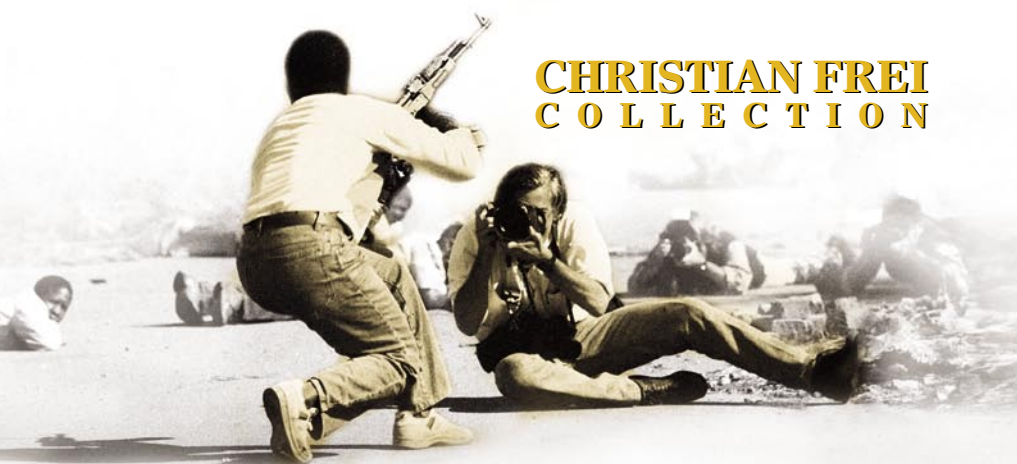


GEO Edition Documentaries

# THE TECTONICS OF HUMANITY

CHRISTIAN FREI  
COLLECTION



SWISSFILMS

**What makes these films so extraordinary?  
They are authentic moments that endure.  
Christian Frei takes us along a perimeter  
that both divides and unites individuals  
and cultures: the tectonics of humanity.**

*KULTURZEIT*

## Imprint

**Publisher** Warner Home Video Switzerland **Production** Christian Frei **Editors** Marc Bodmer and Sophie Schricker **Texts** Peter-Matthias Gaede, Tilmann P. Gangloff, Christian Frei, Norbert Creutz, James Nachtwey, Peter Indergand **Layout** Mike Hartmeier (Boost) **Copyright film stills** Christian Frei Filmproductions GmbH **James Nachtwey photograph** David Turnley / Corbis **Bamiyan photographs** Christian Frei and Nelofer Pazira **Oscar photo** "Kodak Theatre" Courtesy of Keystone **Oscar Nominees 2002 'Class Photo'** Courtesy of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences **Oscar Statuette** ©Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® **Bamiyan Engraving** ©Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica Grosny **photograph James Nachtwey / VII Portrait** Christian Frei Alex Spichale **Portrait Peter Indergand** Christian Frei **Translations** Peter Rigney **Print** Cinram

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**By Peter-Matthias Gaede**  
**Editor in Chief, GEO**

I thought I could imagine what its like for James Nachtwey to photograph the human drama. When he endures what is hardly endurable. I thought I knew him to a certain extent, the world's most important, most contemplative photographer of the realm of horror and shadow. This taciturn, almost lonely chronicler of despair, whose work GEO has been publishing for years. I thought I had a picture of James Nachtwey. Until I saw Christian Frei's "War Photographer". Only then did I truly move closer to James Nachtwey.

And not only to him. Whatever Frei's subject matter may be, it doesn't let go of you. His films sink in, despite their doing without all that the media world normally uses to beg for attention – noise, pompous gestures, the rush of speed. Stillness is the source of power. What sounds like a cliché holds true for the work of Christian Frei and his cameraman Peter Indergand. Their films are calm, almost meditative, and subtle. They exude quiet persistence. They are insightful, intelligently researched and well composed. This becomes particularly apparent when director and cameraman, in "Giant Buddhas" for example, weave seemingly far-removed chronological and plot layers into an intensive account of faith, intole-

rance and hope.

Another strength of Frei's is that he never upstages his subject. He is never intrusive. Instead of forcing himself on the protagonists of his films, he approaches them with cautious sympathy. If it were otherwise, he would never succeed in getting close enough to experience scenes such as that of a daughter's parting from her Cuban father as she goes into exile; and he would never succeed in transmitting this intimacy to us, the viewer of "Ricardo, Myriam y Fidel".

Rarely then has a cooperative venture pleased me as much as that which came about between Christian Frei and GEO. Not merely due to the subject matter, for the scope of all three films extends far beyond their settings and subjects. But also because Christian Frei is one of the most compelling reporters of our time. His works will become classics of documentary film. To be precise, they already are.

January 2007





## “Thou shalt not bore”

He is no “War Photographer”:  
Portrait of the Swiss documentary filmmaker Christian Frei



# “Thou shalt not bore”

By Tilmann P. Gangloff

This is a good place to work, no doubt about it. The Rote Fabrik, or ‘Red Factory’ on the banks of Lake Zurich, has something of an artist colony. Christian Frei fits in well here. And so he analyzes his own oeuvre, enthusiastically, with a sharp eye and an agreeable sense of humor. Our conversation takes place where Frei and his regular cameraman Peter Indergand plan their joint projects. The spartan and functionally furnished space would not have you believe that here works someone who nearly won an Oscar. If there were ever proof that planning is half the battle, then it is to be found in the films of Christian Frei. Even so, he regularly gets himself involved in precarious situations that are actually anything but predictable.

**The adventure.** If you’re going to the front with James Nachtwey, the most famous war photographer alive today (“War Photographer”), you can hardly entertain hopes that what you will encounter will in any way be predictable. The same can be said for the daring expedition into the remote Afghan Bamiyan Valley, where Christian Frei devoted himself to

the giant Buddha statues destroyed by the Taliban (“The Giant Buddhas”).

And yet Frei dismisses any notion of being an adventurer. “I’m a documentary filmmaker,” he says, “and while I might not shy away from adventure, I do not seek it out.” This sets him apart from the lifestyle of the “bored and wealthy who are in constant need of an adrenaline rush.” He adds, “I’m not at all interested in any kind of extreme sports; I’m not constantly in search of kicks.” It’s not that he gives you this impression either, it’s just that the reports of his film shoots happen to sound quite adventurous.

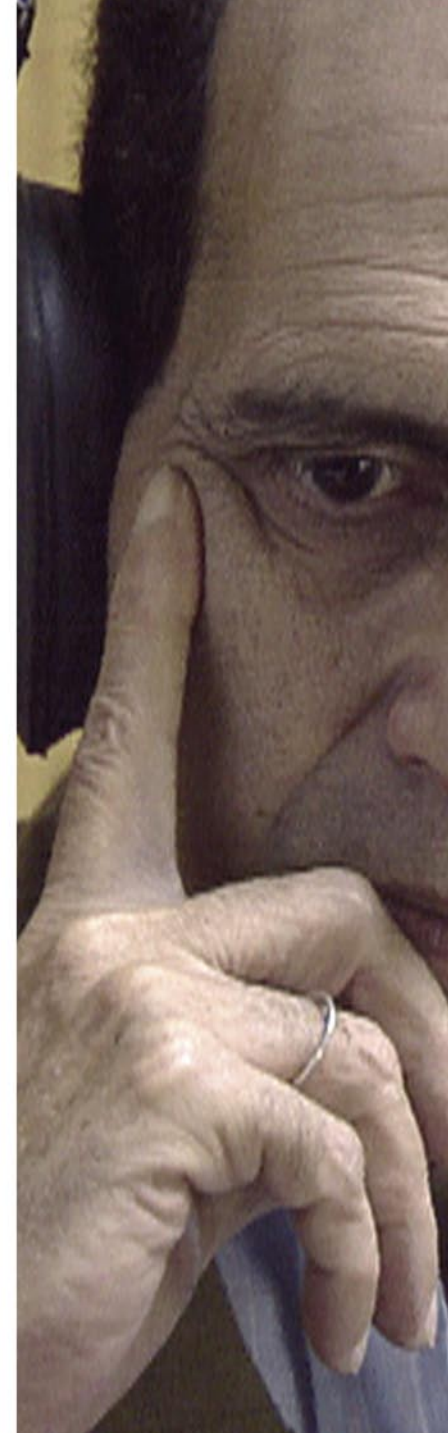
Frei’s creed is this: “As a documentary filmmaker, I want to explore the tectonics of humanity around the globe. Where the plates rub against each other, where there are tremors or earthquakes – that’s where I find the stories that interest me.” Someone who zeroes in on emotional epicenters and yet is no daredevil? “Naturally, these usually aren’t simple stories, and sometimes things even turn dangerous,” answers Frei, “but only when things become difficult do people rise above themselves; only then do the images become important and interesting.”

That’s just how it is if you

uphold Billy Wilder’s first commandment of filmmaking: “Thou shalt not bore!” Nevertheless, Frei considers it a coincidence that his three major documentary films all take place in far away places. “I could also imagine taking on a difficult topic right in the middle of Zurich.” Except that by now he enjoys a certain reputation, which is why Lars von Trier entrusted him with the documentation of his Bayreuth production of the Ring of the Nibelungen. When Frei asked von Trier why he chose him, of all people, the Danish Dogma founder replied, “Because you’re a landmine specialist.” Unfortunately, the production was broken off, and with it the joint project.

**The reverence.** During filming for “War Photographer”, dealing with real landmines could not be avoided. But Christian Frei wasn’t thinking about that when he got the idea for the film. It came to him as he sat on an airplane reading an issue of ‘Stern’ magazine which featured a series of Nachtwey photos invoking the forgotten war in Afghanistan. The topic was a perfect match for what Frei demands of a film subject: “I need the certainty that the story is larger than life, and that it’s worth pursuing for the next three years.”

When the director came to understand that the photographer, in his quest for authenticity, wished nothing more than to be invisible, he had the decisive idea: The most powerful images in “War Photographer” are captured with a micro-camera attached to Nachtwey’s photo camera. This set-up yielded





footage of breathtaking authenticity. You see Nachtwey at work, and at the same time you are eyewitness to the photographer's search for the essential moment amidst war and despair. Without this high-tech equipment, the film would not have been possible. Frei is still indebted to the specialists from the Zurich company Swiss Effects, who "tinkered and experimented" for half a year.

This detail illustrates two things. A crucial prerequisite for achieving relatively smooth filming conditions is Frei's ability to anticipate all potential developments – including, of course, the emotions and objections of persons who will be at the focus of his films. More crucial still is the respect for the people he films, "whether it be the President of the United States or a mountain farmer who might not like me trampling across his field."

**The images.** Peter Indergand's contribution also cannot be underestimated. Although the two are completely different in character, they share what Frei calls "a fascinating friendship". The films come about through a process of "respectful disputation". Frei says, "I have a tendency toward postcard-like images; Peter supplies the breaks and the texture." Thanks to the meticulous preparation of a team that is kept as small as possible, filming can be done without being too intrusive. Frei often takes care of the sound recording himself, "but never with a boom microphone – that would attract far too much attention."

While filming in the inhabited caves of Afghanistan for "The Giant Buddhas", two or three flashlights positioned throughout the rooms served as lighting. The privacy of the caves' inhabitants was respected, which is precisely what produced to such highly exceedingly intimate footage. "Thanks to Indergand's enormous emotional intelligence, we get images as highly precise as those in feature films, only without the staging," says Frei of the cameraman. "He simply has an unflinching feel for situations." Other shots had to be virtually wrested from the difficult conditions: For the fascinating impressions of the Gobi Desert, Frei and Indergand had to repeatedly get up at 2 a.m. in order to reach a particular spot by 5 a.m.. Once there, they had no more than ten minutes in which to capture the "completely outlandish images" which are among the most powerful in "The Giant Buddhas".

Once again, Christian Frei's accounts of these film shoots illustrate why meticulous planning is so crucial. It sounds like a truism when he says, "A farmer can only reap what he sows," but the intensive preparation that is the basis of the team's success becomes particularly clear when critical scenes must be filmed in remote locations far from technical civilization. It was of course clear from the outset that there would be no access to electricity in the desert; and yet just one little missing cable would have doomed the ambitious venture to failure.

**The sound.** Another unique aspect of Frei's films is his particular way of dealing with sound. This is especially apparent in "War Photographer". Frei does without the use of action-laden music to accentuate the danger that Nachtwey is repeatedly confronted with. The reality of war appears completely contrary to that which is normally depicted in war films: "You'll be hard pressed to find adventure and action. There are no heroes, no happy end and no triumphant victory. Seen from up close, the actions of the so-called good guys and so-called bad guys are hard to tell apart. War is complicated, often boring, and in a terrible way trivial – simply awful and sad." This is a truth that Frei neither wants to heighten with musical dramatization nor drown out in sound.

The film music is usually decided on during the research phase, or at the very latest by the time of shooting. Here too, Frei has an important partner: Manfred Eicher, founder and head of the record company ECM, helps with the selection of music, and frequently visits Frei in the cutting room. The filmmaker is very pleased with the collaboration, since Manfred Eicher's music lends his films a sound of their own. In "The Giant Buddhas", the compositions of Philip Glass, Jan Garbarek, Steve Kuhn and Arvo Pärt give his images a suggestive and intense underpinning.

**The message.** "If I had been forced to produce my film com-

mercially, then 'War Photographer' would have been an adrenaline shocker, whereas in 'Giant Buddhas,' the search for the legendary 300-meter long 'Lying Buddha' would have played a much more central role," says Christian Frei. "The entire film would've been made in a 'Discovery Channel style'." And he praises Switzerland: "I can afford the luxury of investing the necessary time only because we have such an excellent system of film funding." And that pays off in the end.

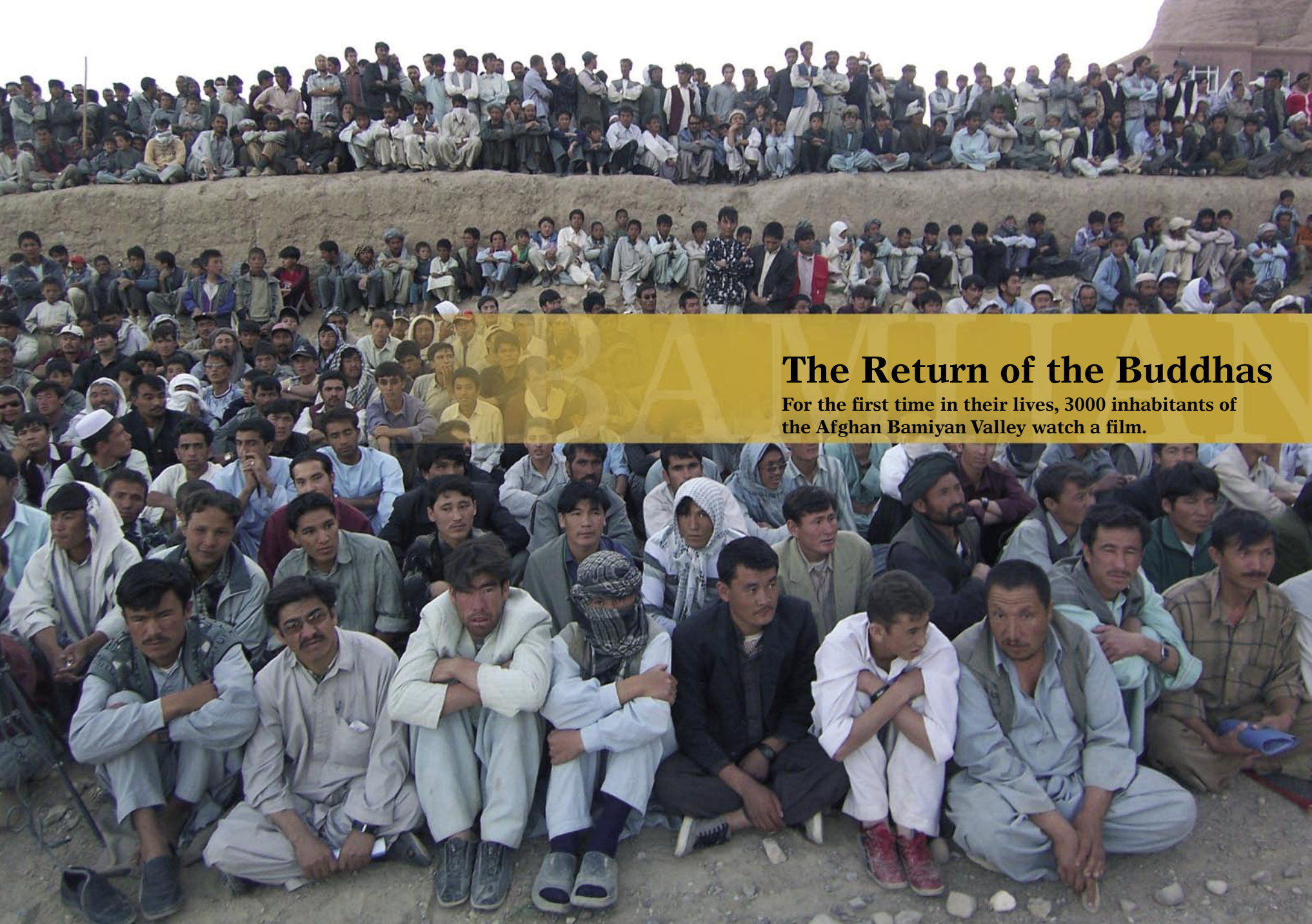
"The Giant Buddhas" was invited to 36 film festivals. "War Photographer" was sold to over 50 countries. That film was seen by 100 000, perhaps 150 000 moviegoers, including at festivals. The viewership for television showings was perhaps a thousand times that. Christian Frei estimates that around the world, at least 150 million, if not 300 million people, must have seen the film. Nevertheless, during his film shoots, the filmmaker doesn't have television on his mind: "From the start, the film was meant as a travel documentation. But I wanted to avoid a godlike, omniscient commentary."

He nevertheless makes his position clear, even if it is never explicitly articulated. "War Photographer" has an anti-war message; "The Giant Buddhas" is call for tolerance, a message that Frei conveys through the figure of the Chinese monk who set out westwards centuries ago. Frei would like the viewer to realize, "Look, they had their Marco Polos as well! We should stop seeing our civilization as the center of the world." He expressly sees his film a "Hymn to diversity of expression,

religions and cultures." Of course it was an act of ignorance for the Taliban to destroy the giant Buddha statues in the Bamiyan Valley. "But the reaction to that ignorance should not be equally ignorant."







## **The Return of the Buddhas**

**For the first time in their lives, 3000 inhabitants of the Afghan Bamiyan Valley watch a film.**





# THE REVIEW

## The Return of the Buddhas

By Christian Frei

Sleep is out of the question. I'm standing in the kitchen of the 'Bamiyan Roof' guesthouse, making myself a tea. In a corner, on the bare floor beneath the stove, sleeps one of the young Hazara boys who cook for us. I let him sleep. Quietly, I open the door, sit down on a wall in front of the lodge and gaze out over the valley into the night. Not a moon to be seen. I can hardly make out the long cliff facing me. A full moon would have clearly illuminated the 750 former grotto-dwellings of the monks, which 1500 years ago were chiseled into the cliffs like honeycomb. But now I can hardly even make out the two giant niches where the Buddhas once stood. I am in Bamiyan, in the heart of the Hindu Kush. It is four in the morning, Thursday, the 27th of July 2006. I've come to show my film "The Giant Buddhas".

I would like to fill, at least for one and a half hours, the empty space created when the Buddha statues were demolished. I'd like to give something back to the inhabitants of this valley. How much they gave me during the shooting of my film! Directly

in front of the huge niche left by the destruction of the larger of the two monuments, a screen and a sound system will be set up. Never before has a film been shown in this valley.

Here, there is no electricity, and infrastructure is virtually non-existent. The concept of an open-air screening in this place is nothing short of a logistical nightmare. For months now, I have been involved in preparation and planning, with support from the Swiss Afghanistan expert Paul Bucherer and a cultural organization in Kabul. The massive undertaking is financed by Swiss international development organizations along with my home canton of Solothurn. Since the majority of people here cannot read subtitles, we've had a version of the film dubbed into Dari, the local language. And so that the inhabitants find out about the showing, huge banners and countless posters have been hung throughout the valley, and a man on a motorcycle has been circling the local bazaar for days, using a megaphone to announce, "Attention, attention! On Thursday night, a film will be shown in front of the giant Buddha!"

Meanwhile, the heart of this whole undertaking, the 40-kilo heavy video projector, has yet to arrive in Bamiyan! For days, the box has been stuck in customs somewhere in the Persian Gulf. Last night, the shipping company from Kabul reported that the chances of the equipment arriving in time were slim to none.

This is the reason why I can't sleep tonight. I simply cannot come to terms with the fact that my film will have to be shown on a small emergency projector. A ridiculously small machine with far too little illuminating power to project onto such a huge screen. My pictures will be reduced to barely discernable, dull, dark shadows. All this work in vain.

And it was all so perfectly planned. The Afghan airline Ariana agreed to sponsor our flights and the transport of the projector. One day before departure, however, the flight was cancelled. And with that began the complications. The box was already supposed to have arrived in Kabul five days ago. Since then, the date's been postponed day after day, despite our protests, petitions to the customs authorities, and despite interventions by the German ambassador. The last word is that the projector is due to arrive on the afternoon of the screening. However, the trip here takes at least eight hours, which means that the projector will arrive in Bamiyan too late. And a postponement of the screening is out of the question, as the date has been announced throughout the region. I'm simply running out of options; I'm forced to accept the fact that, for the first time in my life, I will not attain my goal. I've failed.

I drink my tea and inhale the crisp morning air. A shimmer of dawn creeps through the mountains of the Koh-i-Baba range. Now the cliff across the valley turns blood red. Somewhere far away, the first muezzin begins his mor-

ning prayers. Before too long, the muezzin on the minaret before the niche of the giant Buddha follows suit. The songs swirl and echo from the cliff walls, blending into a unique Bamiyan atmosphere. Peter Indergand and I came here for filming three times during different seasons. And each time, this valley fascinates me anew. I decide not to show my disappointment. The specialists and technicians that I've brought from Kabul will set up the generators, the five-by-three-meter screen and the speakers. Busses will be arranged to shuttle the audience home safely after the show. The police will maintain order, and the New Zealand Army will set up security posts on the cliffs.

How many people will come? 300? 400? And how will they react? The film's protagonists will be in the audience: Sayyed Mirza Hussain, a Hazara and one of the few eyewitnesses to the destruction of the statues. Professor Tarzi, the archeologist who is excavating in the valley for the legendary Sleeping Buddha, a third statue which is thought to be located here somewhere. And Nelofer Pazira, who has come from Canada. Also expected are the Governor of the Valley, Habiba Sarabi, and the German ambassador Hans-Ulrich Seidt. He is traveling from Kabul to see my film. My film, which sadly must be shown without a professional video projector.

I angrily stomp my feet in the dust. It's not easy for me to accept this disappointment. Behind me, someone clears his throat. It's Paul Bucherer. He's beaming from







ear to ear. I stare at him in disbelief. The word from Kabul is that the video projector is on the way. The German ambassador is transporting it with his airplane and will deliver it this afternoon. Apparently, the airplane was already heading for the runway when a frantic shipping agent ran out and flagged down the plan. The freight compartment was opened and the box loaded on board. I can hardly believe my luck.

That evening, 3000 instead of the expected 300, among them many women and children, stream onto the square in front of the niche of the giant Buddha. On a platform in the middle of the audience stands the video projector, which arrived by plane via Bamiyan's dirt runway just hours ago. But there are still other hurdles to overcome. At 6 p.m. there is a small sandstorm, forcing me to cover all the equipment with plastic tarps. After the storm subsides, one of the generators breaks down, and I can't get the amount of electricity I need. Once again the whole undertaking teeters on the brink of failure!

I desperately radio my Afghan partners. May Allah and Buddha help us to succeed. And low and behold... Just before 7 p.m., Governor Habiba Sarabi gives a short speech, after which the film runs without a hitch. During the entire film, a spotlight illuminates the empty, desecrated niche where the Buddha once stood. It was here that the Taliban, in March of 2001, provoked the world with this monstrous act of ignorance. And now I sit here before 3000 people

who have never seen a film before in their life. A film about their own valley. About their past. Their identity.

During the scene in the film in which the Buddha is destroyed, it becomes so quiet that you can hear a needle drop.



74th annual  
**ACADEMY AWARDS**

„This moment is  
so much bigger than me!“  
“War Photographer” on the way to the Oscars







By Christian Frei

The red carpet is lined with giant replicas of those all-too familiar and arguably most coveted trophies of the film world. They form a proud honor guard, the golden knights, the noble swordsmen who go by the profane name of Oscar.

I'm on the way to the ballroom of the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles. It's Monday, March 11th, 2002, two weeks before the big show. 165 nominees have been invited for lunch. The President of the Academy greets each guest personally. I'm accompanied by Francine Brücher, who is responsible for marketing at Swiss Films. A good dozen press photographers are on the lookout for celebrities. I expected more of a buzz.

The atmosphere in the ballroom itself is almost intimate. Cameras and journalists have no access. I look around. Back home in Switzerland, we'll surely have to report on which stars we met. Naturally, they're all here: Nicole Kidman, Halle Berry and the wonderful Judi Dench. Denzel Washington, Russel Crowe and the master directors Robert Altman, David Lynch and Ridley Scott. But this 'nominees luncheon' is meant more as a tribute to screenplay writers, sound engineers, directors, animators, makeup artists and documentary filmmakers whose names are largely unknown to the audience at large. Each one receives an equally heartfelt and long round of applause. After all, everyone holds in the hands the same 'certificate of nomination' for an Oscar. The most important film award, a perpetual myth, now suddenly so real. And on March 24th, one out

# OSCAR® Oscar® Nomination

of five of us will get the 'icing on the cake', the Oscar itself.

Admittedly, it makes me proud to be playing in this league. After three years on the heels of a war photographer, after so many difficulties and dangers and seemingly unsolvable problems, I am relishing this success. And the best part about this race is that there are no losers. At the insistence of the Academy! Ever since 1989, the announcement "And the winner is..." has been replaced by "And the Oscar goes to...". But of course everyone wants to win. We all want to take home that four-kilo heavy, pewter alloy and gold-plated object.

Mainstream production companies launch million-dollar campaigns that I as an author-producer could never afford. But in Francine Brücher I have found someone whose commitment and professionalism can match even the most expensive advertising campaign. In the two weeks until the Oscars, I realize how much hard work is behind our campaign. Together with the Swiss consulate in Los Angeles, Francine organizes a special screening of "War Photographer" on the Warner Brothers studio grounds. Over 130 journalists and film professionals are invited. The response to my film is phenomenal. Many are calling it this season's film, the documentary of the year. A New York Times critic disclosed to me that my film was the best

documentary he had ever seen. Our press agents are busy making more contacts with the media.

The two weeks leading up to Oscar Night are filled with invitations, interviews and arrangements for the coveted tickets for the ceremony. After all, we will be joined by my cameraman Peter Indergand, my longtime assistant Barbara Müller, my partner Kveta Henzen and my agent Jan Rofekamp. Protagonist James Nachtwey will also be coming from New York. The whole family will be here. Sunday, March 24th, 2:30 p.m. on the dot. A black limousine pulls up in front of the hotel by Santa Monica beach. Let the show begin! At 5 p.m. is when the festivities are to commence. But the drive takes hours; hundreds of stretch limousines inch their way toward the Kodak Theater at a snail's pace. Finally, after passing through a security tent, we see it: the famous red carpet. Nearly 200 meters in length. The staccato barrage of camera flashes is surreal. Grotesque, nearly obscene is the throng of cameras and journalists, all eager to capture the ceremonial appearance of the stars and celebrities. A Swiss satirist describes the scene as a „parade of impeccably adorned mammals”.

The show itself is stunningly professional and truly exciting. James Nachtwey and I sit in the 12th row. Naturally, we are slightly disappoint-



CAMPAS

# CERTIFICATE OF NOMINATION FOR AWARD

BE IT KNOWN THAT

*Christian Frei*

74<sup>th</sup> ACADEMY AWARDS NOMINEES



ted when in the end we fall short of an Oscar. That honor goes to the documentary film by Jean-Xavier de Lestrade, "Murder on a Sunday Morning" – and rightly so. It's an important film with a topic that is ideally suited to the message of this year's Oscar awards – the long-overdue tribute to African American actors. And so we, along with a billion other television viewers, sit back and enjoy, among other things Halle Berry's unforgettably sympathetic acceptance speech ("This moment is so much bigger than me!"). One consolation for us is that the Swiss director Marc Foster helped to stage her triumph.

The quest for the Oscar – in the end, it's a lottery. Alfred Hitchcock never got one. In 1965, "Doctor Zhivago" lost to a film called "The Sounds of Music". Richard Burton was nominated seven times, but never took a statuette home with him. In any event: The Oscar nomination propelled my film to an international breakthrough. It will go on to win a number of international prizes and awards; even today, it is considered one of the most successful documentary films.





**Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel**

Documentary, 90', Switzerland 1997

By Norbert Creutz

The first contacts leading to the making of this film were made in 1992. While staying in Cuba and attending the Havana Film Festival, Christian Frei made the acquaintance of Miriam Martínez and her family. Like thousands of other Cubans, Miriam wanted to leave the island, not sharing its 'revolutionary' ideal, especially since her doubts – too clearly expressed – had led to her dismissal from the school where she was teaching. But her plans were not facilitated by the fact that her father, Ricardo Martínez, was a former companion-in-arms of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Formerly the force behind Radio Rebelde, the legendary radio station of the Sierra Meastra Guérilleros, Ricardo had remained a faithful servant of the Communist regime. Here were two ideal characters for someone wanting to explore the Cuban malaise palpable since the 1980s. Their situation mirrored that of Castro himself and his daughter, who had left to settle in the United States in 1991. Frei was also fascinated by the parallels between Radio Rebelde and the modern-day Radio-TV Martí, an anti-Castro station subsidized by the United States which broadcasts from the Florida Keys. Both radio stations use the very same motto: "Tell the truth."

Initially skeptical about the film, Miriam and Ricardo were fearful of reopening scars that had only recently healed over. They thought it impossible to talk about feelings and politics in front of a camera.

On the other hand, the film might play the role of mediator, enabling them to talk honestly to each other. In the end, it required three years of preparation and an authorization undoubtedly emanating from Castro himself before shooting could begin (in video format) in April of 1995. After filming Ricardo and Miriam's farewell, Frei accompanied Ricardo on an emotional pilgrimage into the Sierra Meastra. Finally, he recorded Miriam and her husband Augusto's first impressions of exile, six months after their arrival in Miami.

A mixture of authentic moments and planned situations, the film was completed in 1997. Requiring a large amount of editing, it bears the marks of its long gestation and development. In the end, however, the masterfully assembled drama of this family, and the parallels between the two radio stations echoing across 30 years, balance each other to perfection. "Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel" is far more than an account of individual destinies, as it is imbedded in the crisis of a utopia and a battle of ideologies. Frei expressed this as follows: "At the global level, the failure of Socialism as an alternative to consumer society has left a gaping void that is affecting a whole generation. Miriam expresses people's need to get information and be allowed to form their own opinions. She is right to complain about the lack of public debate in Cuba. But she leaves a country subject to censorship for another which is completely saturated with information. She moves from the 'country of not enough' to the 'country of too much.' Hence the inevitable failure of her search for happiness. The message of

the film, if there is one, lies in the ambivalence of her feelings."

Though well received on the festival circuit (a good 30 showings), "Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel" did not have an impact commensurate with its ambitions and historical relevance. It would in fact be difficult to find a film which better embodies the idea of the 'demise of politics' that has followed the break-up of the Communist bloc. Although the film is unquestionably 'political', it is not motivated by the same 'activism' as films of the earlier generation; its political commitment lies in its search for a new complexity.

In keeping his distance and see-

king greater objectivity, Frei highlights contradictions and paradoxes while being careful to avoid taking sides. He plays his cards slowly, showing great empathy towards everyone he interviews, examining things critically without ever making a judgement. In the end, he leaves the viewer to struggle with the issues he has raised. All this is done with an attention to story-telling and aesthetics (from the quality of the photography to the sparing use of music) which reinforces the overall impact of the film. With „Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel“, Frei undoubtedly forged a style of his own which he was to develop further in the films that followed.

www.christian-frei.info

Protagonists::

**Ricardo Martínez**  
**Miriam Martínez**  
**Fidel Castro Ruz**

Co-founder of Radio Rebelde  
His daughter  
Cuban revolutionary

Crew:

Written, Directed and Edited by  
Cinematography  
Sound  
Editors  
Supervising Editor  
Research Collaboration  
Assistant Director  
Video Operator  
Sound Editor  
Sound Mastering  
On-Line Editor  
Tape to Film Transfer  
Music

**Christian Frei**  
**Peter Indergand** scs  
**Martin Witz**  
**Christian Frei, Damaris Betancourt**  
**Jorge Abello**  
**Christina Rachmühl**  
**Antigone T. Froehlich**  
**Hugo Würsch**  
**Pius Morger**  
**Dieter Lengacher**  
**Patrick Lindenmaier**  
**Swiss Effects**  
**Arturo Sandoval, Chucho Valdés**



## Press and Festivals

**The deep conflict of today's Cuba becomes perceptible through the moving relationship between father and daughter.**

*NEUE ZÜRCHER ZEITUNG*

**A moving film, sensitive and precise.**

*FACTS*

**The humane portrayal of a political conflict makes 'Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel' a masterpiece.**

*VISION DU RÉEL*

**An extremely interesting and riveting film achievement by a young director. Bold and coherent.**

*SDA*

**A multifaceted film, sovereign and striking.**

*NEUE MITTELLAND ZEITUNG*

**Brilliant.**

*LIVE*

**Excellent!**

*AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE*



**The best part about this film is that nobody talks bad about Fidel Castro – except Fidel Castro himself.**

*PEDRO LUIS FERRER,  
KUBANISCHER PROTESTSÄNGER*

**The departure is the focus of a film as rich in information as it is in emotional drama, a film which sovereignly blends an individual story with highlights from Cuban-American media history.**

*BASLER ZEITUNG*

**An amazing feat!**

*CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

**AUDIENCE  
AWARD  
BASIC TRUST**  
HUMAN RIGHTS FILMFESTIVAL  
RAMALLAH / TEL AVIV  
**2000**

**Festival Invitations:**

Nyon, Chicago, New York, San Sebastián, Geneva, São Paulo, Huelva, Puerto Rico, Amiens, Amsterdam, Solothurn, Saarbrücken, Munich, Cologne, Innsbruck, London, Vienna, Seoul, Salzburg, Prague, Kiev, Ramallah, Tel Aviv.

## War of the airwaves

Miriam Martínez is born in Havana in 1955, during the time of the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. While the Cuban people are being brutally oppressed, each evening brings planeloads of rich Americans from Miami to the 'Tropicana' nightclub and to the brothels of Havana. Miriam's father Ricardo is only 19 years old when she is born. He works for a small private radio station in the capital. Miriam is not quite two years old when he quits this well-paid job from one day to the next in order to join Fidel Castro's rebels in the Sierra Maestra.

*„In the evening hours the whole family gathers round the radio, turning it down enough that you can still hear the ticking of a clock – for there are spies everywhere. At first all they hear is static, but then come the words they've all been waiting for: 'This is Radio Rebelde.' Everyone listens with rapt attention and moves in closer, so as not to miss a single word.“* Ricardo Martínez, in his book „La historia de Radio Rebelde”.

Radio Rebelde proves to be an effective tool in exposing Batista's propaganda lies and media censorship. The tyranny is despicable in all its forms,

but none is as ridiculously cynical as its total control of the mass media, as Fidel Castro explained on air to Radio Rebelde. On January 8th, 1959, the Guerilleros triumphantly enter Havana. One year later, the 'Comandante en Jefe' bans the conservative newspaper Diario de la Marina. From now on, Castro's principle is the law: 'Within the Revolution, anything goes; against the Revolution, nothing.' Increasingly, freedom of expression in Cuba is curtailed. On May 20th 1985, 27 years after the founding of Radio Rebelde, another 'pirate radio station' goes on air. Supported by the wealthy Cuban exile Mas Canona, U.S. President Ronald Reagan launches Radio Martí, a branch of Voice of America. The reaction out of Cuba is not long in coming: Castro has two huge jamming transmitters built, each one with the power of a half million watts – ten times as strong as a normal station.

*„We close the blinds because the neighbors across the street are informers, and we turn the volume very, very low. Due to the jamming transmitters we can only receive it on short wave, and sometimes it is difficult to make*

*out everything. If it were not for Radio Martí, we would have no means of making up our own minds. It is the only station by which the opposition can reach the people.“* Miriam Martínez, talking about Radio Martí.

According to the 'Office of Cuba Broadcasting', Radio Martí is the most successful radio station in history. Within months of its launch in 1985, this station, a branch of 'Voice of America,' reached a listenership of 80 percent. The head of Radio and TV Martí, historian Rolando E. Bonachea, states in the film: *„If we cannot conquer him with cannons, we shall conquer him with truth.“*

TV Martí is also unique. It is the only TV station in the world to broadcast exclusively to listeners of a foreign country. The Americans thereby violate international

agreements that they themselves have signed. What is even more absurd is the fact that TV Martí is completely unknown in Cuba, as no one there can receive it. This is because Castro has set up hundreds of jamming transmitters around Havana. Nevertheless, every day for the past seven years, the Americans have produced a one-hour program, which they beam to Havana by way of a captive balloon – despite the fact that no one is watching. In the film we see TV Martí's complicated broadcast set-up in the Florida Keys, 90 miles from Havana. For a television signal to be transmitted to Havana, the stationary balloon must be raised to an altitude of 10,000 feet. Each and every night.

It is a war of the airwaves.







# PHOTOGRAPH

**War Photographer**  
Documentary, 96', Switzerland 2001

By Norbert Creutz

It was in an aeroplane, on the way to a festival in Chicago, that he was first struck by the work of the American photographer James Nachtwey (born in 1948 in Syracuse, NY). Frei saw one of his reports on Afghanistan in an issue of the German magazine 'Stern'. He soon tracked Nachtwey down and found him to be an engaging personality – the diametrical opposite of the hardened and cynical war correspondent. But their first contact was disappointing. Not wanting to be disturbed in his work, by its very nature solitary, nor to endanger lives other than his own, Nachtwey initially turned down the idea of a documentary. It took a great deal of persistence and inventiveness to overcome his reluctance – in particular, the development, with the help of engineers from Swiss Effects in Zurich, of a robust and easy-to-control mini film camera which could be fitted to Nachtwey's own camera in such a way as to show things from his perspective without inhibiting him.

For two years, Frei and his cameraman Peter Indergand followed Nachtwey on a number of missions to Indonesia, Kosovo and, finally, Palestine. These were not always situations of open conflict, because Nachtwey was equally committed to exposing the reality of poverty. But whatever the nature of the mission, violence was on the agenda, making the shooting a very testing exercise.

As Nachtwey took photographs, Indergand filmed him from a distance with his big Digital Betacam, while Frei controlled the images and sound of the minicam remotely. The film is rounded off by stories told by Nachtwey's colleagues and a visit to the photographer's New York apartment-lab at the time of an exhibition featuring his work. "War Photographer" was completed in the autumn of 2001.

A portrait of an exceptional man in extreme situations, "War Photographer" is also Christian Frei's most compelling film. It raises a whole host of questions in the viewer's mind: about humanistic commitment, the need and best way to bear witness to the worst in human nature, about respect for others and the principle of avoiding direct intervention, about voyeurism, media bias, and so on. Its impact has less to do with any underlying danger (Frei avoids the temptation to embellish his film by creating a sense of thrill or spectacle) than with encountering a fascinating and enigmatic character, a sort of modern Don Quixote, a gentleman catapulted into a barbarian environment who seems to have transcended all the ambiguities of his profession. Sometimes his code of behavior seems shocking, his embracing of danger madness, his sacrifices pointless. And yet, we end up understanding why he acts as he does.

Too flattering a portrait? The suspicion is soon swept away, so much is modesty an integral part of Nachtwey's character. Armed with a surprising mixture of realism and idealism, he devotes himself to his craft,

body and soul, in the attempt to raise people's awareness so that things will change, so that the tide of war, poverty and injustice might at last begin to ebb. Clearly overwhelmed, Frei had found his master, but nevertheless he did not dwell in endless introspection. Completely at the service of his subject matter, he too kept himself in the background. Filmed without superfluous artistry, "War Photographer" is nevertheless a model of how to construct a film. It gradually approaches the figure of its subject, playing intelligently with the doubts of the viewer and hinting at the contradictions of the reporter's profession

even before naming them openly. The musical accompaniment from the ECM catalogue (Arvo Pärt, Eleni Karaindrou, David Darling), chosen with the help of Manfred Eicher, combines effortlessly with these often terrible images, adding an element of distance and welcome touch of spirituality.

We all know what happened next: nominated for an Oscar in 2002, awarded prizes at a dozen international film festivals, "War Photographer" became the Swiss film industry's success story of the year.

www.war-photographer.com

Protagonists:

**James Nachtwey**  
**Christiane Amanpour**  
**Hans-Hermann Klare**  
**Christiane Breustedt**  
**Des Wright**  
**Denis O'Neill**

Crew:

Written, Directed and Edited by  
Photographs by  
Digital Betacam Cinematography  
Add. Cinematography (Palestine)  
Microcam Cinematography  
Microcams built by  
Assist. Director/Assistant Editor  
Sound Design and Mix  
Music by  
Music Producer  
Production

Photographer  
Chief International Correspondent CNN  
Foreign Editor STERN Magazine  
Editor in Chief GEO SAISON Magazine  
Cameraman Reuters  
Screenwriter/Jim's best friend

**Christian Frei**  
**James Nachtwey**  
**Peter Indergand** scs  
**Hanna Abu Saada**  
**James Nachtwey**  
Swiss Effects (Patrick Lindenmaier)  
**Barbara Müller**  
**Florian Eidenbenz**  
**Eleni Karaindrou, Arvo Pärt, David Darling**  
**Manfred Eicher**  
**Christian Frei Filmproductions**  
in Co-Production with Swiss TV  
and Suissimage



## Press

**Startling, engrossing! See the world through Nachtwey's eyes.**

*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

**A moving documentary.**

*DER SPIEGEL*

**A great documentary film. Nominated for an Oscar. It deserved to win.**

*STERN*

**Fabulous.**

*ART - DAS KUNSTMAGAZIN*

**This is documentary cinema so real and direct that it sweeps you off your feet.**

*TAGES-ANZEIGER*

**So sublime is the respect which Nachtwey pays to those he photographs.**

**It's as if he is our conscience.**

*FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG*



**This is as close to being inside a photojournalist's mind as it gets.**

*TELE*

**A gripping portrait!**

*LA WEEKLY*

**An instant classic.**

*VARIETY*

**A unique insight!**

*THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY*

**A remarkable portrait of a remarkable man.**

*LOS ANGELES TIMES*

**Nachtwey clears the cynicism right out of you.**

*NEW YORK MAGAZINE*

**This film is an act of spiritual faith – an eloquent, deeply felt meditation on the nature of compassion.**

*SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE*

**Gripping and sophisticated. Intelligent and full of humanity. Not a word too many, not an image too few. Masterful!**

*BLICK*

# Festivals and Awards

**OSCAR®  
NOMINATION**  
ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINATION  
BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

**2002**

**EMMY AWARD  
NOMINATION**

FOR CINEMATOGRAPHER  
PETER INDERGAND

**2004**

**PEABODY  
AWARD**  
GEORG FOSTER  
PEABODY AWARD  
**2003**

**EURODOK  
AWARD**  
EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY  
FILM FESTIVAL OSLO  
**2003**

**WINNER  
VIEWPOINT**  
FILMFESTIVAL GENT  
**2002**

**VOICE OF  
HUMANITY AWARD**  
MOUNTAINFILM FESTIVAL  
TELLURIDE  
**2003**

**ADOLF GRIMME  
AWARD**  
SPECIAL PRIZE OF THE MINISTRY  
FOR DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE  
AND SPORTS  
**2003**

**THE PRIZE OF  
OSAKA CITY**  
SPECIAL PRIZE  
OSAKA EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL  
**2002**



**WINNER  
DOCAVIV**  
TEL AVIV INTERNATIONAL  
DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL  
BEST INTERNATIONAL FILM  
**2002**

**WINNER  
DURBAN**  
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL  
BEST DOCUMENTARY  
**2002**

**AUDIENCE  
AWARD**  
ENCOUNTERS  
SOUTH AFRICAN  
INT. DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL  
**2002**

**GOLD PANDA  
AWARD**  
BEST LONG DOCUMENTARY  
7TH SICHUAN TV FESTIVAL  
**2003**

**WINNER  
PHOENIX PRIZE**  
BEST NON-FICTION PROGRAM  
COLOGNE CONFERENCE  
**2002**

**WINNER  
PRIZREN**  
DOKUFEST  
DOCUMENTARY  
AND SHORT FILM FESTIVAL  
**2003**

**AUDIENCE  
AWARD**  
REHOBOTH BEACH  
INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL  
**2002**

**SPECTATOR'S PRIZE  
ONE WORLD**  
FESTIVAL OF DOCUMENTARY FILM  
BRATISLAVA  
**2003**

**NOMINATED  
SWISS  
FILM PRIZE**  
BEST DOCUMENTARY  
**2002**

**AUDIENCE AWARD  
FEATURE DOCUMENTARY  
SWISSPEAKS**  
SWISS AMERICAN  
FILM FESTIVAL NEW YORK  
**2003**

Festival invitations:

Amsterdam, Solothurn, Gent, Nyon, Tel Aviv, Toronto, London, New York, Cologne, Seoul, Sidney, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Viareggio, Warsaw, São Paulo, Jakarta, Stockholm, Valladolid, Hot Spring, Istanbul, Osaka, Beirut, Havana, Boston, Saarbrücken, Oslo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Prizren, Sichuan, Helsinki.



# PHOTO

## Why photograph war?

By James Nachtwey

**In 1985, shortly before becoming a member of the world famous photo agency Magnum, the then 36-year-old James Nachtwey wrote the following text, a credo about the relevance of his work as a war photographer.**

There has always been war. War is raging throughout the world at the present moment. And there is little reason to believe that war will cease to exist in the future. As man has become increasingly civilized, his means of destroying his fellow man have become ever more efficient, cruel and devastating.

Is it possible to put an end to a form of human behavior which has existed throughout history by means of photography? The proportions of that notion seem ridiculously out of balance. Yet, that very idea has motivated me.

For me, the strength of photography lies in its ability to evoke a sense of humanity. If war is an attempt to negate humanity, then photography can be perceived as the opposite of war, and if it is used well it can be a powerful ingredient in the antidote to war.

In a way, if an individual assumes the risk of placing himself in

the middle of a war in order to communicate to the rest of the world what is happening, he is trying to negotiate for peace. Perhaps that is the reason why those in charge of perpetuating a war do not like to have photographers around.

It has occurred to me that if everyone could be there just once to see for themselves what white phosphorous does to the face of a child or what unspeakable pain is caused by the impact of a single bullet or how a jagged piece of shrapnel can rip someone's leg off – if everyone could be there to see for themselves the fear and the grief, just one time, then they would understand that nothing is worth letting things get to the point where that happens to even one person, let alone thousands.

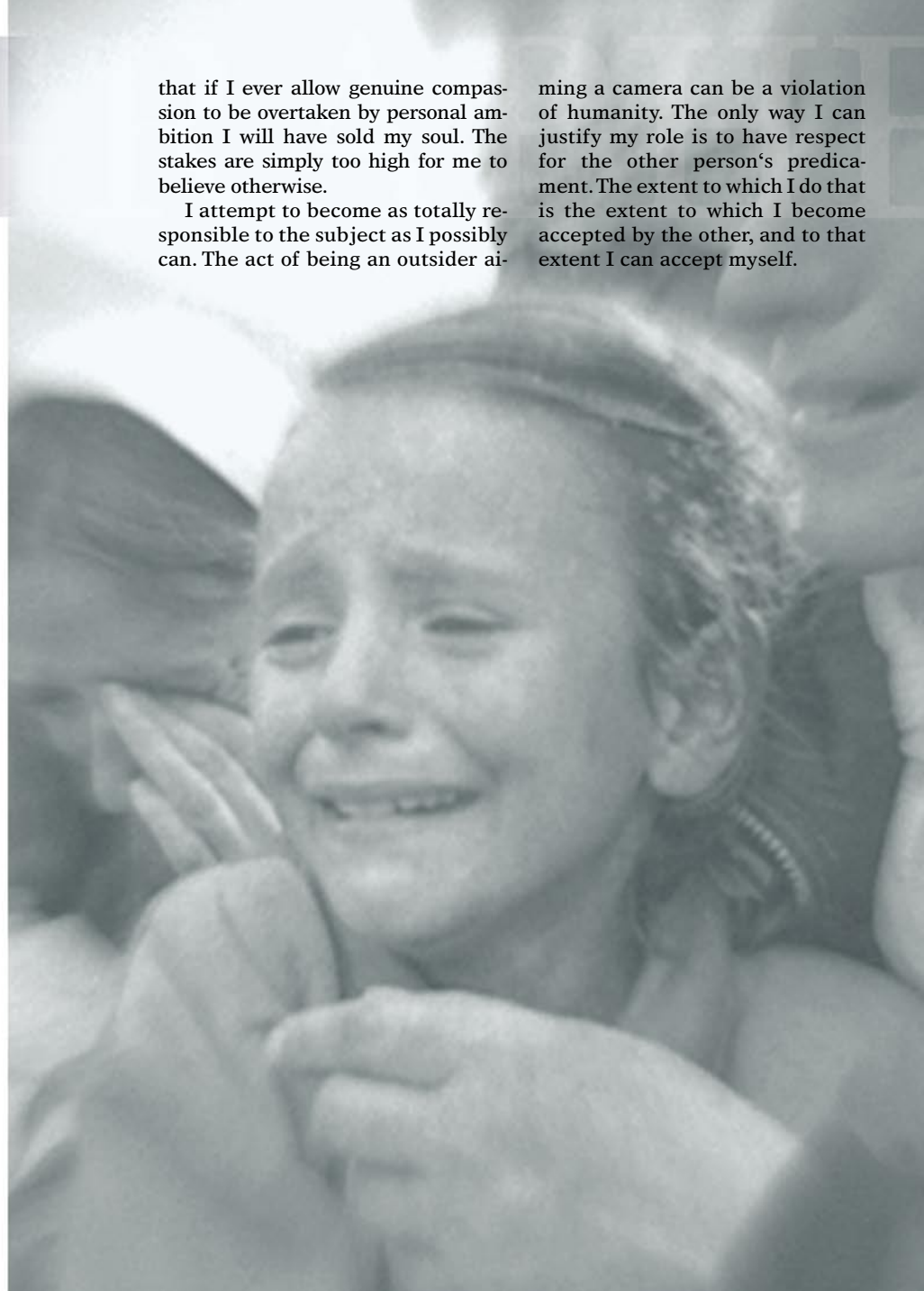
But everyone cannot be there, and that is why photographers go there – to show them, to reach out and grab them and make them stop what they are doing and pay attention to what is going on – to create pictures powerful enough to overcome the diluting effects of the mass media and shake people out of their indifference – to protest and by the strength of that protest to make others protest.

The worst thing is to feel that as a photographer I am benefiting from someone else's tragedy. This idea haunts me. It is something I have to reckon with every day because I know

that if I ever allow genuine compassion to be overtaken by personal ambition I will have sold my soul. The stakes are simply too high for me to believe otherwise.

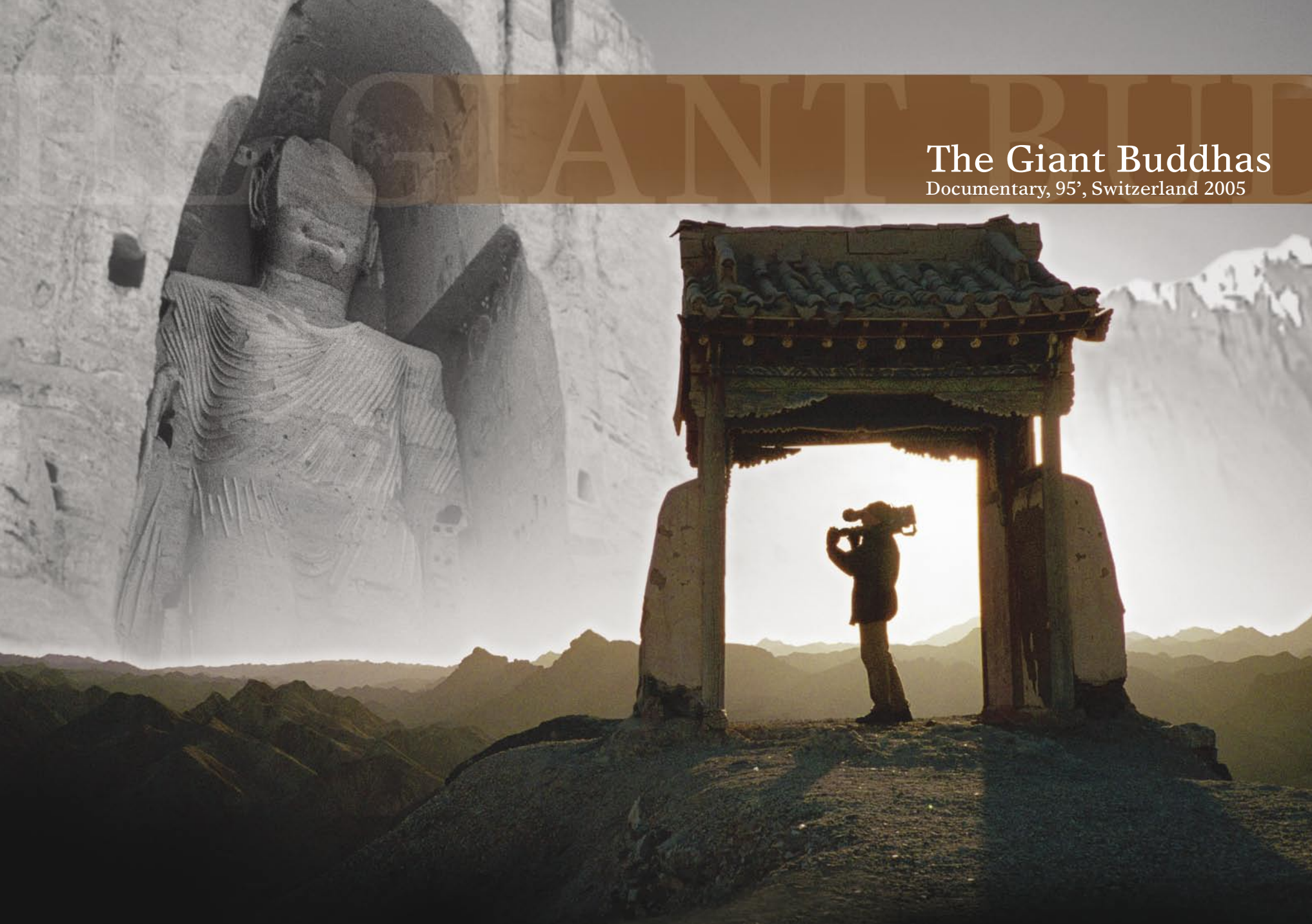
I attempt to become as totally responsible to the subject as I possibly can. The act of being an outsider ai-

ming a camera can be a violation of humanity. The only way I can justify my role is to have respect for the other person's predicament. The extent to which I do that is the extent to which I become accepted by the other, and to that extent I can accept myself.



# The Giant Buddhas

Documentary, 95', Switzerland 2005





By Norbert Creutz

An international success of the magnitude of “War Photographer” raises the bar considerably. To those who still saw it as a stroke of luck, Christian Frei replied in no uncertain terms with “The Giant Buddhas”, a no less remarkable achievement. The destruction by the Taliban in March 2001 of the giant Buddhas of the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan was the trigger for this film, which is much more than simply an attempt to revisit the event. In the final analysis, it was more of an ‘essay’ – in the form of a travel documentary – on faith and fanaticism, tolerance and terrorism, identity and ignorance, and on our feeble attempts to come to terms with transitoriness.

A good year after the destruction of the Buddhas, Frei was contacted by Swiss restorers involved in a reconstruction project. Two now-empty niches in a remote valley, lots of Western technology, nothing really human and emotional to work on – Frei was initially not very keen. But after a few hours of surfing the web, he was persuaded that this was an excellent starting point for a film. A long period of research, making contacts and tracking down evidence was still necessary to decide on the thrust and theme of the film, which was far more complex than its predecessors. In the end it took Frei and Indergand, again working on this venture as a team, 24 weeks of filming to get the footage they needed. This is partly explained by the geographical reach of the film. But the long period of filming was

also determined by aesthetic considerations; to secure the finest possible images, the team often had to wait for the evening light. And all this was capped by a new technological exploit used for the film’s final sequence: the authentic reconstitution in simulated 3D imagery of the celebrated Buddhas of Bamiyan.

But “The Giant Buddhas” was above all a triumph of organization. Rarely has a film required more intelligent traveling – from Bamiyan and back to Bamiyan, along unexpected detours. The film achieves a meeting of past (as evoked by the journey of the Chinese monk Xuanzhuang, who described the Buddhas in the 7th century) and future (embodied in the reconstruction projects sponsored by UNESCO and the Zurich Federal Institute of Technology). And then there is human interest, in the form of the displaced cave-dwelling family, the homecoming of the emigré writer and her archaeologist colleague, not to mention the ambiguous role of Taysir Alony, the only journalist who recorded images of the Buddhas’ destruction. ECM music and unobtrusive narration complete the picture. Seemingly miraculously, everything falls into place by the end of the film, and this complex system of echoes invites the viewer to consider a hundred times more questions than would have been raised by a straightforward journalistic account or reportage of the event.

Launched at the 2005 Locarno Festival, the film did not attract the crowning of an Oscar nomination that its predecessor did. Nevertheless, it was screened at some 40 major film festivals, the-

reby cementing the reputation of its creator once and for all. Will Christian Frei be able to maintain such high standards in the future? Though his resources may appear limited, almost derisory when set against the magnitude of the subjects that interest him, he clearly possesses the necessary capabilities. Ever since Jacqueline Veuve and Richard Dindo, no career in the history of Swiss documentary cinema has been more consis-

tent and trail-blazing. He sets an example for an alternative form of globalization which dares confront today’s growing complexity following the collapse of old ideologies and the reduction of the world to mere commercial aspects. The fact that this approach leads to beautiful cinema – intellectually, morally and aesthetically – is as encouraging a sign as can be found today.

www.giant-buddhas.com

Protagonisten:

**Nelofer Pazira**  
**Xuanzang**  
**Sayyed Mirza Hussain**  
**Taysir Alony**  
**Zémalyalāi Tarzi**

Crew:

Written, Directed and Edited by  
Cinematography  
Assistant Editor  
Sound Design and Mix  
Visual Effects  
Narrator (German Version)  
Narrator (English Version)  
Narrator (French Version)  
Narrator (Italian Version)  
Initiated by  
Based on an idea by  
Advisors

Music by

Music Advisor  
Produced by

Writer and Journalist  
Wandering monk (602 – 664 AD)  
Cave Dweller in Bamiyan  
TV-Journalist ‘Al Jazeera’  
Archaeologist

**Christian Frei**  
**Peter Indergand scs**  
**Denise Zabalaga**  
**Florian Eidenbenz**  
**Patrick Lindenmaier, Paul Avondet**  
**Stefan Kurt**  
**Peter Mettler**  
**Jean-Luc Bideau**  
**Riccardo Merli**  
**Bernard Weber**  
**Peter Spoerri**  
**Paul Bucherer (Afghanistan Institut)**  
**Armin Grün (ETH Zürich)**  
**Christian Manhart (UNESCO Paris)**  
**Philip Glass, Jan Garbarek**  
**Steve Kuhn, Arvo Pärt**  
**Manfred Eicher**  
**Christian Frei Filmproductions GmbH**  
**in Koproduktion mit Schweizer**  
**Fernsehen, ZDF/arte und Suissimage**

## Press

**A subdued, Zen-like rumination. Moving, elegant and profound.**

*TIME Magazine (USA)*

**A lucid, flickering light, in which incredibly beautiful landscapes hang like golden pebbles.**

*BERLINER ZEITUNG*

**A thoughtful, well researched and beautifully filmed analysis.**

*JURY LEIPZIG (Silberne Taube)*

**Drama of stone colossus and dynamite.**

*SONNTAGSZEITUNG*

**A cutting-edge topic... a manifold and ambitious essay... a filmic work of mourning... with exquisitely beautiful images.**

*DER BUND*

**This journey into the Bamiyan valley is so much more than a tribute to two desecrated monuments, more than a masterful piece of research. Christian Frei**



**knows how to tell a story. He fills those niches with memories. At the end of this opulent cinematic meditation, the Buddhas are more alive than ever.fresh information as I've ever absorbed from a single documentary.**

*ARTE-METROPOLIS*

**Frei's images are as momentous as his subject matter.**

*BASLER ZEITUNG*

**Poetic and resolute. Fantastic!**

*L'HEBDO*

**The Giant Buddhas places us at a fascinating intersection of politics, religion and culture. Frei's account ranges from the horrifying to the comic, and in the process delivers as much fresh information as I've ever absorbed from a single documentary.**

*NATIONAL POST*

**An urgent appeal for tolerance**

*MITTELBAYERISCHE ZEITUNG*

**Fantastic!**

*DER SPIEGEL*



## Festivals and Awards

**SUNDANCE**  
FILM FESTIVAL  
WORLD DOCUMENTARY  
COMPETITION  
2006

**TORONTO**  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
OFFICIAL SELECTION  
2005

**WINNER**  
SILVER DOVE  
LEIPZIG  
DOKFESTIVAL  
2005

**WINNER**  
SILVER GENTIAN  
TRENTO  
MOUNTAIN FILMFESTIVAL  
2006

NOMINATED  
**SWISS**  
FILM PRIZE  
BEST DOCUMENTARY  
2006

**WINNER**  
art-tv AWARD  
SWISS CULTURE PEARL  
FIVE BEST SWISS FILMS  
2005

**WINNER**  
DOKUFEST  
PRIZREN  
DOCUMENTARY  
AND SHORT FILM FESTIVAL  
2006

**WINNER**  
THE BEST OF THE FEST  
**TAHOE/RENO**  
INTERNATIONAL FILMFESTIVAL  
2006

Festival invitations:

Locarno, Toronto, Vancouver, Leipzig, Vienna, Valladolid, Copenhagen, Solothurn, Sundance, Saarbrücken, Portland, Bangkok, Prague, Thessaloniki, Washington D.C., Bermuda, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Florida, Paris, Tel Aviv, Istanbul, Singapore, Boston, Nashville, San Francisco, Trento, Munich, Taipei, Warsaw, Catalonia, St. Malo, Durban, Maui, Rhodes, Zanzibar, Prizren, Tahoe/Reno, Avostanis, Turin, Rassegna, Miami, Two River, Banff.

# Bamiyan – The valley of the giant Buddhas

For fifteen hundred years, two gigantic Buddha statues stood in their niches cut in the cliff flanking the remote Bamiyan valley of present-day Afghanistan. The smaller of the two statues, thirty-five meters high and referred to as ‘Shamama’ (Queen Mother), was hewn into the soft conglomerate of the two kilometer long rock face in the year 507. Painted blue, with a golden face, the figure was a portrayal of the Buddha Sakyamuni. The second statue – the ‘Salsal’ Buddha (‘light shines through the universe’) – was built fifty years later. At fifty-five meters, this was the largest standing Buddha statue in the world.

The present dwellers in this valley are proud of their pre-Islamic past. They talk of the old times when Bamiyan, the main link between central Asia and India, provided the main access to the Silk Road and was the trading center for thousands of caravans. It was this prosperity that led to the Buddha statues being hewn into the soft rock face, along with a complex system of steps, niches, balconies, meeting rooms, altar rooms with cupolas and dwelling quarters, all cut into the rock and nestling between the two colossal figures.

For hundreds of years the Bamiyan valley, lying in the Hindu Kush, was one of the most important and attractive pilgrimage sites for

practicing Buddhists, a true global center of Buddhism and a melting pot of cultures.

However, in the spring of 2001, Taliban leader Mullah Omar issued a fatwa giving the order to destroy the two Buddha statues. The world was up in arms. Until then, neither the years of looting of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage nor the religious fanaticism of ‘God’s warriors’ and its devastating consequences for the people of Afghanistan had provoked much interest. Now, all of a sudden, UNESCO was hastily sending a special envoy to Kabul, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York had offered to purchase and seal the statues in their niches. But to no avail.

At the beginning of March 2001, the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan were blown up by specialists belonging to the Al Qaeda terror organisation.

One of the cave-dwellers is named Sayyed Mirza Hussain. He is one of the very few people to have directly witnessed the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. Sayyed relates how the Taliban initially attempted to hack away at the Buddha and the frescoes adorning their niches. And how they then began attacking the statues with tanks, grenades and anti-aircraft missiles. But even those attacks caused much less damage than was expected. Frustrated by their failings, the Taliban positioned huge quantities

of mines, grenades and bombs at the feet and shoulders of the statues, and set off one enormous detonation. The torso of the giant figure, however, remained intact. Only after some 20 days of senseless attacks were specialists flown in at the beginning of March 2001 to blow up the two giant Buddhas.

Following the destruction of the Buddhas, the world suddenly began to take an interest in the remote Bamiyan valley. The ‘liberators’ arrived, followed by journalists and charity organizations. Then, once again, life on the cliff face took a dramatic turn. Since spring of 2004, the caves and grottoes in the cliff face are abandoned and empty. Sayyed Mirza and the other families have been resettled and now live in a sterile village of huts on a high plateau, at least two hours walking distance from the bazaar. A windy place, without water and devoid of any community structure. What had happened? The governor of Bamiyan and a French charity decided that the cliff and the Buddha niches were now part of UNESCO’s global heritage, and that the cliff-dwellers were no longer welcome. UNESCO was outspoken in its protests. They had always been firmly against any resettlement plan for the cave-dwellers. After all, according to UNESCO, people had lived in the cliffs of Bamiyan for centuries, and the residents had protected the frescoes in the caves from looting. But the protests were in vain.

The cave-dwellers of Bamiyan were forbidden from living in the cliffs.





# BIOGRAPHY

## Biography Christian Frei

Christian Frei is considered to be one of the most renowned contemporary documentary filmmakers. Born on September 16th, 1959 in Schönenwerd, Switzerland, he studied visual media in the Department of Journalism and Communication at the University of Fribourg. He shot his first documentary, "Die Stellvertreterin" (the Representative) in 1981, and has been working as an independent filmmaker and producer since 1984. He created several short and educational films and works regularly for Swiss National Television 'DOK'.

In 1997 he produced his first feature length documentary, "Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel", the portrait of a Cuban family torn between loyalty to revolutionary ideals and the desire to emigrate to the United States.

In 2001, this is followed by "War

Photographer", the portrait of James Nachtwey, whom Frei accompanied to various places of war and calamity around the world. "War Photographer" is nominated for an Oscar in the category of 'Documentary Feature' and receives numerous international awards.

2005 saw his third documentary feature, "The Giant Buddhas", a film journey into the world of fanaticism and diversity, terror and tolerance, ignorance and identity. The film revolves around the destruction of the two giant Buddha statues in Afghanistan's remote Bamiyan Valley.

In 2006, Frei began research on "Space Tourists", an essay on space tourism.

In 2006-2007, Christian Frei is a visiting lecturer on Reflection Competence at the University of St. Gallen, and president of the 'Documentary Film commission' of the Swiss Ministry of Culture.

He lives and works in Zurich.

### Filmography (Selection)

- 1981 **Die Stellvertreterin** (50') (Documentary)
- 1982 **Fortfahren** (Co-director) (40') (Documentary)
- 1984 **Der Radwechsel** (24') (Documentary)
- 1997 **Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel** (90') (Feature length documentary)
- 1998 **Kluge Köpfe** (53') (TV Documentary for SF)
- 2000 **„Bollywood“ im Alpenrausch** (52') (TV Documentary for SF)
- 2001 **War Photographer** (96') (Feature length documentary)
- 2005 **The Giant Buddhas** (95') (Feature length documentary)



# BIOGRAPHY

## Biography Peter Indergand

Swiss cameraman Peter Indergand is born on February 26th, 1957 in Crest, France. After six semesters of art history and English studies at the University of Zurich, he attends the American Film Institute AFI in Los Angeles, where he completes his degree in photography in 1982. Between 1977 and 1981, he gains experience as cameraman in a number of films made by a group of film-enthusied friends.

In 1984, Peter Indergand and Rolando Colla found the film production company Peacock in Zurich. Together they make feature films such as “Le monde à l’envers“, “Oltre il confine“, the television film “Operazione Stradivari“ and the short films “Einspruch II“ and “Einspruch III“ (Objection II and Objection III) In 1989, Indergand leaves Peacock to work as an independent cameraman.

Since then he has filmed numerous feature and documentary films in various countries, including his first collaboration with Christian Frei, “Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel“ (1997). The film “War Photographer“, Christian Frei’s portrait of the photographer James Nachtwey, gains international acclaim and is nominated for an Oscar in 2002. In 2004, Peter Indergand receives an Emmy nomination for the film.

Back on Christian Frei’s team,

Indergand films “The Giant Buddhas“. In 2005, he films “Störtebeker“, a feature film about the legendary pirate Klaus Störtebeker. That same year, he films “Play your own thing“, a film about jazz in Europe.

Peter Indergand lives in Winterthur, Switzerland.

### Filmography (Selection)

- 1989 **Face of the Enemy** (feature film by Hassan Ildari)
- 1993 **Gasser & Gasser** (documentary film by Iwan Schumacher)
- 1995 **Der Nebelläufer** (feature film by Jörg Helbling)
- 1997 **Zwei im Berg** (feature film by Christoph Kühn)
- 1997 **Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel** (documentary film by Christian Frei)
- 1998 **Le Monde à l’envers** (feature film by Rolando Colla)
- 2000 **Gran Paradiso** (feature film by Miguel Alexandre)
- 2000 **Heidi** (feature film by Markus Imboden)
- 2001 **War Photographer** (documentary film by Christian Frei)
- 2002 **Oltre il confine** (feature film by Rolando Colla)
- 2003 **Ni Olvido ni perdòn** (documentary film by Richard Dindo)
- 2003 **Sternenberg** (feature film by Christoph Schaub)
- 2004 **Grüße aus Kaschmir** (feature film by Miguel Alexandre)
- 2005 **Störtebeker** (feature film by Miguel Alexandre)
- 2005 **The Giant Buddhas** (documentary film by Christian Frei)
- 2006 **Play your own thing** (documentary film by Julian Benedikt)

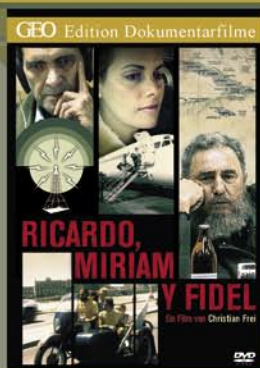






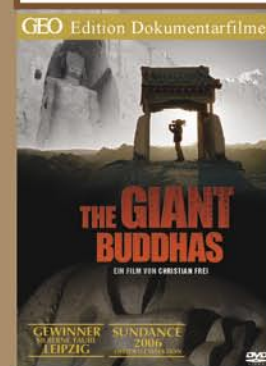
### Ricardo, Miriam y Fidel was shot in

- 01 Havana, Cuba (March/April 1995)
- 02 Sierra Maestra, Cuba (October 1995)
- 03 Miami, USA (October 1995)
- 04 Washington D.C., USA (October 1995)
- 05 Florida Keys, USA (October 1995)



### The Giant Buddhas was shot in

- 12 Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan (February 2003, August 2003, March/April 2004)
- 13 Kabul, Afghanistan (April 2004)
- 14 Al Jazeera TV-Station, Doha, Qatar (March 2003)
- 15 Mogao Caves and Gobi Desert, Dunhuang, China (October 2003)
- 16 Xingjiao Temple, Xian, China (November 2003)
- 17 Leshan Grand Buddha and Oriental Buddha Park, Leshan, China (November 2003)
- 18 ETH Zurich, Institute of Geodesy and Photogrammetry, Switzerland (December 2003)
- 19 UNESCO Headquarter, Paris, France (June 2003)
- 20 Marc Bloch University, Strasbourg, France (December 2003)
- 21 Munich, Germany (December 2003)
- 22 Toronto, Canada (December 2004)



### War Photographer was shot in

- 06 Kosovo, The Balkans (June 1999)
- 07 Ramallah, Palestine (October/November 2000)
- 08 Jakarta, Indonesia (May/June 1999)
- 09 Kawah Ijen, A Sulfur Mine in East Java, Indonesia (October 1999)
- 10 New York City, USA (May 2000)
- 11 Hamburg, Germany (January 2001)

