

TIGRE GENTE

A Documentary by Elizabeth Unger
Produced by Academy Award-Winner Joanna Natasegara



RT: 93 Minutes

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

A Bolivian park ranger and a young Hong Kongese journalist risk their lives to go undercover and investigate a new, deadly jaguar trade that's sweeping South America. Along the way, they grapple with questions of empathy, responsibility, and bridging a cultural gap to prevent the jaguar trade from spiraling out of control.

LONG SYNOPSIS

As China pours hundreds of billions of dollars into South American infrastructure, jaguars are disappearing from the continent's most protected rainforests. Targeted as substitutes for tiger parts, which have historically been used in traditional Chinese medicines, jaguars are now being trafficked at dangerously high numbers to fill a new market demand.

Spanning over mist-covered jungles in the Amazon to bustling wildlife markets in China, *Tigre Gente* follows the storylines of two passionate people fighting to stop the jaguar trade before it's too late.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2009, while working towards a biology degree, I spent a memorable summer rehabilitating animal victims of the illegal wildlife trade in Bolivia. Working with those animals had a major impact on me and, throughout the years that followed, I held onto the idea of telling a larger narrative about wildlife trafficking in South America.

These thoughts eventually came to fruition in 2015, when I heard about the new trade of jaguar parts for the Chinese black market that was sweeping the jungles of Bolivia. I quickly realized this issue wasn't being widely discussed; it was solely circulating in domestic Bolivian news agencies at the time. Over the next couple years I tried to raise the alarm as best I could, knocking on the doors of international NGOs in hopes that they would address this new criminal jaguar trade as a critical issue. It's estimated there are only between 64,000 to 170,000 jaguars left in the world; a fraction of their previous population numbers. Habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, and local pet and skin markets already threaten the livelihood of jaguars throughout Latin America. However, China's new black market demand for tiger tooth substitutes could be the factor that denigrates jaguar populations to a serious degree very quickly. National Geographic Magazine soon heard about my work and, recognizing the significance of this new trade, sent a staff writer to join me in South America to report on this problem for their December 2017 print issue.

My vision was to create a jaguar trafficking documentary with a stylistically softer tone — one that felt different from the array of run-and-gun wildlife crime docs, all helmed by male

directors, that I had watched over the last decade. I wanted to break away from the status quo and show the visceral, character-driven world I was witnessing, so that the audience could connect with the protagonists as much as the plot itself.

This idea deepened over time, and the film evolved from a standard exposé on jaguar trafficking to a more intimate, nuanced portrait of our protagonists and of the dreams and fears that were driving them. Our team further gravitated away from the 'who' and 'how' of this new jaguar trade and instead started focusing on the 'why'. As we dove into the deeper cultural questions that followed, we expanded our team to better represent the South American and Chinese communities featured in the film itself.

We were then fortunate enough to bring on Producer Joanna Natasegara and Executive Producer Violet Du Feng. We also welcomed former CNN en Español broadcast journalist Magdalena Cabral to our team. These women, with their diverse backgrounds and regional expertise in China and South America, not only helped shape the new direction of *Tigre Gente*, it furthered our team's mission to pursue ethical storytelling in the wildlife-crime genre.

We hope we have broken new ground with this film — not only by exposing the underbelly of the jaguar trade —but by exploring the root cause of the mentality that's driving the demand. It's critical to note that Asian people, and Chinese people in particular, are being stigmatized more than ever during the time of COVID-19. The events that unfurled in 2020, and the reports that a wildlife market in Wuhan birthed the virus, have caused an uptick in violent, racist attacks towards Chinese people around the world. Our team's hope is that *Tigre Gente* will help battle misconceptions and give Western audiences a better comprehension of Chinese culture and tradition as it pertains to wildlife consumerism.

The reality is simple: We can do better, and we should do better, to understand the other side. It will only be then that we can drive real impact and stop the illegal wildlife trade industry together.

— Director Elizabeth Unger

FILM SUBJECTS

MARCOS UZQUIANO, a rugged outdoorsman and the director of Bolivia's Madidi National Park. For Marcos, protecting Madidi is more than a job description; it is a duty bestowed on him to safeguard the place that he was born, and that he calls home. After Chinese citizens near Madidi are accused of trafficking jaguar parts, Marcos believes the trade is much larger than originally thought — with local Bolivians providing much of the supply. As he and his rangers journey deep inside Madidi for answers, Marcos realizes that the political-economic forces between China and Bolivia may be fueling the very trade itself. His investigation eventually leads him to the biggest wildlife bust in Bolivia's history.

LAUREL CHOR, a 31-year old award-winning journalist in Hong Kong. With incredible access and a rare perspective, Laurel decides to embark on an investigation of her own into the quickly rising jaguar trade in China. She engages in intimate conversations with Chinese citizens both young and old, including her own family, to examine the desire driving this rising demand. Along the way, Laurel faces harsh realities about China's role in the decimation of species worldwide, and grapples between her duty as a conservationist and the desire to defend her own country's people and culture.

Laurel has reported from more than 20 countries, having worked with the [New York Times](#), [National Geographic](#), [Getty](#), [AFP](#), [Reuters](#), [EPA](#), the [Los Angeles Times](#), the [Wall Street Journal](#), [NBC News](#), the [Telegraph](#), the [South China Morning Post](#), [Hong Kong Free Press](#), the [New Humanitarian](#), the [Spectator](#), the [Nikkei Asian Review](#), the [Guardian](#), the [Washington Post](#), [Quartz](#), and more. She regularly makes guest appearances on TV and radio.

As a current masters student studying Biodiversity, Conservation and Management at Christ Church, Oxford University, Laurel is particularly interested in exploring the relationship between people and nature. She is working on a long-term photography project on traditional Chinese medicine, culture, and the environment.

She has worked on western lowland gorilla conservation in the Central African Republic, Chinese white dolphin research in Hong Kong and undercover investigative documentaries on the wildlife trade in Central Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America.

Through her HK Explorers Initiative project, which encourages people to explore and appreciate Hong Kong's biodiversity, she has spoken to thousands about the importance of connecting urban populations to nature. In 2013, Dr. Jane Goodall appointed her as an ambassador for the Jane Goodall Institute HK.

Previously, Laurel was the Asia reporter and producer for VICE News Tonight on HBO, covering news, culture and politics across the region: from the [Rohingya refugee crisis](#) to the

[Chinese social credit system](#), from the [assassination of Kim Jong Un's half-brother](#) to [Chinese "boy" bands](#), and from the [earthquake in Palu, Indonesia](#) to the [war on drugs in Bangladesh](#).

FILMMAKERS

ELIZABETH UNGER — Director & Producer

Elizabeth Unger is a National Geographic Explorer and filmmaker whose work has been featured in National Geographic Magazine. A passion for wildlife and cuisine has led Elizabeth across seven continents, steeping her in rich anthropological experiences that have shaped her into the storyteller she is today. After acquiring a B.S. in Biology from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, Elizabeth worked as a PhD research assistant for big cat and primate projects in Latin America. Her photojournalism and videography work has been showcased on National Geographic Magazine digital and NG Travel. Elizabeth was selected as one of five North American Regional Finalists for the prestigious UN Young Champion of the Earth Prize and is a 2019 Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program Grantee for her feature debut, *Tigre Gente*.

JOANNA NATASEGARA — Producer

Joanna Natasegara is a celebrated Academy Award-winning film producer and founder of Violet Films. Known for their hard hitting, popular documentaries, Violet continues to be a driving force behind films that cover some of the most pressing socio-political issues of our times, including Netflix Originals *Virunga* (2014), *The White Helmets* (2016) and *The Edge of Democracy* (2019) as well as recent projects, the BIFA winning feature doc, *Evelyn* (2018) for BBC Films and BFI, and *The Nightcrawlers* for National Geographic.

A small, nimble and highly dynamic team, Violet has a track record of capturing powerful and personal human stories, whilst creating authentic, cinematic and highly watchable films. Working with major distributors and globally recognised talent, Violet is developing scripted projects alongside its documentary slate, with an ongoing focus on social justice issues and impact.

KATE BROOKS — Executive Producer

Kate Brooks is an international photojournalist and filmmaker who chronicled conflict and human rights for many years before turning her lens to conservation and extinction. Her photographs have been extensively published in *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Smithsonian*, and *The New Yorker* and exhibited in galleries and museums around the world.

In 2010 Brooks' love for filmmaking was sparked while working as a cinematographer on the documentary *The Boxing Girls of Kabul*. Her introspective collection of essays and

photographs, *In the Light of Darkness: A Photographer's Journey After 9/11*, was selected as one of the best photography books of 2011 by PDN. In 2012-13, Brooks was a Knight Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan. There she researched the global wildlife trafficking crisis before embarking on directing her first film, *The Last Animals* (2017).

The documentary premiered at Tribeca Film Festival on Earth Day 2017 and was awarded a Disruptor Award, alongside those who sacrificed their lives protecting Garamba National Park in DRC. In 2018 the film won a Panda Award for its impact at Wildscreen, in consideration with Blue Planet II. *The Last Animals* was distributed through National Geographic, Hulu, Netflix, and AMC.

In 2018 Brooks joined the *Tigre Gente* team as an Executive Producer. Her drive and passion for conservation storytelling comes from the fundamental belief that time is running out to save the planet's biodiversity. Brooks also co-founded *The Last Animals* Foundation nonprofit to raise awareness about wildlife trafficking, support frontline park rangers and help animals in times of natural and manmade disasters.

EDWARD ROQUETA — Director of Photography

Edward Roqueta is an Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker, National Geographic Explorer, conservationist and activist who holds an MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking from Montana State University and a BS in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation from the University of Florida. Roqueta has produced independent documentaries, as well as films for a variety of non-profit clients. His debut short-film, *Silencing the Thunder* (2014), screened to great acclaim at the Wildlife Conservation Festival, Environmental Film Festival, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival and the BANFF Mountain Film and Book Festival.

ALISTAIR SHURMAN — Editor

Alistair Shurman is an Emmy-winning documentary film editor based in Western Massachusetts and New York City. He began his career editing the documentary *Run for Your Life*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2008.

He went on to edit the critically-acclaimed films *Everybody Street* (2013), *No Mas* (2013), *Kerri Walsh Jennings: Gold Within* (2016) and *200 Miles* (2017). Alistair was also an editor on ESPN'S groundbreaking, 63-part series, *Basketball: A Love Story* (2018). Most recently, he co-produced and edited the film *16 Bars*, which was released theatrically across the country in 2019.

JILL SCHWEITZER — Editor

Jill Schweitzer is a documentary editor who has been tackling social justice issues in film and television for close to twenty years. Known for her intimate, character-driven work, her credits include the HBO film, *Casting By* (2012), which was nominated for an Emmy in 2013 and named one of the "Top 5 Documentaries of the Year" by the National Board of Review. Her other credits include *Thank You For Your Service* (2015); *Cooked* (2016) and the Peabody Award winning *Time: The Kalief Browder Story* (2017). She recently completed *Bleed Out* for HBO which premiered at DOC NYC in 2018. Jill draws inspiration from her travels and engaging with other cultures. A deep love of nature has taken her through the Galapagos Islands, the Andes Mountains and a summer working at Yellowstone National Park. She continues to seek out experiences that expand her global perspective and feed her passion for storytelling.

KATHRYN EVERETT — Executive Producer

Kathryn Everett is an award-winning filmmaker who works at the intersection of politics, philanthropy and film. Kathryn is Head of Film at the premium nonfiction studio XTR and a co-founder of nonfiction streaming platform DOCUMENTARY+. Previously, she worked in field and finance for President Barack Obama's presidential campaigns and as a producer and creative director for the artist activist collective We Stand United, co-founded by Mark Ruffalo. Kathryn's work and approach are deeply informed by the years she spent working in Haiti as Chief Operating Officer of non-profit organization Artists for Peace and Justice, building over 100,000 square feet of permanent classroom space and the nation's only colleges for film and music alongside board members Ben Stiller, Susan Sarandon and David Belle. Kathryn serves as a board member for Iqra Fund, a non-governmental organization that provides girls' education by establishing high quality, self-sustaining school systems in the remote, mountainous regions of northern Pakistan.

VIOLET DU FENG — Executive Producer

Violet Du Feng is an Emmy winning independent documentarian. Her producing credits include *Confucian Dream* (2019), *Mainland* (2017) and *Please Remember Me* (2015). Feng directed the most recent PBS/CPB special program *Harbor From the Holocaust* (2020) with music performed by Yo-Yo Ma. Feng started her career as a co-producer on the critically acclaimed 2007 Sundance Special Jury winner, Peabody and Emmy winner *Nanking*, which was distributed theatrically around 30 countries throughout the world, and was the highest grossing documentary in China. Violet is the producer of the forthcoming film *People's Hospital* (2020) and a director of her first feature length documentary *Hidden Letters* (2020).

BRYN MOOSER — Executive Producer

Bryn Mooser is a twice Oscar-nominated, Emmy-winning filmmaker, humanitarian, and the founder and CEO of XTR and DOCUMENTARY+. In 2019 Mooser founded the documentary studio XTR and launched the streaming platform DOCUMENTARY+ in 2020. Previously,

Mooser co-founded RYOT, a media company specializing in documentary film and Virtual/Augmented Reality. Over his career he has produced more than 200 linear and immersive films garnering multiple Emmy Awards, two Oscar nominations and both a Peabody and Cannes Lions Award. In 2016, Mooser sold RYOT to Verizon, becoming a SVP and helping create the roadmap for immersive media, documentary films and branded content for AOL, Yahoo and Verizon. As a humanitarian, Mooser spent three years in the Peace Corps in West Africa, and was the Country Director for Artists for Peace and Justice in Haiti. While in Haiti he helped build the nation's largest Cholera center, and a High School in Port-au-Prince that today educates nearly 3,000 Haitian. For his charitable work he was made a recipient of the prestigious Nelson Mandela Changemaker Award, and Esquire Magazine named him as one of their Americans of the Year.

MINAH WORLEY — Executive Producer

For the past twelve years, Minah Worley has worked in the film industry as a producer, telling stories across a variety of mediums. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Minah was Associate Director of the Martha's Vineyard Film Society, where she developed and programmed the first Women In Film festival, featuring work by female directors. She also held the positions of Head Grant Writer and Head of Youth Programming for the non-profit organization.

Before Martha's Vineyard Film Society, Minah held a producing role at the MIT Open Documentary Lab, where she worked with graduate students, technologists, and other colleagues to explore new documentary forms, all focused on collaborative, interactive, and immersive storytelling.

Before joining MIT, Minah co-founded WorleyWorks, a post-production studio in Brooklyn, NY. WorleyWorks' mission was to make cutting-edge, post-production technology accessible to independent filmmakers. Within WorleyWorks, Minah served as executive producer on film projects that premiered at festivals including Sundance, Tribeca, Cannes, Toronto and more. During her ten years helming WorleyWorks, she managed internal and external teams throughout the film development process, from pre-production through post, safeguarding each project's creative integrity.

Minah and her two children moved to Martha's Vineyard full-time in the fall of 2016. Since 2019, she has been working towards an MFA in Creative Writing while continuing to tell stories through film production, screenplays, and narrative stories.

CREDITS

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EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Kate Brooks

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