

**Samsara de Lois Patiño : une expérience
cinématographique au rythme méditatif**

Interview with Lois Patiño

Sous la direction de
Santiago Hidalgo

Coordination éditoriale Baptiste Creps Marnie Mariscalchi	Conception graphique Alex Delagrave
Révision (textes français) Alex Delagrave	Révision (textes anglais) Aleksander Janicki

Référence bibliographique

Hidalgo, Santiago (dir.). *Samsara de Lois Patiño : une expérience cinématographique au rythme méditatif*. Montréal: CinéMédias, 2025, collection « Écrans partagés ». <https://doi.org/10.62212/1866/41586>

Dépôt légal

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec,
Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2025
ISBN 978-2-925376-21-7 (PDF)

Mention de droits pour les textes

© CinéMédias, 2025. Certains droits réservés. Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International



Retranscription des entretiens et interventions

Les propos rapportés dans ce livre sont retranscrits dans leur langue originale. De plus, ils ont été édités afin d'en faciliter la lecture, avec l'accord des personnes concernées.

Mention d'appui financier

cinEXmedia est en partie financé par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada.



Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Canada

Mention de droits pour les images

Les captures d'écran du film *Samsara* sont reproduites dans ce livre avec l'aimable autorisation de Lois Patiño.

Interview with Lois Patiño

Santiago Hidalgo

A Multicultural Postpandemic Project

Santiago Hidalgo >

How did this project, which required you to immerse yourself in two different cultures, come together?

Lois Patiño >

Usually, my works start from an aspect, a form in the cinema language that I want to explore. It's not very common. It's common for artists, but not so much for filmmakers or documentary filmmakers. Here, the two countries where we filmed, Laos and Zanzibar, appeared after. At the beginning, I was exploring the idea of the invisible, how cinema reflects on the invisible, how the invisible can be shown in cinema or how you can work with the tools of cinema around this concept. I was dealing with this question and suddenly I discovered this book, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It is a guide for what one is going to find in the afterlife, step-by-step, chronologically. I'm also interested in how different cultures reflect about death and the afterlife, how each myth and legend appeared from these problems or this type of questioning of what can be after this life. So, these two things that I was interested in connected here. I thought it could be really interesting to make a film to be experienced with eyes closed, exploring this very literal idea of the invisible. And this idea of a journey during the film, with the audience having their eyes closed, connected with this journey through the Bardo, the afterlife in the Buddhist conception. I thought it could be a really interesting experience in a cinema theatre. After that, when I thought I needed two different cultures and countries, I thought the first one should be a Buddhist one. As for the second one, I wanted a big cultural contrast with the culture, the landscapes, and the attitudes of the people. I wanted the film to be a celebration of cultural diversity, and this is how it evolved.

Santiago Hidalgo >

It's very interesting that it started from an aesthetic or formal question and grew into what the film is. How did you establish contact with the two main sets?

Lois Patiño >

First, I thought about different countries because I don't have a connection with any of them. Mainly at the beginning, I was more thinking about a place that was not so shown in cinema. This is also another thing that I wanted. I wanted the screen to show cultures that are not so shown in cinema and on screens. Also, my film wants to be against how Western culture monopolizes



screens in general – that’s why I wanted to show cultures that are not so represented in cinema. So, I made a first trip to Laos to understand more about the place and see if it could work for me. During this trip, I discovered how kids and teenagers live mainly by themselves in the Buddhist temples. They organize very well by themselves, very strictly following the rules of the temple. I was very interested in this community of kids and teenagers. So, we contacted a production company in Laos, and we had an interview with the master of one of the temple schools to see if they would agree for us to be there. This was also during the pandemic, so we were the first foreign people entering the country after the pandemic. The kids and the teenagers were in this temple without going outside for almost two years, so it was a very strange moment there. Then, in Zanzibar, I was invited to give a video art workshop just after my trip to Laos, so I thought it was like a signal and I fell in love with Zanzibar: the atmosphere, the people. I discovered this aspect, the seaweed farms and how the women could make some money from that work. Also, it’s a Muslim country, so the contrast in terms of religion was very big and I thought it was a nice community to portray, these women with this seaweed farm.

Santiago Hidalgo >

One of the reasons I mentioned how you managed to create links with the two different places is that one gets the impression that you’re very close to the subjects, that it’s very intimate. Did you spend a lot of time in each place with those people?

Lois Patiño >

Not so much at the end because of the situation with the pandemic on one side and also because of my personal life with two kids. So, it was not as long as I wanted, but I think one of the key things was that we were a very small crew travelling from Spain, just three people and me, the rest of the crew were local people. In the end, we were more or less ten local people in the crew and four people from Spain. That made us enter the communities in a softer, nicer way. Also, we had an attitude of listening. We did many interviews with the people there to understand their wishes, their desires, and their fears, mainly in the two communities that I wanted to portray: the kids in the temple and the women in the seaweed farms. They were the two communities that we got closest to. I remember a meeting with the women from the seaweed farm. My girlfriend was breastfeeding our child, and they were all there with their eyes open. They understood what we wanted; they trusted us. We were very worried about these things we cannot take out of ourselves: that I’m a European guy going to Africa and Southeast Asia, that I have a position of

power. So, we tried to get into the project with many people working with us, we also developed a cinema workshop in Zanzibar, and they came to the project as assistants. As you see, the film mixes documentary and fiction; we shared the parts where the dialogues were written many times with the local crew and with the actors to try to gain as much expertise as possible.

Santiago Hidalgo >

That's interesting that you were very aware of that. Two questions: did the people that you filmed see the final film? And secondly, have you received any comments about this aspect that you mentioned, about a European going to film in different cultures and non-Western places?

Lois Patiño >

Yes, in Zanzibar we had the opportunity to show it at the Zanzibar Film Festival. The actors and the local people were invited and of course I was nervous. You know, a filmmaker is always nervous when people are going to watch his film, but they really loved it, many people were crying a lot. They are not actors, they are local people, and it was a very nice experience. In Laos, we didn't have the opportunity to show it in a theatre because the political situation there is not easy. I had to change the script a few times because, for example, they didn't want a monk as the main actor. So, I had to adapt the script for two actors. Finally, something that, I think, makes the film better. At the beginning, it was not going to be like that. I wanted the teenage monks to have conflict around living at the temple. However, the idea of having two actors came because of this problem with the government in Laos. Afterwards, I sent the link to the actors, and they saw the film. The one who is not a monk is a rapper in real life, as he is portrayed in the film, and he was a very natural actor. He was surprised by the film: of course, the actors didn't know at all about the part with the eyes closed^[1]. When we shot the film, I told them that we had another part in Zanzibar, but not so much about the central part of the film. That's why all of them were surprised. They saw it on a computer, not in a theatre, even though that is what I would have wanted. About the second question, yes, mainly in the US and in Canada, mainly from the academic world as well. This aspect of a European going to film abroad always appears as a point to be aware of before going to the film. Mainly, all the critics found the film nice in terms of the fact that I did it with respect and involved local people. It's always something to be aware of, as I was as the filmmaker. Aware of trying not to be condescending, of the exoticism and, you know, many aspects that come up, but of course I still came from my culture.

Santiago Hidalgo >

Actually, when I saw the film and I was thinking about it after, I thought that there's a logic within the film itself for a third perspective that is going to be required in order to make this universe possible, the one that you created. If it had just been one place, maybe the issues would have been different. But because you're looking at two different places, it does require a kind of outsider, by necessity in some ways, to look at these two different things and contrast them, compare them.

^[1] The film includes a 15-minute interlude featuring only sound and flickering light, designed to be experienced with one's eyes closed.



Lois Patiño >

Yes, I thought about that. If it's just one place, it could be more problematic, but I include more places and I want the film to follow more places like following the soul reincarnating in the future. I don't want to speak only about a portrait of this community, it's something more than this. There is a distance there. We are watching the Laos part and we don't know yet that the other one is going to appear, but when we see Zanzibar, there are always echoes of Laos. And this is what I wanted. I really wanted to make a celebration of cultural diversity, and I think it would be really problematic to forbid curiosity about the Other, if we only allow artists and filmmakers to have interest in something that belongs to one's universe. I think it's very important to have this multiculturalism, to open one's identity, to mix with other identities and to have this curiosity. I grew and I think also all the crew grew a lot, learning from each other while working together, while doing this film together. And I think many spectators will grow a lot and will be affected. Of course, I don't say that it's the only kind of film that we should do. I think it's very important to give people the power and money to make their own films, of course, just as we have that opportunity. I think it would be very interesting also for a filmmaker from Zanzibar to come to Europe to make a film. This film evolved also from a real interest in Jean Rouch's films. I saw one, a late Jean Rouch film, where he brings a man from Africa to Paris – it's the opposite and I thought that was interesting.

Technical, Narrative and Editorial Aspects of Production

Santiago Hidalgo >

You mentioned already that the film is mainly acted by non-actors. Were there any professional actors involved, or are all the people involved or filmed non-actors?

Lois Patiño >

There is one that used to be an actress; it's the old lady in Laos. It was very difficult to find a woman who wanted to act as a dead woman. Before being Buddhist, they were animists, and they believe strongly that it will bring bad luck if you act as an ill or dead person. So, the local producers didn't want to say that she had to play as a dead person, they were just saying an "ill person." And even with that, it was impossible to find anyone. We found one, but her son heard what we wanted and forbade her to play. Then, we found another one, but the villagers found out, and they forbade her. They said that to compensate for the bad luck, they should kill a buffalo as sacrifice. So finally, we went for actresses and even with her, with Mon, at the end of the shoot we performed a ritual with her family and her neighbours to cleanse away this potential bad luck. There were bracelets and smoke; it was a very beautiful ritual to close the shoot. She's the only actress.

Santiago Hidalgo >

One of the more complex parts of the film for me was the narration. Sometimes this film seems to have narrators that appear suddenly, and the actor's kind of the anchor of the story. For example, the lady who goes to buy the machine for making seaweed soap essentially conducts a short interview with the person who's selling it. Other times, we're following characters, or in the case of Zanzibar, an animal, and yet other times, we seem to be in a kind of disembodied position, like the camera that wanders a little bit here and there away from the action. How did you conceive the narration yourself when you were making it? How did you envision the storyteller?

Lois Patiño >

For me, it was a mix of both. Sometimes more fiction in which we follow the action and the characters, some other times a more contemplative documentary, a sensory experience. For me, it was a mix of a documentary portrait of the communities, the women working on the beach, the kids living in the temple, and inside that reality, we made some fiction, action parts, like the child who appears outside the temple, the Buddhist kids that need to go to another temple with the boat, and the goat in the other part. I wanted also to break with the anthropocentric and go towards the animal. So, it had these two levels. Sometimes when we were going more documentary, we went more out of the action, we were more descriptive, and then when it was more fiction, we articulated it more classically.

Santiago Hidalgo >

But the editing process, you had a clear idea of what you wanted to attain as a final film, or is it something you built as you went along?

Lois Patiño >

Well, the film is shot in 16 mm, very low budget, so we didn't have much. I couldn't record for a long time. I think in total, the shooting was like twelve days in Laos and eight days in Zanzibar. We had this small, minimalist fiction narrative in both places and then the community to portray. So, we shot the fiction with precision and for the documentary part, we were more open to the things we could find. Since I'd been living in the temple with the kids for five days, more or less, I understood their daily life. I came during their classes, when they were with their teacher, and to the place where they relax and sleep. I wrote a script, a documentary script for different elements and then we had the fiction script, and we were doing both of them.

Santiago Hidalgo >

You mentioned that you went to the locations with a small crew. Who was part of the crew? The director of photography and who else?

Lois Patiño >

Yeah, for the director of photography, I worked with two of them, because as the film was about this idea of reincarnation, I wanted the film to relate reality in a different way in each part. In the first part, it was a Spanish cinematographer and filmmaker, Mauro Herce, and in the second part, a British-Argentinian filmmaker, Sarah Jessica Rinland. For her, it was the first time being a cinematographer outside of her own films. But I called her because in her films she works very nicely with hands. Her films are mainly hands touching things and doing things. And as we were arriving to the Zanzibar part from a very spectral and ethereal part, I wanted to go more tangible again, to touch things again. This is why I recruited Jessica for that part. The other important person is the sound designer, Xabier Erkizia, from Spain. He also did the direct sound, the recordings in both places, and the middle part with the eyes closed. He developed that and he also made the music for the film. Also from Spain, we had one producer who helped with everything and then the local producers who were a team of four or five people. There were two assistants for the camera, one assistant for the sound and more people working with us and with the actors.



Santiago Hidalgo >

This is your first film using celluloid. It presented some limitations for you in terms of how long you could shoot different shots. The first shot of the film is maybe the longest in the film.

Lois Patiño >

It is.

Santiago Hidalgo >

And after watching the first scene, I had the impression that it was going to be a lot of long takes and a bit slower than what it turned out to be, because the editing gets a bit quicker. But was this a preference on your part to have shorter shots, or was it because the limitations of celluloid gave the film its own structure, its own rhythm in the editing, since you had to be more economical in your shooting?

Lois Patiño >

The thing is that I decided to go to celluloid also because I wanted to change my way of shooting. I used to work from an accumulation of images and then I would find the film afterwards. And here, I wanted to think better about the film that I wanted to do and the images that I wanted to film, to be more precise. This is why I made that decision. Well, of course, as I wanted to talk about some spiritual, ethereal aspects of reality, the celluloid, the “heartbeat” or “materiality” of the celluloid, worked better in that direction. But mainly, it was because I wanted to change my method. I didn’t think at the beginning about this shot being the first image. But when I shot it, I thought it was perfect for the start of the film. Also, because everybody has their eyes closed, and it’s the same thing that I’m going to ask the audience 45 minutes after that image. It was like this idea of the echoes. The idea of the eyes closed also appears many times during the film. We start in Zanzibar with a girl who is sleeping. There is also the idea of the Bardo, that is this space between death and reincarnation, the afterlife. In Buddhism, there are other bardos that represent different states of consciousness. Dreaming is a bardo, meditation is another one, so I wanted to include, little by little, this idea of the different states of mind.



Santiago Hidalgo >

How did the fact you shot it on film impact the way you edited the movie? Is it different from when you edit on video? I know we can transfer film images to video and use the same video editors that we use normally. But was your approach different?

Lois Patiño >

It's different because the material that you get is different. It's shorter. Speaking about my films, here I had a more articulated script, whereas before I just had a list of images and situations that I wanted to shoot and had to put them in order, to find the order. So that was the main difference. In terms of duration and contemplative experience, it affects the shooting more. In the editing, of course, I tried to expand to the maximum the length of the shoot, because I am interested in trying to find an intimate experience from a long duration and a calm rhythm.

Santiago Hidalgo >

It often seems that the film attempts to explain what reincarnation is, but almost for children, because the children in the film are often listening to what an elderly person is saying about reincarnation. It has a didactic component. But there is one scene, the last scene of the film or as we get close to the last scene, where things turn a little bit darker. Once the goat is separated from the girl, the boat gradually moves away... It's a bit of a scary situation. I'm worried about that goat, especially because of some sounds offscreen that seem a little bit supernatural. How would you characterize this last sequence within the theme of the film and what you were trying to accomplish?

Lois Patiño >

For me, the goat is very frightened. She's by herself and not knowing where she is, lost by herself. And so, she is scared. In the script, I wanted to create a situation where we can think that the goat may die, where we are put into the goat's skin and we are going through this scary situation. Again, working a lot with the goat's sounds and space. Also, the sound designer made really sure to understand how goats hear, but they hear in a very narrow way and we didn't want to do that in the film. Still, we go into her experience there. Before the cave in the last scene, we have the most didactic sequence of the film, the conversation between the mother and the girl when she essentially explains the goal of the film, trying to see different perspectives of death and dying in different cultures.

Rhythm and the Spectator Experience

Santiago Hidalgo >

How would you characterize the rhythm of the film? And just overall, were you very conscious of trying to create a specific kind of a rhythm to the film or was it more intuitive?

Lois Patiño >

I think I have a sense of rhythm that I build from film to film. And I think the sensitivity of a filmmaker mainly appears here, in the sense of rhythm. Maybe sometimes with some images, I found that I had to be faster than I wanted because of the material. But I don't want the images to appear just as an illustration of the narrative. I want the viewer to be able to live in the film, in the landscape, in the image. So, we needed to give enough time for the spectator to go into the image and come back, for the image to see and for the viewers to feel that the image is looking at them. Here appears the idea of the aura. I learned this when I was very young, with my parents being both painters. One day, my father took a glass of water and told me, "Look at the glass. Look longer, look longer, look longer..." And suddenly, the glass appeared as something very weird. That lesson affected me a lot.

Santiago Hidalgo >

That lesson is actually represented in the film in the scene where the two boys are looking at the tree. And I had exactly the experience you described. The longer I looked at the tree, the more I started to see things beyond the tree and even felt the tree. It was a strange experience.

Lois Patiño >

This is the first time someone tells me that, but I tried hard. And this is one moment when I felt I didn't have enough images of the tree. And as I wanted the viewer to have the same experience Amid is having, I had to do that trick of superimposition with the tree, to make it longer because I didn't have enough material.

Santiago Hidalgo >

I'm very curious to know what children think about it, because of the rhythm. I kind of felt at different times, because of the introduction of phone technology at different moments in the film, that there is a contrast also at this level, not just between the two cultures, but between





modern rhythm and something more traditional or more rural. Because everybody feels or has a sense that everything is so fast now, that the spaces that you chose to film there are by nature places where the rhythm of life is slower. Was this deliberate also on your part to create this contrast not just between the cultures, but between like the present and the past?

Lois Patiño >

I think it's something that I have internalized more, because I know that I'm interested in proposing this kind of experience in my film. I was not thinking about it as present and past. Here, I was interested, or surprised at the beginning, by this idea that in this film we are seeing the Buddhist people in their temple in 2022. But if we recorded in the 1980s, it would probably be the same. The only difference is the telephone. The rhythm would be the same. This is the present; I like the idea that people understand the film was shot in 2022. That is the past, because it's the past of Western culture in a way. It's the past not in the sense of a progressive line; it's the past chronologically, you know, but it could be our future. So, it was more about, you know, reflecting about the rhythm, mainly the external, but also the internal, rhythm that we live in.

Santiago Hidalgo >

One aspect that, in my opinion, contributed to avoiding exoticism is the presence of phones in the film. They are quite prominent. You wouldn't expect this if the idea was to create an exotic place separated from the rest of the world. Was this a deliberate choice on your part to integrate this into the film?

Lois Patiño >

It was impossible to avoid. Of course, I included them also because we felt that without the presence of the telephones, someone would think, like I said before, that this film was shot twenty years ago or thirty years ago, also because of the 16 mm texture. But the reality of the teenagers in the temple is that they cannot go out of the temple as they please. They need a reason. So, they allow them to have a telephone. They don't have Wi-Fi in the temple because otherwise they will be connected all the time. They are not allowed to play any sport or to play music, so the telephone is a way to go outside of that reality for a moment. And all of them are on the phone any time they can.

Santiago Hidalgo >

When I walked out of the film, I told my brother: “The film is asking you to make a commitment, a commitment that you’re going to spend the time that you need to watch this film.” This commitment is a very important part of the film experience. And in today’s context, with everybody looking at little images all the time on their phone, and very quickly, and thirty-two-second clips, the experience of seeing your film or any film really, but yours especially, feels like you’re being asked to calm down. It takes some time to get into that rhythm of the film because we’re used to speed. But then, when you sit down, and you commit to watch the film, there’s a moment of time when you adapt to this new rhythm that you’re observing on the screen, and it feels very good. There seems to be something there that is valuable, especially in today’s context. Your film doesn’t just create a mental experience, it creates a physical experience, especially in the middle eyes-closed section. And when I mentioned this aspect of commitment to my brother, he said: “Well, in the film itself, the characters are committing themselves to a meditative life, a spiritual life, a religious life.” There’s something there at this level, to me, that this film creates as well.

Lois Patiño >

I find that my films are a kind of resistance to the acceleration of the rhythm of life. I don’t do films in this way because of that. I do it because it’s my way of being in the world. But I know they can be a resistance place for that. And this commitment that you speak of, and the fact that the first image is the longest one, is a thing I often do in my films. The first image is the longest because it creates intrigue and if you can sustain this first one, now, the rest is going to be easier because it’s going to be faster. You create expectations, and after these hard expectations, it goes softer.

The Importance of Sound for Rhythm and the Meditative Experience

Santiago Hidalgo >

How did you work with the sounds while you were editing? Did they determine the rhythm in your editing, or did you edit the images first and then add the sound after?

Lois Patiño >

I'm more of a visual filmmaker. I came to cinema from photography, you know, as others come from theatre or literature. For me, it was from the image, from photography and painting, as my parents are both painters. For this film, the editing process was strange. It was very hard to sync the sound and the image because I did the sync with just the digital monitor, not on the celluloid, to save a little bit of film. I did a first cut of the whole film without sound. No sound at all. Then, I synchronized only the images that I used in the film, so I could save a little bit of effort, but without understanding what the people were saying in the documentary part. In the fiction part, I trusted the actor to say what was in the script. The local crew we had on the film helped me to do that. Most of them didn't speak English, only the monk protagonist, the main character, did. I chose him because he spoke English. Of the 200 people in the temple, there were four teenagers who spoke English, so I took one. So, after this first edit, without sound, I did one with sound, but without the subtitles for what they were saying in the dialogues. Then, I had all those parts translated and did a new edit with all the elements in hand. I worked on the sound alone. I had all the tracks that the sound designer Xabier Erkizia had recorded, and I worked to have the atmosphere I wanted there. It's ultimately more or less what he did, but with improvements. But in terms of sound I did the tone, the rhythm, and the atmosphere for the parts where we have our eyes open. Xabier worked the sound differently for the part where you have your eyes closed.

Santiago Hidalgo >

During the first shot, the sequence of the kids in the temple, we hear different sounds in the background. It sounds like a bug or bugs chirping. It's hard to know what it is, but it really already triggers a state of meditation. What are those sounds in that first scene?

Lois Patiño >

Xabier found some water with frogs next to the temple, so it was not the real sound of what we were shooting, but it was like 100 m away. When I was checking the ambient sound that he'd recorded, I found this one. I knew that he recorded there because he told me: "I found this, the sounds of these various places." And I just put it there and yes, it brings you to a rhythm.

Santiago Hidalgo >

That's very interesting that you're trying to create a spectator experience. It seems that you are trying to create an analogous experience to what the content of the film is about, which is a kind of transcendental experience of reincarnation. You're looking for the spectator to have a

comparable experience throughout the film, except in the middle part, which is a different kind of experience. There's a feeling of being in a meditative state throughout all these images. Were you trying to construct this experience for the viewer?

Lois Patiño >

Yes, absolutely. And this is something I try to work on in general in my films. At the beginning, I was not so concerned about this. I was making films in an intuitive way. Indeed, I thought it was contemplative cinema, a contemplative experience and, of course, the contemplation and the meditation, if both go deep, they are very similar experiences. A couple of years ago, I understood that I was very interested in this, so I tried to go further into it and explore the possibilities of cinema as a meditative and intimate, introspective experience.

The Experimental Interlude

Lois Patiño >

For me, the whole film was a meditative experience but, of course, the middle part is different, it is in a way more aggressive. We are trying to bring you to the experience of death so, of course, it is harder. Some Buddhist believers who saw the film and many other people told me that they were crying during that part. It was really intense for them.

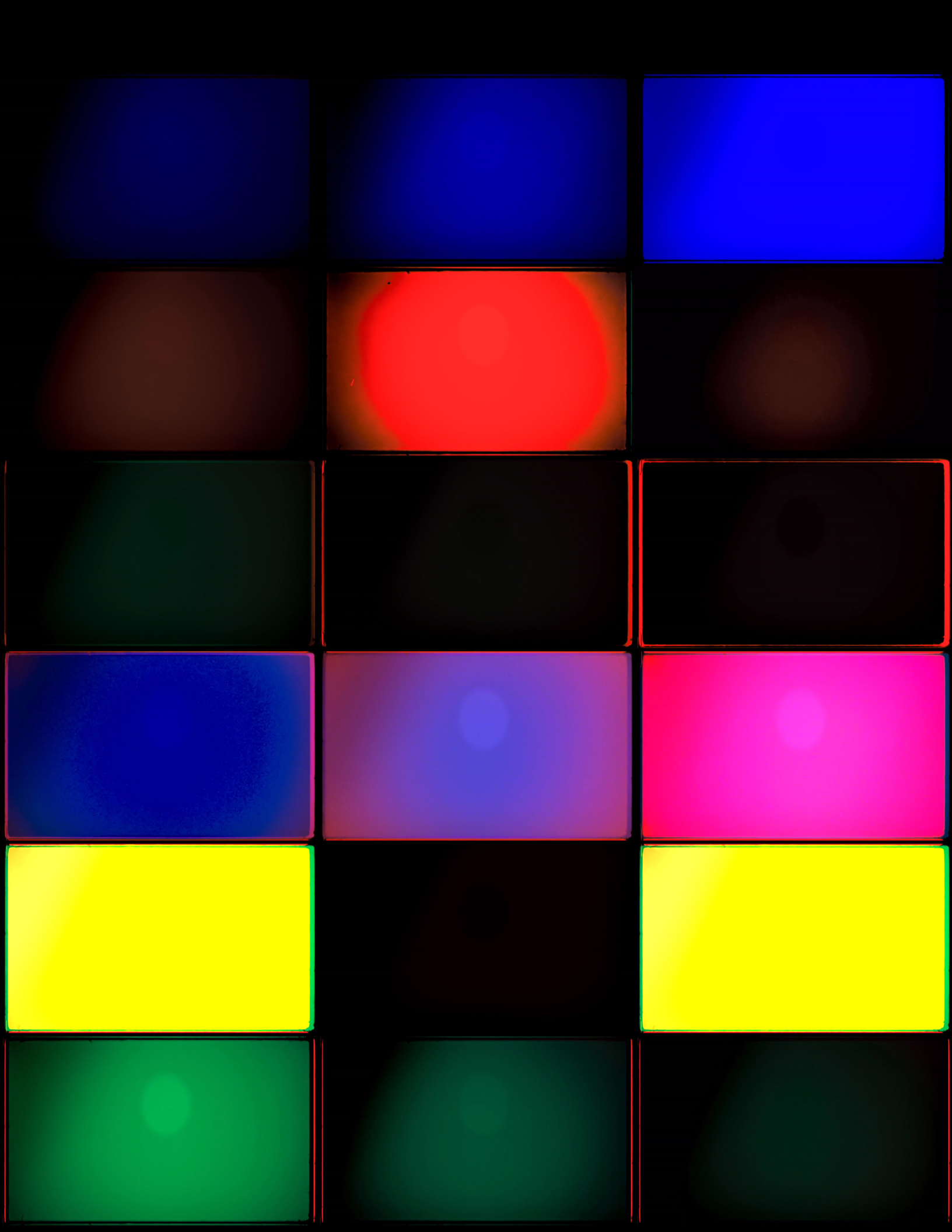
Santiago Hidalgo >

About the middle part, I think it's the first film and the first scene I've ever seen in my life that attempts to make a film inside the eyelids of the spectator. When you close your eyes, the light is flashing on the screen and different colours appear. It does create its own little film experience inside the eyelids. How did you come up with this idea?

Lois Patiño >

When I was exploring this idea of the invisible, I decided to make a film to watch with the eyes closed. And after probably one year, I thought about this concept. It was not directly influenced at that moment by what is called the Dreamachine but I knew about it. The Dreamachine is something that the Beat generation and William Burroughs created. It was like a lamp which had holes, and the holes were turning. They put their faces in front of the lamp and sometimes the light appeared, sometimes it was blocked. They used it while taking drugs or to have a similar experience to the drug experience. The work of James Turrell is also very inspiring for me. He's a light artist who creates light spaces. I saw a couple of his works in Los Angeles. To enter, you have to take off your shoes, enter a white space, and at the end there is an infinite space of light and colours. This work was called *Breathing Light*. We don't see anything, just light, but we don't know how far it is, it's infinite. In this work, the light was going up and going down, fading in, fading out very slowly, and the colour was changing very slowly as well. You were feeling that you were breathing light. The light was going inside you and out of you, but also the light was breathing by itself. It was a really powerful work and very spiritual, very meditative and working







with sounds. This was different from the way I worked, because I worked more with flickers and the retinal persistence, and it changed the experience a lot. When I was editing it, I was in the dark and I was exploring how the experience felt with two frames of light, two frames without light, five frames of light, five frames without light... The experience changed a lot with just these little changes, and I worked towards that.

Santiago Hidalgo >

Do you inform spectators that there'll be a scene that has this kind of dimension to it beforehand?

Lois Patiño >

Individual festivals decided if they wanted to do it or not, because the film itself says that you have to close your eyes. If they don't close them, of course, epileptic people can have difficulties. At the beginning it's slow, but at the end, it's fast and it's powerful. So if you have your eyes open at that part and are epileptic, you may have a problem. At the Berlinale, when it premiered, they informed the public about it, and most festivals say it, I think.

Santiago Hidalgo >

There's a part that left me wondering what it was about, because there you hear a man and a girl, I believe. They're speaking Italian. What is that part?

Lois Patiño >

I told Xabier Erkizia, the sound designer, I wanted two parts there. For the interlude part in the middle of the film, we are more or less following the sounds described in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It says, "Do we hear a storm? Do we hear thunder?"... many sounds. So, what Xabier made was a poetic journey through some of these sounds. And then, in the second part, I wanted to show sounds from different places in the world. So, during our work Xabier recorded sounds in many different places, and worked with different atmospheres there. I wanted to try to evoke images for the spectator, like if these were places where the soul could be tempted to reincarnate.

Visual and Sound Aesthetic

Santiago Hidalgo >

What was behind the choice of shooting on film? It's quite clear that it's film. Not just because you see the sprocket holes sometimes or the gate, but just the image itself really is different from what you would see in video. The image is softer than what you find in video, and the colours are more saturated. It gives it the impression almost of a painting, especially in some scenes. In the waterfall scene especially, you have the impression of a painting, the colour of the water, the contrast between the different colours that we see there... They all seem to be very linked to the format that you chose. Was it deliberate on your part to make visible these different kinds of "impurities" in the image: hair, dust, seeing the edge of the frame?

Lois Patiño >

Yes, it was the first movie that I did on analog film. My previous works were all digital. So maybe there's something about this thing of being new to this that makes me really like the errors in the film, which, I think, makes it very alive. I like my previous work as well, I like the painting style and the work with colours and all this. We were very extreme on *Samsara*. I did the colour correction with the first director of photography, Mauro Herce, and I asked him to go very pictorial, and for the colour to try to find something extreme with the saturation. I think in the waterfall part we found something very interesting. The waterfall itself has an interesting colour, surprising because the stone is a calcareous stone, very white, and the water is very pure, but we made it more extreme. Also, in the film many people are sleeping, and we see the superimposition of layers sometimes, when they are sleeping, so I wanted to go little by little to a more oneiric aspect. In the waterfall sequence, in a way the oneiric and the real mix together, because the kid falls asleep, and then awakes.

Santiago Hidalgo >

I agree, it feels oneiric. Before the waterfall scene, I think there's a kind of background music that comes in, that starts to infiltrate, mixing itself with the location's sounds and becoming kind of meditative, like a meditative kind of music. When I watched the film, I had the impression afterwards that the sound and the image, although I would hear the sound, and it would correspond with what I was seeing, felt a bit unreal, like if it was recorded separately from the image. Were you able to record a lot in sync, or did you record the sound and the images separately?





Lois Patiño >

Well, both. When we are watching the images, everything is in sync. The sound designer recorded a lot more because he knew he was going to need the sounds for the atmosphere, and the middle part of the film with the eyes closed. But with the images, everything was in sync. As we didn't have much film, I was doing the clap in the digital monitor, so it was more difficult afterwards to do the sync, but yes, it's in sync. And I was trying to remember what is before the waterfall scene, and before the waterfall is when they travel on the boat. For the monks, it was the first time in their lives going on a boat on the river, so it was very special for them, even though they live very close to the river. And before that, we have a musical part. It ends when they are in the classroom with the teacher, and they are talking about the different tribes that live there and the different languages they speak in Laos. That's something that was important for me as well, to see that within Laos they have different cultures, just like in Zanzibar they have the Maasais. It was always different cultures inside cultures. We are living on a planet with different cultures, living more or less harmonically, or sometimes not so harmonically, but this was the intent of the film. Inside the countries there are different cultures, different languages, and even in the same city we have the monks and non-monks. So, it's a huge diversity of ways of living, understanding life and death, living together and everything.

Reception

Santiago Hidalgo >

What has been the spectators' reaction to your film? When you talk to people, what kinds of things do they say about the film?

Lois Patiño >

They are very touched. I didn't expect that. I was happy with the film and I knew it was something quite new or quite original that could be deep for people, at least with my sensitivity. But it was amazing. There is this platform called Letterboxd where people, whoever wants to, can talk about films. So, when you look up *Samsara*, you can see reactions from all over the world, all the different countries where *Samsara* was screened. I can go there and see the reactions. At the first screening at the Berlinale, two people stood up to say that they would never in their lives forget the experience. At the same screening, one woman came up to me, her mum was dying, and told me her way of relating with that and how the film helped her in that moment. I take, in the film, this attitude of being calm with the process.

Santiago Hidalgo >

That comes across. It's clear with this middle part that we're going through a kind of journey.