



PRESS
KIT



TIGER ON THE ROCKS

SCAPEGOAT OF A COLONY. SPIRIT OF A CONTINENT.

Bower Bird Films



INDEX

Log Line and Short Synopsis	4
One Page Synopsis	5
Storytellers & Voice-Narrator	6
Director's Statement	9
Producer's Statement	10
Cathryn Vasseleu Biography	12
Pat Fiske Biography	12
Credits	14
Awards	15
Contact Details	16



*“The history of the Tasmanian Tigers -
it’s painted on the rock.”*

Jeffrey Lee AM



“It was across the continent once upon a time.”

Dr Anna Gillespie

LOG LINE

The Tasmanian Tiger once roamed throughout Australia, leaving lasting connections with the land and its First Peoples.



TIGER ON THE ROCKS

SCAPEGOAT OF A COLONY. SPIRIT OF A CONTINENT.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

The Tasmanian Tiger twists and turns depending on how it's seen. Sheep-killing beast or tragic victim of human induced extinction. Ancient painting on a rock or vivid ancestor spirit. Lost forever, or a timely reminder to respect the connection between human and animal, culture, nature and country. In stunning landscapes across Australia where Thylacines once roamed, people from wide-ranging traditions share their experiences: First Nations artists, rangers and custodians; biologists, bone hunters and archaeologists. Multiple insights combine to throw light on Australia's most wanted animal.

ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS

On a cave wall in Mok Clan country in far north Australia, a magnificent painting of the Tasmanian Tiger is the final resting place of an ancestor spirit. The people from that country call it *djarnkerrk*. Also called the Thylacine, it's not a true 'tiger', despite its striped flanks, but a marsupial. An unusual one. A pouched animal with a kangaroo's tail and a dog's head. The British, who colonised lutruwita/Tasmania in 1803, blamed the Tiger for killing their sheep and put a bounty on its head. Since 1936 there have been no verifiable sightings. But its story lives on all over the continent in rock art, footprints and fossil bones. ***Tiger On The Rocks*** goes in search of the traces. Thylacines survived through 25 million years of drastic ecological changes. First Nations People have long known this creature as a presence interlinked with the land and culture.

Filmed in a range of its former locations, memories of the Tiger come alive as we follow its trail. With a gifted storyteller's powers of humour, drama, mimicry and song, a Senior Elder guides us through rough bush to a towering rock art gallery near Katherine, where the creation stories, the animals and other spirits visible there and in the night sky are intrinsic to law and life.

In the Pilbara, home to 50,000 years of rock art and its living culture, Indigenous rangers and Elders team up with an archaeologist-advocate to train our eyes to pick out the details of a Thylacine image etched deeply into rock by artists 20,000 years ago.

A palaeontologist in a lab-coat breaks into a smile as the 15 million year old skeleton of a Thylacine emerges from its limestone tomb. Fossils reveal many Thylacines, small and large, flourishing throughout Australia and New Guinea before disappearing from the mainland. As a biologist processes samples of ancient Thylacine DNA she weighs up different schools of thought regarding their fate.

Passionate storytellers, a rich array of artworks, archives, and mesmerising animation transport the audience into the Thylacine's world. Together they reveal a species whose profound role in the culture and ecology of Australia continues to this day.

STORYTELLERS

Jeffrey Lee AM is Senior Cultural Custodian of Koongarra, the traditional lands of the Djok Clan, in World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park.

Dr Anna Gillespie, an ‘acid queen’ at the Vertebrate Palaeontology Lab, University of New South Wales, is an expert in the art of recovering specimens trapped in the limestone of Riversleigh World Heritage Fossil Area in Queensland.

Yidumduma Bill Harney is Senior Elder of the Wardaman People whose country is near Katherine. He learnt his people’s law and astronomy under the stars and grew up to become a revered Bush Professor and artist.

Dr Ken Mulvaney is an archaeologist who has spent most of his career studying and advocating for the rock art of Murujuga, which is located in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

Dr Lauren White recently completed a ground-breaking PhD about Thylacines, at the Australian Centre for Ancient DNA at the University of Adelaide.



Lindsay Hatcher, a bone hunter and palaeontology expert who’s probably been in more of the many caves beneath the deserts of southwest Australia than anyone else, was co-founder of National Thylacine Day.

Dr Adam Yates, Senior Curator of Earth Sciences at the Museum of Central Australia, leads a dedicated team that has been excavating fossil sites in the heart of Australia for over 30 years.

Lois Nadjamerrek is Senior Elder of the Mok Clan Estate in Arnhem Land, at the top of the Northern Territory. Her late father, Bardayal Nadjamerrek AO, one of Arnhem Land’s finest artists, worked to establish communities for First Nations people, including his own family, to return to.

Mary Kolkiwarra Nadjamerrek (Bardayal Nadjamerrek’s widow) is an esteemed Bush Professor and song-woman.

Gavin Namarnyilk (Bardayal Nadjamerrek’s grandson) is an artist who also works as a ranger caring for their country.



VOICE-NARRATOR

Rachael Maza is a Yidinji (FNQ), Meriam (TSI), and Dutch. Also Artistic Director for Ilbjerri Theatre (2008 - present). Maza is known for her work on Stage and Screen: presenter on ABC *Message Stick*, stage play and film *Radiance*, *Sapphires*, *Holy Day* and *Beautiful One Day* and as an acting coach for the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Awards include: 2003 Uncle Bob Maza Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution to Victorian Indigenous Theatre - the VIPA Awards, The Drovers Award for Touring Legend, the Australia Council 2019 Theatre Award, 2019 Honorary Doctorate for Performing Arts ECU and the Inaugural Alumni Award ECU 2019. In 2020 AM (Order of Australia) for work in the Performing Arts, and Greenroom Lifetime Achievement Award 2021. Directing Credits include: Ilbjerri Productions: *Stolen*, *Chopped Liver*, *Jack Charles V The Crown*, *Foley*, *Which Way Home* and *My Urrwai*, *Black Ties* and *Heart is a Wasteland*.



The Thylacines appearing in *Tiger On The Rocks* are animations created from photos of fossils and specimens, and black and white archival films.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Tiger on the Rocks is a documentary that found me. It happened at Ubirr in Kakadu National Park, when I first set eyes on a small weathered painting of a Tasmanian Tiger located high above a spectacular gallery of rock art. It's a well-known painting, much older than the rest. As I took a few photos I began to wonder ...

I've always been interested in the Tasmanian Tiger (or Thylacine) as an animal people keep alive in their hearts even though it's officially extinct. Dedicated groups still search for it, and some scientists hope to clone one. The Thylacine is a special creature people can't let go of. But what struck me about the Tiger on the rocks was the immense history behind how it came to be there many thousands of years ago, far from the island that colonists named it after. And I knew nothing about this Tiger.

That ochre painting led me around Australia, following the Tiger's trail, seeing the land of my birth with new eyes. I wasn't searching for a missing animal. I was searching for its ancient story. I hoped to create a kind of experience that differs from most nature documentaries. My plan was to combine documentary and animation to bring the physical, memory and spirit traces of the Thylacine to life.

Tiger on the Rocks brings together a rich range of perspectives from all over Australia. First Nations people whose work continues to care for and celebrate the land as its knowledge keepers, artists and custodians, come together with biologists, with a message of hope that translates into action—a respect for the connection between human and animal, culture and nature. Listening to their voices while following in the footprints of the Thylacine will be an illuminating journey of discovery.

Cathryn Vasseleu

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

Making documentaries is my passion! I've been directing and/or producing now for almost 50 years. I love the power of documentaries to tell stories that can move people, provoke, inspire, or stimulate them into action. I enjoy mentoring and consulting emerging and middle level documentary filmmakers and helping them through challenges. When I work as a producer, I work closely with directors, I need to love their idea, have a feel for their vision and get along well. My role is a creative and constructive contribution to projects that can take 2, 3, 5 years, or even longer sometimes! I've known Cathryn Vasseleu for decades. When she called me in mid 2017 and asked me if I'd be interested in producing a film for her called ***Tiger on the Rocks*** – a film she'd been working on for a number of years and definitely a passion project for her, I was interested. We met and she showed me a rough, rough assembly of the footage that she had – I learned so much from viewing the cut and was very impressed. I loved her ideas for the film and said a resounding 'yes'. And we've been working together on it ever since. Now it's finished and it's a fascinating film. I will look forward to seeing how it goes out there in the world.

Pat Fiske





CATHRYN VASSELEU

Writer/Director

Cathryn Vasseleu is a filmmaker, photographer and animator with an inquiring mind and a love of nature. While living in Darwin from 2010-2017 she ventured to remote parts of Australia and inside science labs, researching and filming a documentary about the iconic Tasmanian Tiger. Her previous films include *De Anima* (a finalist in the Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films) and *As If One Bird* (made for The Overwintering Project, an environmental art project to raise awareness for critically endangered migratory shorebirds). She has a doctorate in philosophy, and has been a lecturer and research fellow in philosophy and media arts at several universities in Australia and the USA, including Vice-Chancellor's research fellow in philosophy at University of New South Wales, a visiting fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, and an ARC fellow (1999-2004) at the University of Technology Sydney, where she also taught animation for 11 years. Author of a book about vision and touch, *Textures of Light*, and editor of the English translation of Czech Surrealist filmmaker Jan Švankmajer's book on tactile art, *Touching and Imagining*, she is also an award winning photographer of birds and weather.



PAT FISKE OAM

Producer

Pat Fiske, Bower Bird Films, has directed and/or produced many award-winning documentaries and has mentored many emerging filmmakers by either producing or consulting on their projects or helping them through difficulties over the years. In 2001 she was awarded the prestigious Stanley Hawes Award for her outstanding contribution to the documentary industry in Australia. In 2001-2002 she was Documentary Consultant at SBS Independent television for 18 months and was Co-Head of Documentary at AFTRS from 2002-2008. In the 1970s and 80s, Pat Fiske was on the boards of Filmnews and the Australian Screen Director's Association (ASDA now ADG). Since the early 1990s to today, she has been on the Advisory Panel for the Sydney Film Festival. From 2007 to 2010 Pat worked part time as a curator for the The Australian Screen Online. At present she is on the Board of ASDACS. In 2023 Pat Fiske was awarded The Order of Australia for her services to the film industry. Some of her films: Directing: *Rocking the Foundations; Woolloomooloo; For All the World to See; Australia Daze; Following the Fence Line; An Artist in Eden; Larrikin Lad; Footprints on our Land.* Producing: *Business Behind Bars, Selling Sickness, River of No Return, Scarlet Road, Love Marriage in Kabul, Oyster, Rosemary's Way* and most recently *When the Camera Stopped Rolling* and *Tiger on the Rocks.*







CREDITS

Writer/Director	Cathryn Vasseleu
Producer	Pat Fiske
Narrator	Rachael Maza
Co-producer/ Cinematographer Animator Editor	Cathryn Vasseleu
Consultant Editor	Melanie Sandford ASE
Sound Recordist	Pip Martin
Additional Cinematography	Robyn Marais Steve Macdonald Penny Fawkner
Additional Animation	Melissa Huni Bollinger
Treatment Consultant	Alison Lyssa
Colour Grade/ Sound Mix	Michael Gissing Digital City Studios



“In every carefully evoked First Nations story, in each mesmerising animation, through its extraordinary landscape shots and by the fascinating scientific facts, this illuminating film lets us feel the weight of losing 25 million years of Thylacines while showing us the Tasmanian Tiger forever alive in the rock art and lives of

Indigenous Australia!” -- Associate Professor Katrina Schlunke,

Australian Research Council Discovery Project ‘Beyond Extinction’, University of Tasmania

“So important and powerful. A totally untold story.”

Margot Nash, filmmaker and screenwriter

“Magical!!!”

Dr Mitzi Goldman, CEO Documentary Australia

CONTACT

TIGER ON THE ROCKS is produced by Bower Bird Films. www.bowerbirdfilms.com

Funded by Development investment from Screen Territory, Production investment from Screen Australia and donations made to the Documentary Australia Foundation.

International sales Abacus Media Rights (formerly Flame Distribution). Domestic sales TBA.
Educational sales ATOM The Education Shop.

© 2022 Bower Bird Films Pty Limited

Producer

Pat Fiske

Bower Bird Films Pty Limited

E pat@bowerbirdfilms.com

M +61 (0) 407 813 255

Director/Co-Producer

Cathryn Vasseleu

tigerontherocks1@gmail.com

Trailer Link

<https://vimeo.com/866635142>

Website

<https://tigerontherocks.com>

Running time | 55 minutes Exhibition formats | DCP, H264

Aspect ratio | 16:9 Sound | stereo Shooting format | 1920x1080 25p

Original language | English / English Subtitles Year completed | 2022

