

**UTAMA by Alejandro Loayza Grisi**  
**SUNDANCE Grand Jury Prize World Drama Competition**

**THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER, Jordan Mintzer**

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/utama-review-sundance-2022-1235076472/>

**“BEAUTIFULLY REALIZED.** Shot in artfully composed and vibrantly colored widescreen by DP Barbara Alvarez, it resembles a cross between a minimalist Sergio Leone western and a series of photos by Sebastião Salgado. And yet the story at the heart of the film, which follows an older couple’s struggle to stay alive in the drought-ridden Bolivian highlands, is more than just a coffee-table-book view of indigenous culture; it’s a **powerful and cautionary tale of survival in a dying world.** Loayza Grisi remains attached to the land the same way that Virginio and Sisa do, **setting his small-scale drama against a grandiose barren backdrop, in a part of the planet that few movies have ever set foot in.** When Virginio’s health situation turns dire and the search for water grows desperate, he decides to gather the remaining members of his Aymaran community together to perform a sacrificial ritual that will hopefully save them all. The ceremony takes place at the top of a ragged mountain, and it’s one of the visual highlights of the movie, adding a mythical quality to the otherwise naturalistic scenario. *Utama* is very much a pessimistic film, never shying away from the realities faced by those who still inhabit the highlands of Bolivia. And yet it’s also convincingly, and sometimes movingly, optimistic — less about the possibility of the situation really changing, at least anytime soon, than **about the capacity human beings have to build stronger bonds, and to find dignity, as death slowly sets in.**”

**INDIEWIRE, Carlos Aguilar**

<https://www.indiewire.com/2022/01/utama-review-sundance-bolivian-film-1234692912/>

**“VISUALLY STUNNING. Sumptuously rendered.** The film thrives when it combines magical realism with gorgeously precise cinematography. Plays like a spiritual cousin to Peru’s 2018 Academy Award entry *Wiñaypacha*. *Utama* is embellished with a few sublime touches of magical realism and Bárbara Alvarez’s **gorgeously precise cinematography.** Early on, she frames Virginio’s reflection inside a pool of water with the open sky as background providing enough room in the composition for a flying condor to be added in post-production. The aesthetic meticulousness of that shot serves the filmmaker in reinforcing the winged motif as omen. Another standout shot sees Virginio in an angelical glow walking towards mountains drenched in soft twilight light. Whether maximizing the potential of mirrors and windows for dramatic effect in this inhospitable terrain with the help of art director Valeria Wilde or simply filling our view with the couple’s adorable pack of llamas weaning bright pink ribbons on their ears, **the images conjured in *Utama* momentarily let us into the language of the unknown,** of what we can not comprehend unless we are as in tune with the land as those whose existence is so deeply tied to it. Calcina’s performance involves a particular physicality, that of a gravely ill person with a superlative will to withstand the trial in hopes of prompt improvement. Every step he takes comes off as indignantly defiant. The **visually beguiling** effort, donned with **an original filmic idiosyncrasy,** from a promising storyteller in the region does expand on other pertinent themes in an effort, it seems, to not simplistically glorify tradition.”

**THE FILM VERDICT, Patricia Boero**

<https://thefilmverdict.com/2022/01/24/our-home/>

**“SPELLBINDING. MASTERFUL.** From the **stunning** opening sequence of *Utama*, **we know we’re in for an intense experience**, as we watch the sun rise above the mountains and hear the wind whispering across the Andean Altiplano. **Alejandro Loayza Grisi directs with confidence and sensibility.** The script uses only essential dialogue and most of it is in Quechua, the ancient language of the indigenous people. It, too, is threatened with extinction as Spanish, the language of the Conquistadores, overtakes the culture. None of this is hammered home but **delivered in subtle, carefully timed and layered brushstrokes as the narrative unfolds.** Virginio and Sisa are played with understated dignity by local non-pros Jose Calcina and Luisa Quispe. **Barbara Alvarez’s cinematography beautifully captures the luminosity of the high altitude landscapes.** The camera angles are always calibrated and surprising, as when we see a couple resting in bed from an overhead angle, or a shepherd’s face reflected in the water of a hand basin. **Sound is another of film’s outstanding features**, along with the sparing use of music to enhance the drama and the desolate beauty of the Bolivian highlands. *Utama* is **timely** in dealing with the double threat of climate change and cultural extinction. **It is a necessary, essential film** that will hopefully travel far and wide and impact audiences with its urgent, primal cinematic language.”

**ROGEREBERT.COM, Marya E. Gates**

<https://www.rogerebert.com/festivals/sundance-2022-leonor-will-never-die-utama-you-wont-be-alone>

**“MEDITATIVE AND DEEPLY ROMANTIC.** Rarely has the climate change crisis been addressed as organically as in Alejandro Loayza Grisi’s *Utama*. There are shades of John Ford and Sergio Leone in the framing of cinematographer Bárbara Alvarez’s **painterly shots**, evoking their later revisionist films. Jose Calcina’s melancholic performance reminded me of Mary Twala Mhlongo in *This Is Not a Burial, It’s a Resurrection*, another film about loss of a heritage and community that is so intrinsically linked with land. In perfect harmony with Calcina, **Luisa Quispe’s patient Sisa feels as lived as a performance can get.** Her stoic face and matter of fact way of talking belie a hidden well of emotions, that come to the surface in striking bursts. Never has a mortar and pestle spoken so loudly. *Utama* understands that renewal is just as inevitable as death, sometimes hope is a much richer path than despair, and that a home is the life you build with others.”

**THE PLAYLIST, Gregory Ellwood**

<https://theplaylist.net/utama-quechua-sundance-review-20220122/>

**“BREATHTAKING. CAPTIVATING.** Packs an emotional punch without endless exposition or symbolism. Grisi was inspired by the stories of the indigenous people he met traveling all over Bolivia. As one would expect, his own cinematic eye and the talents of celebrated Brazilian cinematographer Barbara Alvarez combine to fashion some **absolutely stunning imagery across the highlands.** What is more impressive is how, with decidedly sparse dialogue, Grisi **eloquently depicts the life of an elderly couple who truly love each other and are fiercely loyal despite their differences.** The world is constantly changing and not everyone is willing to leave their old life behind. And **Grisi’s willingness to share that naked truth and evade the pitfalls of a decidedly happy ending might be the film’s most impressive feat of all.”**

**SCREEN INTERNATIONAL, Wendy Ide**

<https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/utama-our-home-sundance-review/5166545.article>

**“VISUALLY ARRESTING.** A strikingly beautiful work which employs stunning widescreen cinematography from Bárbara Alvarez to capture the breathtaking highland vistas and the vast, brutal indifference of the landscape. Offers the audience a relatable connection with a way of life which is on the verge of extinction. The score takes the components of traditional Bolivian folk music – pan flutes, percussion, lute – but deconstructs and disrupts them. It’s disconcertingly effective – like elements of the life that Virginio and Sisa share, the music seems both familiar but also alien and unpredictable. **The casting of Jose Calcina and Luisa Quispe (non-professional actors who are married in real life) adds a layer of authenticity.”**

**VARIETY, Anna Marie de la Fuente**

<https://variety.com/2022/film/news/utama-sundance-1235158531/>

**“By telling the story of an elderly indigenous couple as they eke out a living in the arid Bolivian highlands, Alejandro Loayza Grisi brings home the all-too-real perils of climate change in his country and around the world.** But *Utama (Our Home)* is also **an enduring love story**, played by real-life couple Jose Calcina and Luisa Quispe, who’ve been married for 48 years.”

**VARIETY, Peter Debruge**

<https://variety.com/2022/film/reviews/utama-review-our-home-1235165876/>

**« sublime, quietly elegiac feature debut »**

**“Photographer Alejandro Loayza Grisi makes a stunning if understated transition to cinema in this portrait of an Indigenous couple threatened by drought on the Altiplano.”**

**THE MOVEABLE FEST, Stephen Saito**

<https://moveablefest.com/alejandro-loayza-grisi-utama/>

**“ABSORBING.** Gorgeous cinematography. *Utama* leads with the beauty of the land and conjures a cinematic oasis out in the desert. Easy to get lost in. Loayza Grisi’s insistence on authenticity gives a sense of place that conveys why it would be so hard to leave.”

**BACKSEAT MAFIA, Rob Aldam**

<https://www.backseatmafia.com/sundance-review-utama/>

**“A THOUGHTFUL AND TIMELY ECO-DRAMA.** Alejandro Loayza Grisi’s casting choices give the film a truly authentic feel while the rhythms of the highlands are captured by Barbara Alvarez’s sumptuous cinematography.”

**CINEUROPA, Fabien Lemerrier**

<https://www.cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/420717>

**« Alejandro Loayza Grisi crafts a highly promising, existentialist and mythical first feature film** about a family of three Quechua Indians against the spectacular backdrop of the Bolivian Altiplano”

**In Review Online, Luke Gorham**

<https://inreviewonline.com/2022/01/24/utama/>

Alejandro Loayza Grisi's debut feature is one that thrives according to its singularly cinematic qualities — not that there is a comprehensive definition of what exactly constitutes cinematic, but in this case it's the **striking, immersive compositions** put to screen.

### **Moviejawn, Gary M. Kramer**

<https://www.moviejawn.com/home/2022/1/25/sundance-2022-utama-watcher-amp-la-guerra-civilnbspnbspnbspnbsp>

**"Utama is a heartfelt film that is as moving as it is gorgeous."**

### **The Film Stage, David Katz**

<https://thefilmstage.com/sundance-review-utama-asks-for-death-with-dignity-in-the-bolivian-highlands/>

Loayza Grisi shows a skill with structure and observation

### **Cinapse, Elizabeth Stoddard**

<https://cinapse.co/sundance-2022-utama-9a139e36a874>

This Bolivian drama, which had its world premiere at Sundance, is a **striking meditation on the effects of climate change in an indigenous community.**

### **Cinemacy, Morgan Rojas**

<https://cinemacy.com/utama-review/>

Alejandro Loayza Grisi's remarkably powerful debut feature, 'Utama,' is a beautifully crafted film that radiates with sincerity.

### **Deadline, Todd McCarthy**

<https://deadline.com/2022/01/utama-sundance-review-1234920803/>

**Directing with a very sure hand and the confidence of a veteran, Loayza Grisi has fashioned an exceptional debut that reveals a heightened visual sense,** strong skills with non-professional actors (the two aging leads were evidently found in a village and had to be talked into participating) and the shrewd good sense to offer up something fresh and new.

### **The Movie Buff, Brayan De Jesús Rivera**

<https://www.themoviebuff.net/2022/01/sundance-2022-review-utama-a-solid-film-and-a-stunning-parable-on-climate-change/>

"Utama" is visually stunning, full of excellent performances, and provides a necessary reflection on climate change.

## **VARIETY**

June 25, 2022

"Sundance Winner 'Utama' Takes Top Prize at Transilvania Film Festival"

By Christopher Vourlias

<https://variety.com/2022/film/global/transilvania-film-festival-awards-utama-1235303511/>

## **SCREEN DAILY**



June 27, 2022

"Bolivian drama 'Utama' extends winning streak at Transilvania 2022"

By Martin Blaney

<https://www.screendaily.com/news/bolivian-drama-utama-extends-winning-streak-at-transilvania-2022/5172045.article#:~:text=Bolivian%20director%20Alejandro%20Loayza%20Grisi's,closed%20yesterday%2C%20Sunday%20June%2026.>

#### **CINEUROPA**

June 27, 2022

"The Transilvania Trophy goes to Alejandro Loayza Grisi's Utama"

By Ștefan Dobroiu

<https://www.cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/427177>