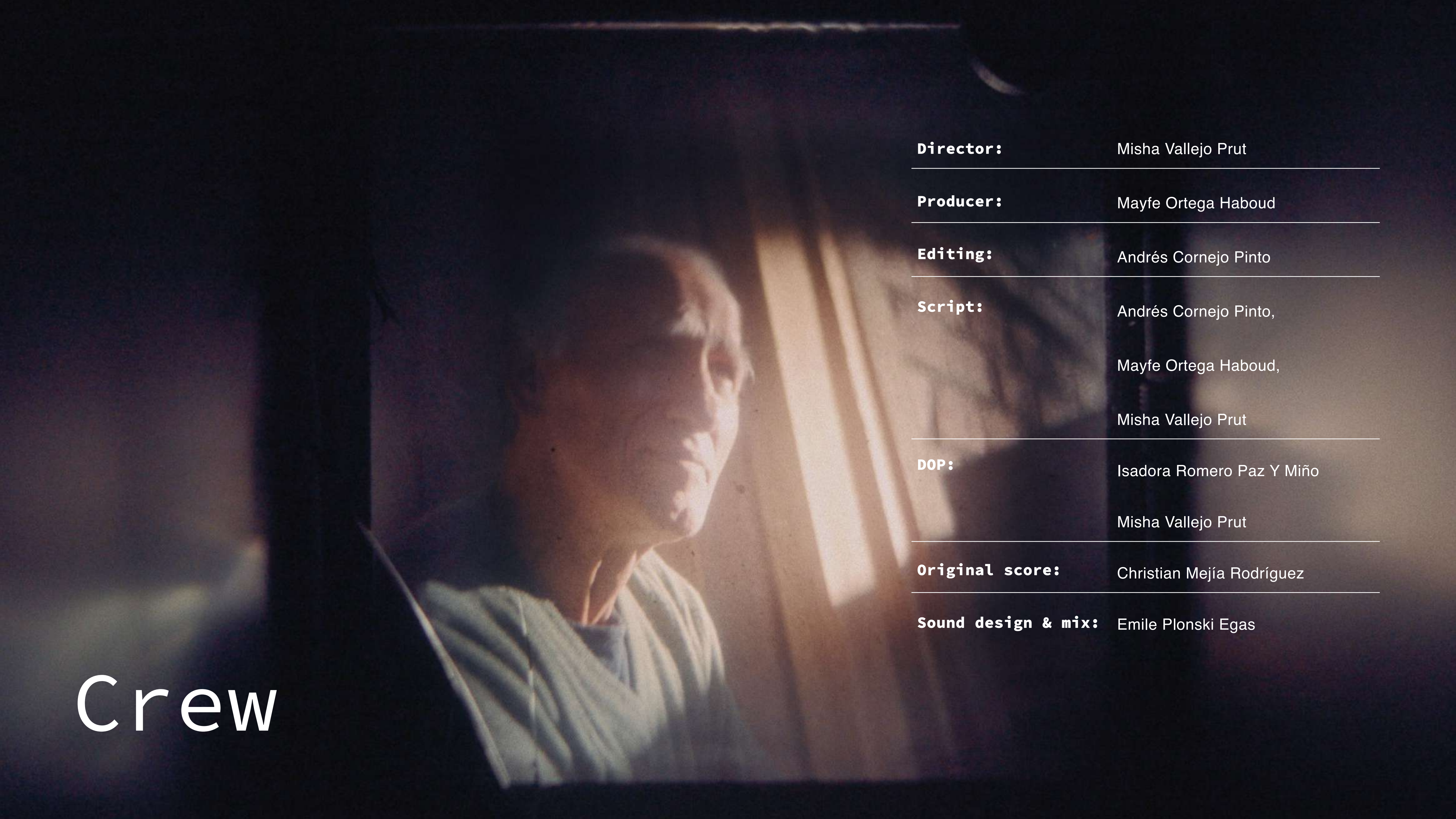
How was the music creation process?

We began working on the music during the editing phase, incorporating references that evoked the feelings we wanted to convey throughout the film. Once that stage was complete, we collaborated with Ecuadorian musician Christian Mejía. Together, we decided on the different musical phrases to include; for example, we wanted Jorge's sounds to have a somewhat rough texture, while Luz would be accompanied by a cello that started harmoniously but became more dissonant as her memory loss progressed. We also sought a melody that represented the Chimborazo volcano.

Additionally, it was crucial to understand that the music couldn't be melodic throughout the entire film. Instead, it needed to be more abstract, evoking feelings and sensations without being hummable. An important decision was to incorporate diegetic music from Inna's piano, which marks her presence in the first part of the film. Although her visual appearances are sporadic, her music constantly accompanies Misha's quest for information.

Would you make another film?

Yes, I would definitely do it if that's what the next project demands.

A man in a blue shirt is shown in profile, looking out a window. Warm, golden light from the window illuminates his face and the interior of the room, creating a soft, contemplative atmosphere. The background is dark, making the light from the window the primary source of illumination.

Crew

Director: Misha Vallejo Prut

Producer: Mayfe Ortega Haboud

Editing: Andrés Cornejo Pinto

Script: Andrés Cornejo Pinto,
Mayfe Ortega Haboud,
Misha Vallejo Prut

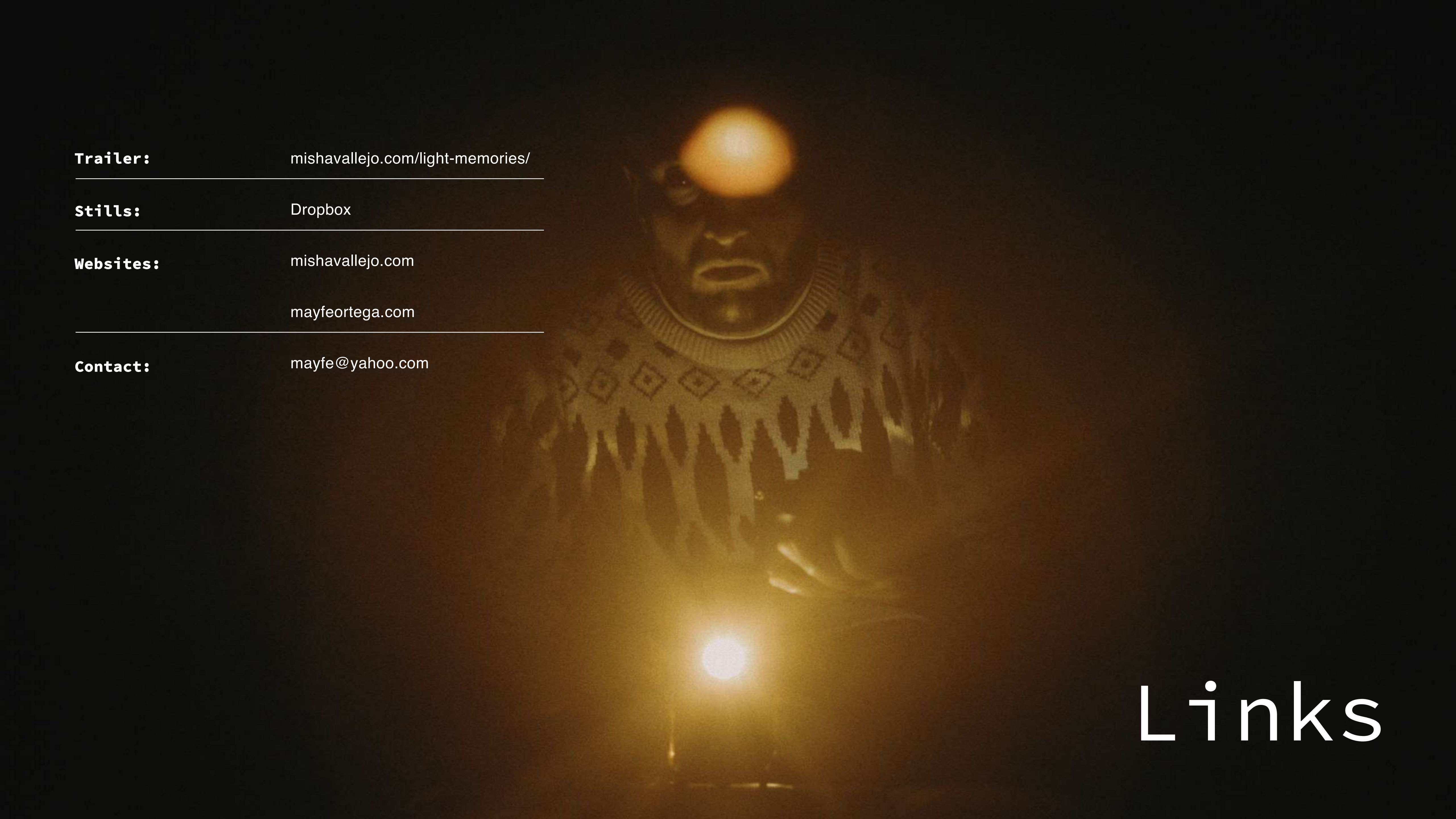
DOP: Isadora Romero Paz Y Miño
Misha Vallejo Prut

Original score: Christian Mejía Rodríguez

Sound design & mix: Emile Plonski Egas



Festivals and Awards



Trailer: mishavallejo.com/light-memories/

Stills: [Dropbox](#)

Websites: mishavallejo.com

mayfeortega.com

Contact: mayfe@yahoo.com

Links

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