

A man with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a small, open notebook in his left hand and a pen in his right hand. He has a serious expression on his face. The background is dark and out of focus.

Sweet Potatoes

PRESS KIT

PRESS CONTACT:

Rommel Villa | rommel.villab@gmail.com

Andrea Porras | porrasma@usc.edu

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Short Film Written and Directed by Rommel Villa

GENRE

Drama/Historical

TAGLINE

Some relationships are not meant to last

30min | 2020 | SPANISH | USA | COLOR

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A background image of a laboratory. A scientist in a white lab coat is working at a bench with various glassware and equipment. The room has large windows and shelves with more lab equipment.

Synopsis

LOGLINE

1951, Mexico City. After synthesizing the main component of the contraceptive pill, young scientist Luis Miramontes deals with the religious and personal consequences of his groundbreaking invention.

SYNOPSIS

1951, Mexico City. After several unsuccessful tests, LUIS MIRAMONTES, an introverted young scientist father of four, synthesizes a hormone that could prevent pregnancies at TEXINE LABORATORIES. Back at home, Luis' fear of having more kids increases when LILIA, his loving wife, mentions she wants to have more children. The situation gets worse when ALFONSO, the town's priest and Luis' best friend, questions Luis about the work Texine has been doing. Luis lies to Alfonso saying he's not involved in that research, while in his personal NOTEBOOK, he confides his wishes of having fewer children and criticizes Alfonso's lack of understanding in the topic. At the lab, Luis celebrates his discovery with his bosses, but the celebration gets interrupted by a radio interview where Alfonso condemns Texine's work on the birth control pill. An upset Luis goes to church, ignores Lilia's request to buy a candle for the baptism of their baby Patty, and confronts Alfonso for calling the radio, making the last one question Luis' involvement in the research. Back at home, Lilia asks Luis to make amends with the Priest. Luis writes in his book again, asking God if he's a monster for imagining a world with fewer children.

The next day Luis goes to church with a basket of sweet potatoes, willing to talk to Alfonso, but once there, he finds pamphlets made by the church calling Texine Labs "Heretics". Luis storms his way to the Lab and drops his notebook outside the church by accident. At Texine, Luis and CARL DJERASSI, research director, develop an idea to fight back the pamphlets. At church, Alfonso reads Luis' notebook while listening to Carl Djerassi on the radio, promising the audience that the pill will be harmless and if anything, it'll increase the quality of life. Back at home later that day, Luis finds an agitated Lilia holding his notebook saying that Father Alfonso asked her to read it. Lilia reveals to Luis that she's pregnant, and after seeing Luis's negative reaction, she kicks him out of their house. Hurt and angry, Luis confronts Alfonso for betraying him. Alfonso asks Luis to leave, telling him their friendship is over.

Synopsis (cont)



SYNOPSIS (continued)

A defeated Luis goes back to the lab and reflects on his actions. Back at home, Luis apologizes to Lilia and reveals to her that he's terrified she'll die if they have another miscarriage, and promises he'll be a better husband and father. He shows her a baptism candle he made in the lab for Patty as proof of his love. Lilia gives Luis a second chance. The next morning, the Miramontes family go to church dressed in their baptism clothes. However, they're welcomed with posters and signs calling Luis and Tere "Heretics", and "Disrespectful of the laws of God". Alfonso excommunicates Luis from his church due to his work on the pill. In the middle of a humiliating silence, the Miramontes family leave the church they once saw as a second home. Back at home, Luis and Lilia gather around on the floor with water and their candle, and they baptize baby Patty.

Director's Statement

I come from a numerous family. My father has twelve siblings, my mom has fourteen. Family reunions were great. We were more than fifty people sitting around an infinite table eating, laughing, and playing together. It all seemed fine on the surface, but what I didn't notice were the sacrifices some of my relatives had to make in order to provide for their families. My uncle Carlos works as a teacher, carpenter, and DJ to make enough money to support his six kids, my grandmother spends at least five days, most of them sleepless nights, preparing meals for family reunions, and my mom, she left her career as a nurse in order to take care of my sister and I, all because of the taboos and lack of accessibility of birth control methods in Bolivia.

When I read the biography of Luis Miramontes, memories of my own life and my family's struggles came back to life, which encouraged me to tell his lovely story. Sweet Potatoes is a story about everlasting and rocky relationships. Luis was a young scientist who at the early age of 26, already had a few children and struggled a lot to provide for them. That encouraged him even harder to synthesize the main component of the contraceptive pill. Something I'm fascinated by about Luis is that he was one of the few scientists who didn't criticize faith but embraced it. From Sunday Mass and Baptisms to prayers before dinner, his good relationship with his wife got even stronger thanks to the guidance of their friend, the priest in town. However, things went south for Luis when the priest finds out he was working on the birth control pill.

As the story develops, we follow Luis' self-destructive obsession with his job and experience the consequences of his invention which includes his detachment from his family and the disapproval from his church. I think this is a good opportunity to show the humanity behind a young Latino scientist who was not recognized by the world for his brilliant mind. Instead, he was humiliated and condemned for his actions. However, through that painful process, he learned to cherish what really matters in life, his family.

Rommel Neilla



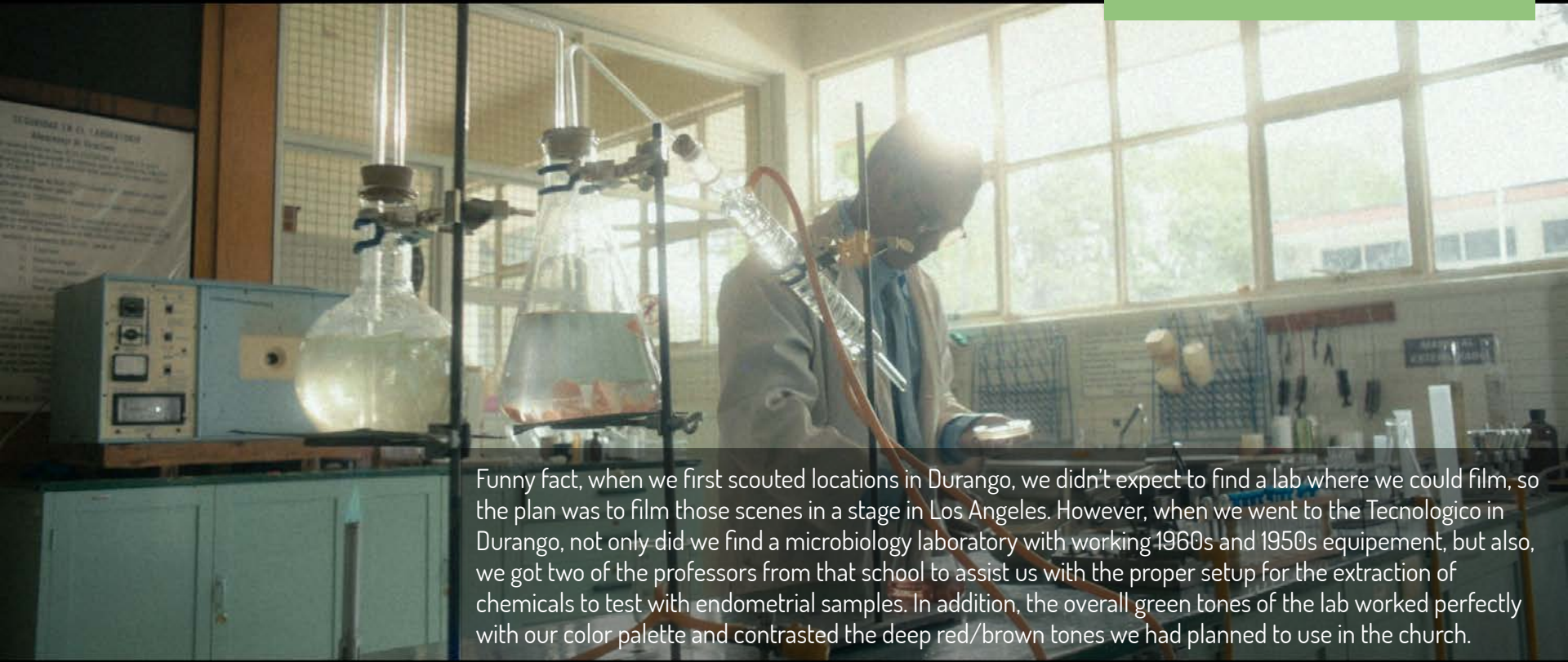
The Production

Sweet Potatoes was shot in June 2019 in Durango, Mexico. It was a nine-day production with three infrastructures as the main locations: The Analco Church, The Tecnológico de Durango College, and a farm house in Nombre de Dios. The exterior town locations were shot in Chupaderos, area where they shot some of the John Wayne movies.

It was very important for me to capture the essence of rural and urban Mexico, staying true to the colors, the environment, the vibe and the people. Therefore, it was an easy answer when deciding to film everything in Mexico with Mexican actors vs filming in Los Angeles, CA, mixing production footage with stock footage.



The Production



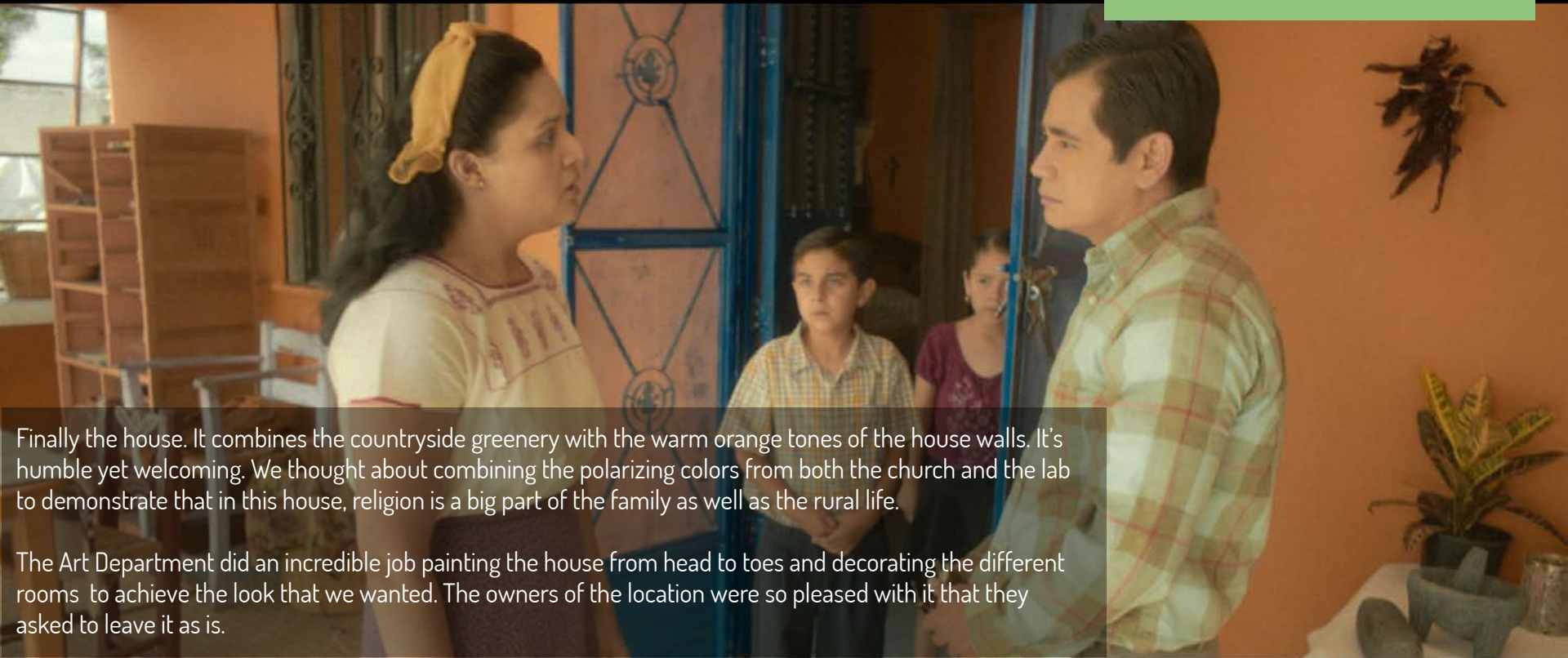
Funny fact, when we first scouted locations in Durango, we didn't expect to find a lab where we could film, so the plan was to film those scenes in a stage in Los Angeles. However, when we went to the Tecnológico in Durango, not only did we find a microbiology laboratory with working 1960s and 1950s equipment, but also, we got two of the professors from that school to assist us with the proper setup for the extraction of chemicals to test with endometrial samples. In addition, the overall green tones of the lab worked perfectly with our color palette and contrasted the deep red/brown tones we had planned to use in the church.

The Production

The Analco church is one of the most beautiful churches I've seen in Mexico. The pillars, chandeliers, flowers and images bring out the strong and powerful presence of the church that I wanted to portray in the film. The contrast of orange light in this location vs. the white light in the lab really helped show how polarizing these two institutions are.

The last montage with father Alfonso was not meant to be filmed. We decided to film it because in one of our exterior shoots outside the church, it started to rain nonstop and while drying up in church, we decided to take advantage of the situation and to film something that could intercut with Luis. Guess what? It was worth it and it made it into the film. Thank you rain.

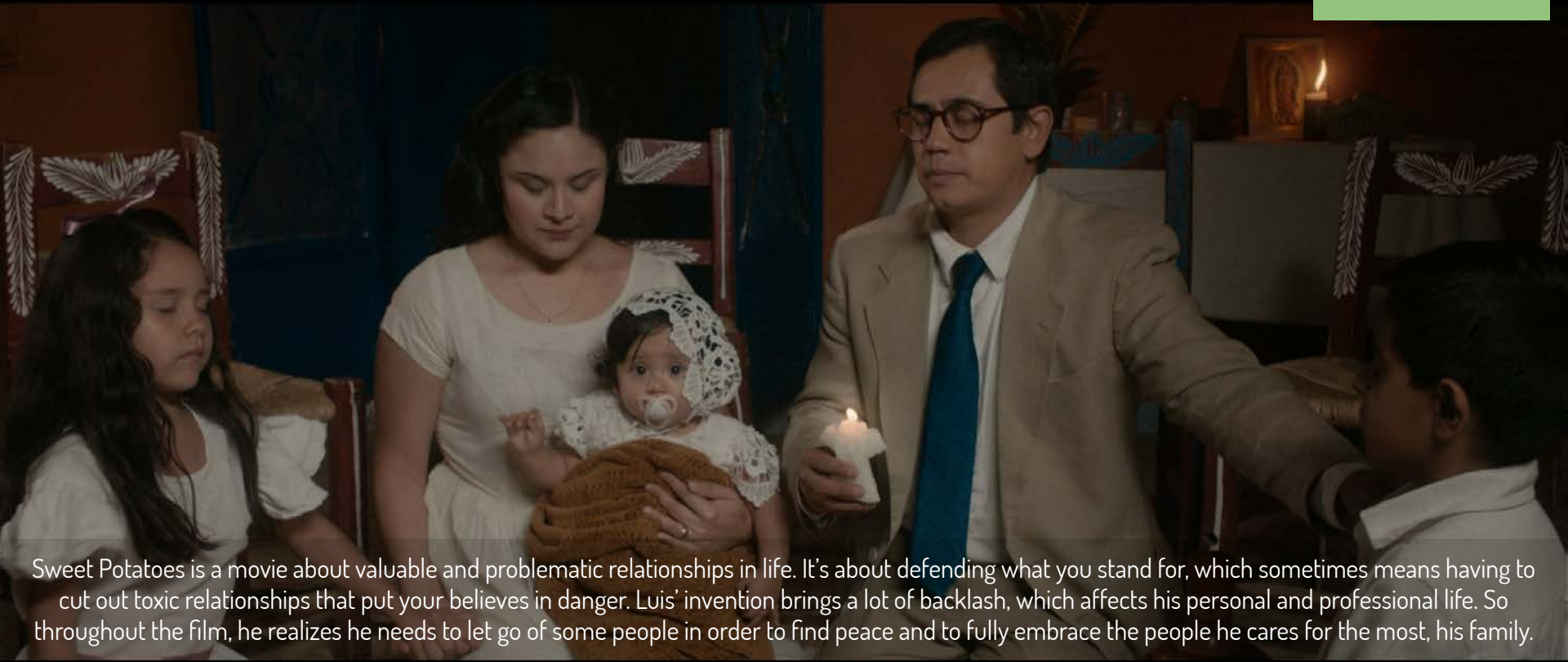
The Production



Finally the house. It combines the countryside greenery with the warm orange tones of the house walls. It's humble yet welcoming. We thought about combining the polarizing colors from both the church and the lab to demonstrate that in this house, religion is a big part of the family as well as the rural life.

The Art Department did an incredible job painting the house from head to toes and decorating the different rooms to achieve the look that we wanted. The owners of the location were so pleased with it that they asked to leave it as is.

Themes



Sweet Potatoes is a movie about valuable and problematic relationships in life. It's about defending what you stand for, which sometimes means having to cut out toxic relationships that put your beliefs in danger. Luis' invention brings a lot of backlash, which affects his personal and professional life. So throughout the film, he realizes he needs to let go of some people in order to find peace and to fully embrace the people he cares for the most, his family.

Look and Visual Progression



We made it a rule to have green as the primary color in the lab and to use natural light and/or white light to keep the clinical look in that location. In contrast, the church had a brown/orange color palette with deep shadows especially towards the end when the dramatic scenes happen.



The orange light from the candles brought a great contrast to the artificial light in the lab. The house was a combination of both worlds: it included the warmth and candle light that the church had to offer but it also incorporated a lot of the lab's organic chemistry colors in the farm's greenery.



Look and Visual Progression



The stairs were a great element to show the power dynamics in the film. Low/static angles would enhance the power of the church while high/dolly move would show the struggle Luis had because of the church's actions.



We used silhouettes in the film to intensify the scenes. We wanted to showcase the characters' emotions by playing with the environment around them - rain, windows, patterns, etc -, and when combining them with wide angles, we noticed the tension would increase by including the world.



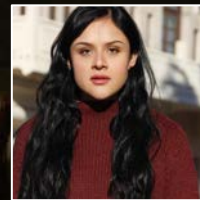
Cast and Character List



Jorge Adrián Espíndola
Luis Miramontes



Daniel Pinte
Padre Alfonso



Azucena Acevedo
Lilia Vidal de Miramontes



Emilio Cuaik
Carl Djerassi



Frank Forke
Jorge Rosenkranz



Rommel Villa - Writer/Director

Rommel is a director, producer, and writer born and raised in Sucre, Bolivia. His interest in telling stories started when he was a kid, creating fictional stories about his family having superpowers and fighting poverty and corruption. Rommel has a Bachelor's Degree in Systems Engineering, a minor in Psychology, and he recently graduated from the MFA in Film and TV Production program at USC with an emphasis in Directing, where he directed over 8 films and wrote more than 10 scripts.

Winner of best director in several theater festivals in Bolivia, Rommel received the Lionsgate and Televisa fund for Latinx filmmakers at USC. In addition, he was awarded two directing grants: one of them being TEDDY MATE, fully funded by USC, and the second one, SWEET POTATOES, which was funded by the Sloan Foundation. Rommel's next project will be a psychological film based on the experience of Latino young adults in San Fernando Valley who suffer from psychotic disorders.

[IMDB - RV](#)



Damon Laguna - Producer

Damon Laguna was born on January 10, 1995 and was raised in Los Angeles, California before attending the University of California, Berkeley where he graduated with a B.S. in Business Administration from the Haas School of Business. Damon has worked for production companies like NBCUniversal's Illumination Entertainment, Beachside Films, and Blumhouse Productions. Currently, Damon is pursuing a MFA in Film & Television Production at the University of Southern California, primarily focusing on producing, writing, and directing character-driven, humanistic content.

[IMDB - DL](#)



Andrea Porras - Producer

Andrea is from Torreón, Mexico. She recently graduated from the University of Southern California, where she studied Film and Television Production. She is interested in both documentary and fiction storytelling and is passionate about the development of strong and diverse characters and yearns to explore the depth of the human experience through themes of social justice and family dynamics.

Her first documentary, Out of the Shadows, was well received and it granted her the Sundance Ignite Fellowship 2018, as well as, Tomorrow's Filmmakers Today Fellowship through Hola Mexico Film Festival. She is currently in post-production for two projects, her first VR short film, as well as a fiction piece shot in Mexico. She wants to create bridges and opportunities to work with artists across Latin America and the United States. Andrea founded a production company alongside four USC grads to create diverse and inclusive content.

[IMDB - AP](#)



Letia Solomon - Associate Producer

Letia Solomon is an African American filmmaker based in Los Angeles, CA. She graduated from the University of California Riverside with a degree in Chemical Engineering and worked as a Materials Engineer in Aerospace for four years before transitioning into a career of film. She wrote and directed "Elevate" which won Best Student Film in the 2017 Philadelphia Independent Film Awards and Co-Founded the African World Film Festival in Detroit, MI. Letia attends USC's School of Cinematic Arts for a MFA in TV & Film Production and recently completed an internship with the groundbreaking production company Macro. Letia primarily focuses on directing, producing, and acting on various film projects.

[IMDB - LS](#)



Luke Sargent – Director of Photography

Luke Sargent is a cinematographer who grew up in Orange County. His love of cinematography started at a young age when he started filming skateboarding, surfing, and hikes with his family. Soon he started working for Freestyle Watches filming sport commercials. He then moved to LA to attend USC's School of Cinematic Arts. There he filmed hundreds of short films ranging from musicals to horror films. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

[IMDB - LS](#)



Kristina Wong – Production Designer

From the Bay Area, Kristina Wong specializes in Production Design and Art Direction. With a Bachelors of Arts degree in Film and Television Production from the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, Kristina works as a Production Designer and Art Director for films, commercials, and music videos. She also previously studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago during 2014–2015, as well as De Anza College in Cupertino, California, with a previous education and focus on interdisciplinary studies.

With experience in areas of art department such as production design, art direction, set decoration, and construction, Kristina's passion for world building in both authentic and creative ways allows her to bring stories and ideas to life.

[IMDB - Kw](#)



Sebastian Silva – Editor

Sebastian Silva is an LA-based editor with over 10 years of experience. He considers himself highly competent, confident and very passionate with what he does. He is excellent at collaboration and following direction, while also taking creative initiative. Sebastian has dealt with cross-functional teams and producers/directors with a problem-solver mindset. He's also a nerd for systems and workflows. Organization is crucial as an editor not only for the sake of efficiency, but also for anyone else who may come to one of his future projects.

[Website](#)



Jesper Ankarfeldt – Composer

Jesper is a Danish film composer with more than 100 films to his name. Latest his music was awarded the Golden FIPA award for Best Original Music at FIPA / Festival International de Programmes Audiovisuels for the Van God Los: Kerstkado.

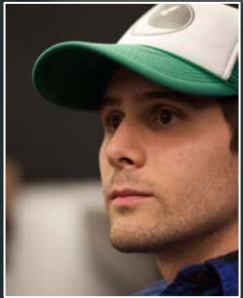
[IMDB - JA](#)



Chris Garcia – Sound Designer

Recently graduated from the USC's MFA in Film and TV Production program, Chris is a freelance sound designer and sound editor based in Los Angeles, CA.

[IMDB – CG](#)



Ryan Vaughan – Sound Designer

Ryan is passionate about three things: sound, The Beatles, and David Fincher movies. Originally from Williamsburg, Virginia, he began writing and recording original music in a makeshift studio he built. It was during those late hours recording that he fell in love with creating his own sounds.

Ryan earned his MFA from USC's School of Cinematic Arts, where he was the first student to mix multiple projects in Dolby Atmos and 7.1 Surround Sound. His Dolby Atmos work spans multiple genres, from action-comedy to musicals to period drama films. Ryan has edited and mixed projects that have premiered at the Tribeca, Austin, and Cannes film festivals. Additionally, he currently teaches an advanced sound course at California State University Northridge on industry standards for production sound recording and sound editing.

[IMDB – RV](#)



Eric Han – Sound Designer

A SoCal native, Eric Han was born in L.A. and spent most of his childhood in Riverside. After making several short films during high school, Eric decided to pursue a degree towards filmmaking and studied Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego. Initially interested in directing and writing, Eric was exposed to the world of sound after taking a class on sound design. After applying and getting accepted to USC's MFA film program, Eric developed further interest in production and post-production sound and currently freelances doing production and post sound while also pursuing his screenwriting passion.

[IMDB – EH](#)

Sweet Potatoes

Jorge Adrián Espíndola

Daniel Pinte

Azucena Acevedo

Written and Directed by Rommel Villa Barriga

Produced by Andrea Porras Madero
Damon Laguna

Production Manager Pamela Velazquez

Associate Producers Mairely Yaresi Muro Montes
Letia Solomon
Zoraya Favela

Casting Director Elvira Richards

Cinematography by Luke Sargent

Production Design by Kristina Wong

Art Director Christina Dial

Costume Design by Meredith Peebles

Hair and Makeup by Paulina Haro Herrera

Edited by Rommel Villa Barriga
Sebastian Silva

Music by Jesper Ankarfeldt

Sound Recordist Eric Han

Sound Designers Chris Garcia
Eric Han
Ryan Vaughan

Sound Mixer Ryan Vaughan

Additional Sound Editing Cindi Marquina

CAST

Luis Miramontes Jorge Adrián Espíndola
Padre Alfonso Daniel Pinte
Lilia Vidal Azucena Acevedo
Carl Djerassi Emilio Cuaik
Jorge Rosenkranz Frank Forke
Lucho Diego Israel Soto Ortiz
Lily Scarlett Yamilet Guzman
Pedro Maximiliano Ibarra
Patricia Sofia Estela Duenes

Doña Demetria Luz Carrasco Hurtado
Mujer 1 Victoria Favela
Canillita Hector Daniel Bursiaga
Hombre pobre Eric Eduarte Villa
Mujer pobre Mairely Muro Montés
Organista Gustavo Alejandro Galindo
Chofer Rubi Amaya Beyer

First Assistant Directors Letia Solomon
Adrian Vega Albela Osorio

Casting Assistant Eric Eduarte Villa

Production Assistants José Luis Rojas
Diego Fernandez
Luis Ángel Macías Quiñones
Noé Martinez Perez
Alan Matron Núñez
Saúl Osvaldo Murillo Gallegos

1st Assistant Camera Kiersten Friesen

Gaffer Hugo A. "Keso" Garcia Soto

Grips Gerardo de Jesús Enriquez
Marco Antonio Guereca
Aldo Raymundo García
Fernando Perez Hernandez
Enrique Alejandro Ortiz
Emanuelle Akzayacatl Santillán
Carlos de Jesús Vasca

Set Dressers Ana Kempke
Rebecca Garza Bucio
Andrea Garza

Makeup Assistant Mario Galaviz
Catering Rodolfo "Rudy" de la Paz
Catering Assistant Pedro Renteria Ortiz

Firefighter Ariel Juan Gallegos
Production Drivers Sergio Fabian Garcia Cuevas
Luis Hector Cuevas García

Location Managers Jesús "Chuy" Enrique Ayala Santa
Veronica Romo Viggers
Jesús Gaona Moreno
Daniel Nájera
César Medina



Post-Production Assistant Deja' Robinson
Additional Editing Ashley McGraw

Visual Effects Kieran Barker
Additional Visual Effects Pimvenus Clark

Musicians Leonard Chong
 Klara Krklec
 Daniel Carson
 Yu-ting Hsu

Scoring Engineer Lauren Johnson
Scoring Engineer Assistant Chris Garcia

BACKGROUND

SCIENTISTS

Jesús Enrique Ayala Santa • Roberto Castellón Torres •
 Carlos de Jesús Reyes • Gerardo Enriquez Guerrero • Marco
 Guerecs • Saul Murillo

PARISHIONERS

Juan Manuel Alvarado Sánchez • Inés Alejandra Alvarado
 Soto • Angelina Barraza • Eduardo José G. Bearril •
 José Antonio Calderón • Jesús Abraham Calderon Gaucizl •
 Constanza Sofía Capote Alvarado • Dairov Yosue Capote
 Alvarado • Diego Isaac Capote Alvarado • Dairo Capote
 Branta • Silvia Guadalupe de los Santos Diaz • Fernando
 Arturo del Carmen • Paola Sujeil Delgado Vela • Iyali
 Dominguez Reyes • Claudia Duenez Favela • Eric Eduarte
 Villa • Blanca Elina Gallegos • Andrea Fernandez Alvarado •
 Jorge Fernandez Alvarado • Mario Galaciz • Sergio Fabián
 García Cuevas • Geraldo Daniel García Flores • Judith
 Gaucín Morales • Sixto Guzmán • Mayela Guzmán



Sanchez • Antonio Huihuixtla • Paulina Huro Herrera •
 Andrés Ibarra Ramos • Álvaro Matías López Valenzuela •
 Luis Fernando Luna de Leon • Noé Martínez Pérez • Alan
 Matrón • Gabriela Mena Favela • Viridiana Mena Favela •
 Armando Mena Zapata • Arturo Michel • Marian Michel •
 Wiliam Miximijiano • Maga Muñoz Sánchez • Mairely Muro
 Montés • Fernando Santillán • Andrea Murillo Gallegos •
 León Misaél Murillo Gallegos • Ximena Murillo Gallegos •
 Janis Victoria Nava Contieras • Wendy Celene Navarro
 Quirino • Magdalena Flor del Carmen Nevovez Barrón •
 Carlos Nieves Gonzalez • Julio Ángel Pagce • Ana Isabel
 Porras Kempke • Jorge Quiñones • Alejandro Retana
 Medina • Nubia Reveles Casaneda • Miguel Rivas • Roberto
 Roja • José Luis Rojas Tamayo • Jesús Alfonso Sanchez
 Gram • Brenda Guadalupe Soto Calderón • José Baltazar
 Torres Sanchez • Penélope Triniada Vela • Julia Sofía
 Valenzuela Martinez • Ramsés Vasquez Rodriguez • Vaneza
 Sarahí Velarde Villalba • Alejandra Yiranda Degtz

Sloan Supervisor Alan Baker
Sloan Mentor Thomas G. Miller, ACE
Sloan Science Advisor Raquel D. Arias, M.D.

Studio Teachers Cathy Sverev
 Jan Turetsky

SPECIAL THANKS

Don Julio • Irving Belateche • Ryan Ng • Joe Piccozi •
 Jason Piemnopkako • Craig Sabin • Reed Simmons • Joe
 Wallenstein • Erick Ziegler • Reine-Claire • Alexander
 Colbeth • Octavio Miramontes • Lolita Burcio and her family •
 Casablanca Hotel • The City of Durango

Production filmed in Durango, Mexico.

Country: United States.

Language: Spanish.

Film: Short.

Genre: Drama, Historical.

Run Time: 30 minutes.

Picture Format: Color HD.

Sound: Dolby Atmos, 5.1 Surround, Stereo.

Aspect Ratio: 2.39:1 (Scope).

Screening Format: DCP, ProRes, Quicktime.

Sweet Potatoes

PRESS CONTACT:

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