

and around a riverside Buddhist monastery.

The youthful, bald-shaved, saffron-robed trainee monks include Be Ann (Toumor Xiong); his non-monk pal Amid (Amid Keomany) pays daily visits to the elderly, ailing Mon (Simone Milavanh) and reads aloud to her ‘Bardo Thodol’, the Tibetan Book of the Dead. This service is a crucial element in easing (or even enabling) Mon’s imminent transition from one plane of existence to the next.

Nothing prepares us, however, for what ensues when Mon expires. Patiño belatedly and deftly reveals his true experimental colours via a genuine coup de cinema of delightful audacity, executed with simple but overwhelming bravura. A magical quarter-hour later, the ruminative, observational “action” has elegantly segued to a Tanzanian island where a newborn female goat becomes the bleatingly wayward pet of Muslim schoolgirl Juwairiya (Juwairiya Idrisa Uwesu).

This is a seductively balanced world—in welcome contrast to the horrors with we’re currently being bombarded via all media, these are bygone ways of life apparently without conflict or strife, buoyed and propelled by harmony, simple goodness, and faith. In *Samsara*, the sensual and the spiritual flow together to intoxicating and invigorating effect—as the credits roll, it feels like our souls have been collectively cleansed. ♦

Coming soon to Acropolis:

- Chantal Akerman: Her First Look Behind the Camera + *Lá Bas* introduced by Nina Menkes (Dir. Chantal Akerman 1967/2006)—Los Angeles premiere, May 11 at 2220 Arts + Archives
- In Our Day* + *small flower* (Dir. Hong Sangsoo, 2023/2022)—May 26 at 2220 Arts + Archives

Acropolis Cinema presents:



April 21, 2024 – 2220 Arts + Archives

ABOUT THE FILM

Laos. Dozens of teenagers are living and studying together in Buddhist temples. A young man crosses the river every day to read a text to an elderly woman that serves as a guide for finding one's way through the afterlife. When the woman dies, her spirit begins a sensory journey towards reincarnation in its next body. To complete the journey, you have to entrust yourself to be carried away by the sound and light. In this conversation held on the border between life, death and meditation, Lois Patiño continues his exploration of the image as an immersive experience. As in a film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, the cycle of birth, death and reincarnation coincides with the experience of watching. The act of seeing and of telling stories becomes a unique visionary experience that literally leads the viewer into another dimension. *Co-presented by LA OLA.*

TRT: 113 min

Samsara: a transformative sensorial journey by Ben Nicholson

The following article was originally published by Sight and Sound, October 5, 2023

In Buddhist philosophy, the word 'samsara' refers to the nature of life as a cycle of deaths and rebirths. It is this process that Lois Patiño evokes to breathtaking effect in *Samsara*, a film with a triptych structure that follows a soul from the body of Mon (Simone Milavanh), an elderly woman in Laos, and later into the form of a baby goat in Zanzibar. It is a voyage that probes spiritual and cinematic boundaries to create a deeply moving meditation on what happens after we die and is, at times, a transcendent experience.

Around the halfway point of *Samsara*, some on-screen text explains that we will now follow the soul of Mon into the bardo, the liminal state between bodies—a 15-minute sequence that served as the film's genesis for Patiño. We must close our eyes for this section of the film, and the effect of the sensory symphony that unfolds is contemplative and genuinely transformational. Audio landscapes meld into one another, suggestive of shifting earthly environs and those far more ineffable. The light show—a combination of flashes and glowing colour fields, all viewed through closed eyelids—evokes the dappled sunlight of deep forest as easily as the heavenly grandeur of the beyond. The sequence is among the most enrapturing cinematic gambits of recent years.

Of course, the majority of *Samsara's* runtime occurs in the mortal realm. Patiño worked with different cinematographers for each section – both filmmakers in their own right – and the result is two distinct chapters representing these different incarnations. The scenes in Laos were shot by Mauro Herce and have their own otherworldly quality.

Centring on the occupants of a Buddhist temple, this segment is focused on the achievement of enlightenment and Herce's luminous cinematography emphasises its dreamlike aspects. Here novices dream of elephants in the forest and reflect on joining the monkhood, while Mon approaches the end of one life by preparing to voyage to the next.

Jessica Sarah Rinland's Zanzibar footage is far more tactile. Rinland's own films have often focused on the labour of the hands, which reappears here. A young girl Juwairiya (Juwairiya Idrisa Uwesu) cares for the family's pet goat, Neema—the reincarnated Mon—while the women of the community farm seaweed. This section constructs a more concrete, corporeal world. The juxtaposition between the two halves—the philosophical and political, the metaphysical and the material—seems to celebrate the breadth of lived experience. The passage between them allows us to marvel at cinema's miraculous capacity for the transportive and sublime.

Samsara: a quiet, radical masterwork by Neil Young

The following article was originally published by Little White Lies, January 24, 2024

For years a fixture in the film-festival circuit's more rarefied corners thanks to visually striking, entrancingly enigmatic shorts such as 2012's *Mountain in Shadow* and 2022's *The Sower of Stars*, 40-year-old Lois Patiño breaks out to significantly wider renown with his third feature-length picture *Samsara* – the first to obtain UK release.

A tripartite docufictional reverie that begins in Laos and ends in Zanzibar, the film's USP is a 15-minute bridging mid-section whose nature will not be divulged in this review as its effectiveness depends heavily on the element of surprise. Suffice to say that, A) it feels like new cinematic ground is being broken before our eyes, and B) the impact is exponentially increased if experienced with people in the dark of the cinema. Bottom line: even if you must travel a long way to catch *Samsara*, all effort and expense will be rewarded and then some.

Like many of his fellow filmmakers hailing from Spain's north-western province of Galicia, his approach has in the past profitably straddled the worlds of cinema and gallery/installation. And while distinctive and intermittently magisterial, his previous feature-length outings *Coast of Death*, from 2013, and *Red Moon Tide*, from 2020, together suggested he was ideally suited to smaller canvases. Not so, as it happily turns out.

The film's ambling early stretches will come as a surprise to those familiar with Patiño's innovative, sometimes esoteric and austere oeuvre. *Samsara* (the Sanskrit word refers to cycles of rebirth) initially seems to operate among the languid, torpid Southeast Asian zones of Thai master Apichatpong Weerasethakul. In well-worn slow-cinema style, with non-professionals playing versions of themselves, we observe the hushed quotidian in