



## **SAMSARA (U)**

Director: Lois Patiño

Starring: Amid Keomany, Toumor Xiong, Simone Milavanh

Spain, 2023, 1 hour 55 minutes, Lao/Swahili + English subtitles

*"A truly extraordinary piece of work (even if it drives you mad)"* **Donald Clark, The Irish Times**

Samsara is a Pali and Sanskrit word meaning 'wandering' as well as 'world'. There is also a broader meaning of 'birth and rebirth'.

Mon is being read to by a young man who visits the old woman every day. He reads to her from the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Mon tells him, "It's just as well we have dreams. When we go to sleep, they tell us such lovely stories."

In the middle of Lois Patiño's *Samsara*, you are asked to close your eyes until the film goes silent. This act of trust in the audience, inviting you to follow a soul from the moment of death, through Bardo and onwards to rebirth, is a cinematic first for most audiences. Patiño asks you to "watch through closed eyes" and to listen, and judge for yourself when to reopen your eyes.

Mon's is one story among several, in Laos and then Zanzibar. A Buddhist narrative and cinematic narrative combine to introduce and explore the idea of rebirth across time and space.

*Samsara* premiered in the UK at the London film festival in October 2023, screening at the BFI Imax, a setting that showed how well the film – immersive, detailed, sensorial – fitted the big screen. Landscapes shimmer in full grandeur; sounds blare out of speakers with deliberately varied degrees of intensity.

Patiño had already had the idea for a closed-eye film. Reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* sparked an interest in "how different cultures imagine the afterlife, how they relate to death". Pairing a closed-eye sequence with a story about the afterlife felt like "the perfect match".

"I needed a Buddhist culture"... He was intrigued by Laos, as he says its history is not too well-known in Spain... [And he] wanted the second part of the film to show a very different world, and inspiration struck after he was invited to Tanzania to give a film workshop. He spent 12 days shooting in Luang Prabang, eight in Zanzibar. He arrived with a crew of three from Spain. The rest of the production, camera crew and actors were locals [– he had a small budget and a real desire to tread lightly]... "We were lucky they trusted us and our intentions. I think it is important we have dialogue and curiosity across cultures... if we just focus on our own cultural identity ... nationalism grows". **Rebecca Liu, The Guardian**

Notes compiled by Matthew Evans