

Lu that he could use some of the cow's milk to make baked goods. They sneak onto the Chief Factor's property at night, Cookie milking the cow and Lu keeping watch from a tree. They manage to get enough milk to bake a batch of buttermilk biscuits. Cookie is unsatisfied with the result, wishing it could be sweeter, but Lu points out they are far better than anything on the outpost and suggests they could make a fortune. Cookie refines his recipe and adds honey.

They take their first batch of sweet oily cakes to market. When asked the recipe, Lu claims it's a "Chinese secret." The first few men to try them excitedly ask for more, and a bidding war erupts for the last cake. Word spreads and the men line up day after day as they run out. One day, a big man shoves a slight man aside for the last cake, and Lu does not object, only caring for the money. As they get richer, they decide it's safer to store their money in a tree than to take it to a bank.

Edited by	Kelly Reichardt
Music by	<u>William Tyler</u>
Production companies	FilmScience <u>IAC Films</u>
Distributed by	<u>A24</u>
Release dates	August 30, 2019 (<u>Telluride</u>) March 6, 2020 (United States)
Running time	121 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$2 million+ ^[a]
Box office	\$1.4 million ^[3]

The Chief Factor tries their cakes and asks Cookie to bake a clafoutis, the favorite of a captain he wants to impress at their next meeting. Lu and Cookie proudly deliver the clafoutis and observe as the Chief Factor offers tea with cream to the captain, remarking that despite his cow's good breeding, it is producing very little milk. He takes the captain, the chief, Cookie and Lu to see the cow, which recognizes Cookie and nuzzles him. Cookie urges Lu to leave town now, sensing the danger, but Lu persuades him they don't have enough to get to San Francisco and start their business, so they go back the next night to milk the cow once again.

A man at the Chief Factor's estate comes out to fetch a cat, and the tree branch breaks before Cookie hears Lu's warning call. They run as the alarm is raised, and after the captain sees the pail and stool and informs the Chief Factor his cow was being milked, they send their men to kill Lu and Cookie. When they reach a river, Lu jumps, but Cookie hides, then falls down a hill. Cookie wakes up in a shack, helped by an elderly Native Hawaiian couple. He says he needs to find his friend and soon leaves.

Lu trades his buttons to hire a canoe to go downstream in search of Cookie, and returns to the shack, hiding from the Chief Factor's men rummaging through the destruction. He retrieves their money from the tree. Cookie returns to the shack, walking by the cow on the Factor's estate, now surrounded by a fence. He is spied by the slight man Lu ignored in line at the market, who follows with a rifle.

Cookie finds Lu at the shack, and Lu suggests they catch the next boat south. Cookie can't keep up through the woods and he lies down, clearly fatigued. Lu tells Cookie they will be safe and promises to keep watch, then lies beside him, reassures him, and closes his eyes.

Cast

- John Magaro as Otis "Cookie" Figowitz
- Orion Lee as King-Lu
- René Auberjonois as Man with Raven
- Toby Jones as Chief Factor
- Ewen Bremner as Lloyd

- [Scott Shepherd](#) as Captain
- [Gary Farmer](#) as Totillicum
- [Lily Gladstone](#) as Chief Factor's Wife
- [Alia Shawkat](#) as Woman with Dog
- [Dylan Smith](#) as Jack
- [Stephen Malkmus](#) as Fiddler
- [Mitchell Saddleback](#) as Chief Factor's Servant
- [Jared Kasowski](#) as Thomas
- [Todd A. Robinson](#) as Fort Trapper

Production

In October 2018, it was announced that [Kelly Reichardt](#) would direct the film, from a screenplay she wrote alongside [Jonathan Raymond](#). [Neil Kopp](#), [Vincent Savino](#), [Anish Savjani](#), [Scott Rudin](#) and [Eli Bush](#) would produce the film under their FilmScience and Scott Rudin Productions banners, respectively, while [A24](#) would distribute.^{[8][9]}

In November 2018, [René Auberjonois](#) was cast in the film.^[10] In March 2019, it was announced that [John Magaro](#) had joined the cast.^[11]

[Principal photography](#) began in November 2018 in [Oregon](#).^[12] The film was shot in a 4:3 aspect ratio.^[13] Reichardt dedicated the film to [Peter Hutton](#), with whom she taught at [Bard College](#).^[14]

Release

First Cow had its world premiere at the [Telluride Film Festival](#) on August 30, 2019.^[15] It screened at the [New York Film Festival](#) on September 28, 2019.^[16] Although it was released in four U.S. theaters on March 6, 2020, the film was pulled from release by [A24](#) on March 15, due to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). It was released for purchase on VOD platforms on July 10, 2020, and became available to rent on July 21.^[17]

Reception

Critical response

On [review aggregator](#) [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film holds an approval rating of 96% based on 209 reviews, with an average score of 8.4/10. The website's critical consensus reads, "*First Cow* finds director Kelly Reichardt revisiting territory and themes that will be familiar to fans of her previous work—with typically rewarding results."^[18] On [Metacritic](#), the film has a weighted average score of 89 out of 100, based on 44 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[19]

A. A. Dowd and Katie Rife of [The A.V. Club](#) gave the film a positive review, praising its simplicity and precise storytelling.^[20]

At the end of 2020, 119 film critics included the film on their top-ten lists, with 18 ranking it first and 20 ranking it second.^[21]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Berlin International Film Festival</u>	<u>March 1, 2020</u>	<u>Golden Bear</u>	<u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	^[22]
<u>Boston Society of Film Critics Awards</u>	<u>December 13, 2020</u>	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Runner-up	^[23]
		<u>Best Director</u>	<u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Runner-up	
<u>New York Film Critics Circle Awards</u>	<u>December 18, 2020</u>	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Won	^[24]
<u>Chicago Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 21, 2020</u>	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Director</u>	<u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	<u>Jon Raymond</u> and <u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Cinematography</u>	<u>Christopher Blauvelt</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Art Direction</u>	<u>Lisa Ward</u> and <u>Vanessa Knoll</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	<u>April Napier</u>	Nominated	
<u>Florida Film Critics Circle</u>	<u>December 21, 2020</u>	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Won	
		<u>Best Director</u>	<u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Actor</u>	<u>John Magaro</u>	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	<u>Jon Raymond</u> and <u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Score</u>	<u>William Tyler</u>	Nominated	
<u>Alliance of Women Film Journalists</u>	<u>January 4, 2021</u>	<u>Best Director</u>	<u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Screenplay, Adapted</u>	<u>Jon Raymond</u> and <u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Woman Director</u>	<u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	
<u>National Society of Film Critics</u>	<u>January 9, 2021</u>	<u>Best Picture</u>		Runner-up	
		<u>Best Director</u>	<u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Screenplay</u>	<u>Jon Raymond</u> and <u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Runner-up	
<u>Gotham Awards</u>	<u>January 11, 2021</u>	<u>Best Feature</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Nominated	^[25]
		<u>Best Actor</u>	<u>John Magaro</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Breakthrough Actor</u>	<u>Orion Lee</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Screenplay</u>	<u>Jon Raymond</u> and <u>Kelly Reichardt</u>	Nominated	
<u>Online Film Critics Society Awards</u>	<u>January 25, 2021</u>	<u>Best Picture</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Nominated	^[26]

		<u>Best Director</u>	Kelly Reichardt	Nominated	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Jonathan Raymond and Kelly Reichardt	Nominated	
		<u>Best Cinematography</u>	Christopher Blauvelt	Nominated	
<u>Toronto Film Critics Association</u>	<u>February 7, 2021</u>	<u>Best Film</u>		Runner-up	[27]
		<u>Best Director</u>	Kelly Reichardt	Runner-up	
<u>Critics' Choice Movie Awards</u>	<u>March 7, 2021</u>	<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Jonathan Raymond and Kelly Reichardt	Nominated	[28]
		<u>Best Cinematography</u>	Christopher Blauvelt	Nominated	
<u>Detroit Film Critics Society</u>	<u>March 8, 2021</u>	<u>Best Picture</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Nominated	
		<u>Breakthrough Performance</u>	Orion Lee	Nominated	[29]
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Kelly Reichardt and Jonathan Raymond	Nominated	
<u>Austin Film Critics Association</u>	<u>March 19, 2021</u>	<u>Best Film</u>	<i>First Cow</i>	Nominated	[30]
		<u>Best Director</u>	Kelly Reichardt	Nominated	
<u>Independent Spirit Awards</u>	<u>April 22, 2021</u>	<u>Best Feature</u>	Neil Kopp, Vincent Savino and Anish Savjani	Nominated	
		<u>Best Director</u>	Kelly Reichardt	Nominated	[31]
		<u>Best Supporting Male</u>	Orion Lee	Nominated	
<u>British Independent Film Awards</u>	<u>December 5, 2021</u>	<u>Best International Independent Film</u>	Kelly Reichardt, Jon Raymond, Neil Kopp, Vincent Savino and Anish Savjani	Nominated	[32]
<u>César Awards</u>	<u>February 25, 2022</u>	<u>Best Foreign Film</u>	Kelly Reichardt	Nominated	[33]

Notes

- a. Reichardt stated that *First Cow* was "a low-budget film, obviously, but bigger for me" and her previous films had budgets of \$2 million.^[2]

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See also

- [Native Americans in film](#)
- [Oregon Trail](#)
- [Slow cinema](#)

External links

- *First Cow* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9231040/>) at IMDb
 - [Script \(https://deadline.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FIRST-COW-screenplay.pdf\)](https://deadline.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FIRST-COW-screenplay.pdf) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210209184914/https://deadline.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FIRST-COW-screenplay.pdf>) February 9, 2021, at the Wayback Machine
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