

La Chimera [15]

2023 Italy/France/Switzerland 133 mins

UK released	10 May 2024
Director	Alice Rohrwacher
Screenplay	Alice Rohrwacher; Carmela Covino; Marco Petteenello
Cinematography	Hélène Louvart
Music	Lina Cardillo
Cast	Josh O'Connor (Arthur); Carol Duarte (Italia); Vincenzo Nemolato (Pirro); Alba Rohrwacher (Spartaco); Isabella Rossellini (Flora)

A woman is missing. Arthur (Josh O'Connor) imagines her, he sees her in his dreams, but deep down he knows that Beniamina (Yile Vianello) is gone, even if he can't admit it to himself. Or to her mother, Flora (Isabella Rossellini), who he returns to after a short stint in prison. He can't quite adjust to the outside world, and not just because Italian isn't his first language and some locals giggle at this strange Englishman.

There is something destabilising, too, about Alice Rohrwacher's style, which she has expanded for *La Chimera*, her fourth feature, into something almost linear, with all sorts of visual ideas – from exaggerated blocking, to jump cuts, to sped up footage – that are seldom used more than once. And only after eighties-sounding synths appear on the soundtrack, about an hour in, do you notice that the film's setting is ambiguous: it could be the modern day or a few decades earlier, or, in a deeper sense, it could be much, much older. History is close to the surface in Central Italy, as it seems like everyone is living within the accumulated wreckage of thousands of years. But the temporal divide is made stark when Arthur, falling back in with his Felliniesque gang of grave robbers, digs into the ancient Etruscan tombs scattered everywhere. In the cold silence of this long dead world there is breathless tension, and it feels like they might never be able to return to their own world.

But Arthur has a stronger sense for this archaic world. He has an extrasensory ability to dowse for tombs, and whenever he stands atop one, the camera – at first slowly, then in sharp flashes – turns upside down, or maybe, for him, the right way up. He is like an Orpheus who can only look back, always too terrified to face the world in front of him and what has left it.

Though the camera often follows Arthur’s perspective, it isn’t neatly tied to it. Just as it doesn’t make a precise distinction between images shot on 16mm, Super16 and 35mm; one isn’t used only for dreams, even if it’s most associated with them. Rohrwacher instead makes connections through something more primal than logic, a flow of images that feels surprising but always intuitive, in the way a dream does.

This doesn’t make *La Chimera* distant or elusive, quite the opposite. It invites us into its labyrinthine structure and form, it allows us space to explore.

Rohrwacher implicitly makes the case against coherence: much of life exists beyond our understanding and so, to express it except through abstraction and suggestion, is to flatten and obscure the depths of beauty and truth in the snatches of a conversation half-heard in a Robert Altman film, or a language only partially understood. Because, to quote another artist whose work feels far older than their time, “There are cracks in everything, that’s how the light gets in”.

Esme Holden, *Little White Lies*, 8 May 2024

Coming soon....

Monday 17th June: *Blackbird, Blackbird, Blackberry* (15)

Monday 24th June: *Outgrow The System*

[For details and more – visit our website](#)

www.buxtonfilm.org.uk

Buxton Film is a Registered Charity no. 1165040



admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk



[@buxtonfilm](https://twitter.com/buxtonfilm)