

In 2007, filmmaker Diego López Rivera had heard about a contest designed to celebrate the bicentennial of Mexican independence and the centennial of the Mexican Revolution. The Mexican government would provide financial assistance to winners of the contest, along with additional help from other arts groups. Rivera came across the novel “Expediente del Atentado,” a political thriller by Álvaro Uribe.

El atentado

examines Mexican history

At the heart of the book was an actual historical event, the botched assassination of Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz in 1897. Díaz was attacked by a drunken law clerk armed with only a stone. But behind the episode were complex machinations that revealed much about the way society, and its ruling dictatorship, operated. Historians say that the attack highlighted the weakness of the system and foreshadowed the revolution that would change Mexico forever in 1910.

“I thought the novel had a very cinematographic touch in terms of structure, content and narrative,” says Rivera, who is a writer, director and producer.

After securing Uribe’s participation, Rivera brought director Jorge Fons (*Midaq Alley*) onto the project entitled *El atentado* (*The Attempt Dossier*). The project grew, and was eventually rumored to be one of the most expensive productions in Mexican cinema history. The filmmakers endeavored to present the full panorama of Mexican life in that period, from working-class taverns to the opulent world of the ruling class, and placed great importance on period accuracy in the costumes and environments.



Cinematographer Guillermo Granillo relished the opportunity to work with Fons. “From the beginning of my career, I admired the way Jorge makes films,” says Granillo. “His approach to stories always seemed very human and moving. I feel very lucky to have had a chance to work on *El atentado*, both in terms of the aesthetic challenge and the opportunity to recreate this very special time in Mexican history using light and shadow.”

Upon reading the script, Granillo was drawn to the idea of recreating a period known mostly through black-and-white photographs. “I have a singular weakness for monochromatic images,” he says. “To me, they allow you to navigate in a magical world where color is out of place. Unfortunately, due to the realities of distribution, we had to shoot in color.”

Granillo and the team of filmmakers made a careful study of colors, choosing a palette that reflected the period, and translating it into the sets, costumes, camera filters and lighting. In some cases, actual locations were found. Granillo says that these locations provided a kind of automatic authenticity in terms of movement and framing, as well as in terms of setting. But often the settings had changed too much in the intervening century, and sets had to be built.

“We often decorated these sets using enormous fabrics as backgrounds,” says Granillo. “We didn’t want the sets to look like an attempt at recreating reality. You have to establish a kind of visual game with the scenery, and draw the audience in as is done in theater.”

To facilitate camera movement, Granillo chose ARRICAM Lite 35mm cameras with ARRI/Zeiss Ultra Prime lenses. The cameras were set up for 3-perf to save on film and processing costs, and often mounted on a small Technocrane or a Fischer dolly. The film stocks were KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219 and KODAK VISION2 200T Color Negative Film 5217.

“Film gives me more mobility and accuracy,” says Granillo. “It allows me to create more real, personal images. Shooting film, and creating beautiful pictures photochemically, helps preserve photographers and their art.”

Post-production was handled at Churubusco Research Laboratory in Mexico City. The images were translated to digital form at 2K resolution on an ARRI scanner. Color correction was done on a large cinema screen using a Baselight FOUR system. Using an ARRILASER film recorder, the images were written back to KODAK VISION Color Intermediate Film 2242, which uses the latest emulsion technology to preserve all the sharpness, clarity and color of the original images to the final display screen.

To support the production, Kodak sponsored an exhibition of still photographs relating to the production on Reforma Avenue in the heart of Mexico City.