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Río Verde. El tiempo de los Yakurunas

Green River. The Time of the Yakurunas

Alvaro Sarmiento, Diego Sarmiento

Producer Alvaro Sarmiento, Diego Sarmiento. **Production companies** HDPeru (San Martín, Peru), Desfase Films (Cuzco, Peru). **Directed by** Alvaro Sarmiento, Diego Sarmiento. **Screenplay** Alvaro Sarmiento. **Director of photography** Diego Sarmiento, Jair Guillén. **Editor** Alex Cruz, Fabricio Deza. **Music** Winston Tangoa. **Sound design** Alex Cruz. **Sound** Carina Rosanna Tautu, Marco Panatonic.

Colour. 70 min. Spanish, Quechua.

Premiere February 14, 2017, Berlinale Forum

World sales HDPeru

The lush green of the foliage forms a quivering reflection on the surface of the Amazon. According to the legends of the indigenous people of the region, the Yakurunas live beneath the water, in submerged cities that are the mirror image of human ones. Yet the film deals neither with mythical creatures nor with legends, catapulting viewers instead right into the midst of this incredibly green world. The residents of this region fish, hunt, cook, weave and live under circumstances that are anything but simple or romantic; their existence is dependent on the river, with which they live in an extreme symbiosis. As they move away from the camera, they sometimes appear to become one with the forest on the banks of the river. Their hunting calls and chants merge with the loud sounds of the jungle. Eschewing any classical anthropological pointers, *Río Verde* invites viewers to rely solely on their eyes and ears to get their bearings in this Amazonian catchment area. Or to allow its cinematographic prowess to carry them away to a place where the river itself becomes a surface for projections of all kinds, much like a cinema screen.

Dorothee Wenner

The shadows of ancient cultures

We dedicate our lives to producing films focused on environmental protection and the defence of native people's rights. Over the past ten years, we have produced films in several farming communities in the Andes and the Amazon region of Peru. While different in content and themes, all of them share the aspect of denouncing social injustices against native people.

The Quechua-Lamistas elders are the protagonists of *Río Verde*. The film exposes the personal life stories of traditional farming families, fishermen and hunters.

We believe that the Amazon region has a lot to offer mankind across the globe in terms of a spiritual relationship to nature. It can give a much-needed positive perspective on what traditional cultures preserve. *Río Verde* is dedicated to the native people who survived the colonisation of the Amazon, where nine out of ten inhabitants died as a consequence of the rubber extraction boom during the 19th century.

The bodies of the elders in the film refer us to the ghosts of colonialism who come back bringing the memory of death, shadows of ancient indigenous cultures that are still alive, but in danger of disappearing as a consequence of global capitalism. Nowadays sixty-six per cent of native people's land in Peru has been concessioned to oil companies polluting our ancestral territories, causing deforestation, damaging our biodiversity and exploiting our natural resources.

Alvaro Sarmiento, Diego Sarmiento

"We pay tribute to their mystical universe"

Where did the idea for Río Verde come from?

Diego Sarmiento: The film began as an idea for creating a hybrid narrative that could express the Amazonian time: a mythic time, inspired by ayahuasca-induced visions [ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic brew made from plants and used in traditional spiritual medicine in the Amazon region, -Ed.]. Through poetic images, we pay tribute to the mystical universe of native communities living in the Amazon.

Alvaro Sarmiento: It was conceived as a cinematographic experience that could be screened in a cinema or as a video installation inside a museum space. The film deals with the borders between narrative and non-narrative language; it deconstructs linguistic codes used in fiction, experimental and documentary films; and it subverts the categories of film and contemporary art.

Diego Sarmiento: According to the legends from the Amazon, the Yakurunas are mythological beings, spirits of the water similar to the humans, who inhabit villages under the river.

Alvaro Sarmiento: The poetic images represent the visions of Tsunki, a primordial shaman. His songs provide a sense of guidance throughout the film. We symbolically submerge into the depths of the river so as to enter into the world where the Yakurunas live.

Diego Sarmiento: What we see is not only a register of our physical world, but also a metaphorical interpretation of the spiritual world of the native people from the Amazon.

Alvaro Sarmiento: The film immerses the viewer into a cosmogonic time, a time that precedes the time of modern societies. It is a world inhabited by the first family of farmers, the first wave of women, the first fisherman and the first

hunter. Characters appearing in the film not only exist in flesh and bone, but also exist as a representation of an ancient indigenous society to which the traditional costumes still worn today pay testimony.

Could you talk about the creative process?

Alvaro Sarmiento: Diego worked as the cinematographer while I elaborated the theoretical and aesthetic concept. Alex Cruz, Fabricio Deza and I also edited and organised the footage for two years.

How long did it take to make Río Verde?

Diego Sarmiento: We made around five trips to the Amazon to produce this film. In 2012, we travelled to San Martín [an Andean region in north-eastern Peru, -Ed.] to research, where we met two of the three couples who appear in the film.

Alvaro Sarmiento: But we finally defined the style of cinematic language and started shooting in 2014. We also went back to San Martín in 2015 and 2016. The film was edited in Cuzco [capital of the region of the same name in the middle of the Andean highlands, -Ed.]. It was around three years of work until the end of post-production.

Interview: HDPeru



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Alvaro Sarmiento was born in 1982 in Peru. From 2004 to 2006, he studied Film at the Universidade Estácio de Sá in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 2007, he started the HD Peru film production company. From 2009 to 2010, he studied Film Production at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, U.S.A. Alvaro Sarmiento is a producer, screenwriter and director, and the author of the screenplays for the short films *El sueño de Sonia* and *Hijos de la tierra*, both directed by his brother, Diego Sarmiento. *Río Verde. El tiempo de los Yakurunas* is his first feature film.



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Diego Sarmiento was born in 1984 in Peru. From 2003 to 2008, he studied Film and TV Production at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú in Lima. In 2012, he studied Executive Production in Medellín, Colombia. Diego Sarmiento is a producer, screenwriter, cutter and director. *Río Verde. El tiempo de los Yakurunas* is his first feature film.

Films

Alvaro Sarmiento: 2007: *La Oroya: Full Metal Air* (28 min.). 2008: *Wanka Willka* (28 min., Video Installation). 2011: *Cerro de Pasco: Deep Grave* (49 min.). 2012: *Rancas, From a Long Time Ago* (20 min.). 2013: *Kay Pacha* (13 min.). 2017: *Río Verde. El tiempo de los Yakurunas / Green River. The Time of the Yakurunas*.

Diego Sarmiento: 2008: *Wanka Willka* (28 min., Video Installation). 2011: *Cerro de Pasco: Deep Grave* (49 min.). 2014: *Hijos de la tierra/Earth's Children* (15 min., Berlinale Generation K-Plus 2014). 2015: *El sueño de Sonia/Sonia's Dream* (15 min.). 2017: *Río Verde. El tiempo de los Yakurunas / Green River. The Time of the Yakurunas*.