

UTAMA

Bolivia (2022) 87 minutes

Director: Alejandro Loayza Grisi

Cast: José Calcina (Virginio)

Luisa Quispe (Sisa)

Santos Choque (Clever)



Screening 4th October 2023 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

Virginio and Sisa live high on the Altiplano in Bolivia. They have lived all their lives as poor subsistence farmers caring for a small herd of llamas. Life has always been hard, but climate change has brought drought in recent years and there is no longer any water left in their village. Virginio is also becoming unwell and struggles to walk the miles to find water for his herd. Yet the old couple resist the appeals of their grandson to join the rest of the family in the city.

Reviews



Utama opens with the staggeringly gorgeous image of an elderly man walking towards the sun rising golden over mountains. This is Virginio (José Calcina), whose weathered face is as cracked as the earth beneath his feet. Virginio spends his days tramping across the plain grazing his flock of fluffy llamas; he and his wife Sisa (Luisa Quispe) live without running water or power...

It's Sisa's job to fetch water while Virginio grazes the llamas. The trouble is that rain has stopped coming to the region; the village well has dried up. "Time has gotten tired," a friend tells Virginio, to explain the drought. But the truth is that climate change is making life unbearable – not that global warming is ever spoken about.

In fact, until the couple's grandson Clever (Santos Choque) shows up wearing a hoodie, we could just as easily be watching a film set in the 1920s as the 2020s. Clever wants his grandparents to move to the city with the rest of the family. What he fails to understand is that the question for Virginio and Sisa is not where to live, but where to die. And when they are gone, there will be no one left in the family to speak the indigenous Quechua language or live their way of life. It's a gentle and superbly shot film.

Cath Clarke, The Guardian

A fictional tale that draws from real life, it takes place in the Andean plateau — the Altiplano — an arid, mountainous strip with altitudes nearing 14,000 feet above sea level that runs through western Bolivia. There, on hard, cracked land in a tiny, adobe home, a wizened Quechua couple of indeterminate age with no electricity and few outside contacts, yet graced with unflagging fortitude, wait for the rain that will sustain them, their meagre crops and small herd of llamas...

The Bolivian writer-director Alejandro Loayza Grisi has a background in still photography, and it shows. He has a feel for the drama of colour, form, scale and light, as well as a sensitive collaborator in his cinematographer, Bárbara Alvarez (her credits include [The Headless Woman](#)). With a lucid eye and a steady camera, he captures the region's brutal beauty, using stark contrasts — like birds-eye views of isolated houses and people — to accentuate its extremes. At other times, he zeros in on similarities, like those between the weathered faces and the desiccated terrain, suggesting ideas that the characters don't voice."

Manohla Dargis, The New York Times

Film Facts

- Virginio and Sisa (José Calcina and Luisa Quispe) are a couple in real life, non-professionals discovered by Grisi as he drove around scouting locations.
- *Utama* means 'our home' in the Aymaran language.
- *Utama* won the World Dramatic Prize at Sundance in 2022.

swindonfilm.org.uk