

# PRAISE FOR ALEJANDRO LOAYZA GRISI'S *UTAMA*

WINNER - GRAND JURY PRIZE - WORLD CINEMA DRAMATIC COMPETITION -  
2022 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

## LOS ANGELES TIMES, Justin Chang

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2022-01-30/sundance-film-festival-2022-critic-wrap>

"A movie of **stark Bolivian landscapes and startling emotions** in which a terrible drought threatens the way of life of an elderly couple and their herd."

## CNN, Thomas Page

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/29/entertainment/sundance-film-festival-2022-highlights/index.htm>

"**A HAUNTING, HYPNOTIC EXPERIENCE.**"

"An eco-parable of stark beauty."

"A well-crafted drama."

"First-time actors Calcina and Quispe deliver the kind of stoic, affectless performances that are a boon for a director. Both seem capable of writing whole chapters in a single look -- particularly Calcina as Virginio, whose fate seems tied to the land."

"The film looks great too, shot by Barbara Alvarez to maximize the grand sun-bleached vistas."

## VARIETY, Peter Debruge

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

"**BREATHTAKING.**"

"**SUBLIME, QUIETLY ELEGIAC.**"

"Alejandro Loayza Grisi makes a **stunning** transition to cinema."

"The film looks quite unlike anything else."

"Loayza Grisi bows in awe of the film's locations."

"Before turning to cinema, the helmer worked as a still photographer, and together with DP Barbara Alvarez (*The Headless Woman*), he conceived a **distinct visual sensibility** for the film."

"Movies made in this corner of South America are so few, so seldom exported, the scenery alone **seizes the imagination**, rendering spiritual what might seem mundane if we only saw it more often."

"When the characters are outdoors, *Utama* is told largely in **dramatic hi-def long shots**, the widescreen horizon typically centered in the frame, faded blue skies above, cracked earth below."

"Indoors, it feels more **intimate**, sharing the room where the couple sleep (in separate beds, together in spirit), basking in the comfort of silences made possible by years of marriage. A gesture as simple as Sisa reaching for Virginio's hand at the table says everything about the soulmates: They are one another's world."

**DEADLINE, Todd McCarthy**

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

**“EXTRAORDINARY”**

**“IT’S A FEAST.”**

“Precisely the sort of discovery that justifies film festivals and makes them useful.”

**“Grabs you from the opening minutes** and afterwards makes you want to tell your friends.”

**“Gorgeously made** and brings to life a backwater existence in a distant land with skill and assurance.”

“It’s unlikely you’ve ever seen a film made anywhere near here before.”

“A work that, with the help of the **endlessly fascinating** locations, **keeps your eyes riveted.**”

“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 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.”

“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/>

**“BREATH TAKING.”**

**“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.”

**ARTFORUM, Amy Taubin**

<https://www.artforum.com/film/sundance-measures-humanity-s-depths-in-a-toxic-world-87814>

“I streamed about thirty-five of the festival’s ninety-eight features without a glitch, and while I will want to see some of them on big screens—certainly the vision of a New York that is both seductive and punishing in *Nanny* and the **tragic beauty** of Bolivia’s Altiplano, now nearly uninhabitable because of climate change–induced drought, as depicted in Alejandro Loayza Grisi’s *Utama*, the grand prize winner in the World Dramatic Competition.”

**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.”

**THE MERCURY NEWS, Randy Myers**

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2022/02/02/sundance-fest-2022-delivered-some-gems-here-are-the-best/>

“**PROFOUND.**”

“Alejandro Loayza Grisi’s vision is **equally stunning and devastating.**”

**THE MOVEABLE FEST, Stephen Saito**

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

“**ABSORBING.**”

“Gorgeous cinematography.”

“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.””

**CINEUROPA, Fabien Lemercier**

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

“Tackled with great humility, simplicity, precision and control.”

“Alejandro Loayza Grisi demonstrates a solid understanding of the expressive power of images. His savoir-faire allows him to work with **a subtle economy of perceptions**, teasing out modest and soberly **moving portraits.**”

**CINEMACY, Morgan Rojas**

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

“**ELEGANT.**”

“Remarkably powerful.”

“As devastating as it is breathtaking.”

“A beautifully crafted film that radiates with sincerity.”

“A tightly packaged, slow burn of a film that radiates with heart.”

