



# THE BONES

INTUITIVE PICTURES AND BERLIN PRODUCERS IN ASSOCIATION WITH RBB CRAVE ORIGINALS PRESENT "THE BONES" ORIGINAL MUSIC BY RAMACHANDRA BORCAR  
DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY KAVEH NABATIYAN BETTINA BORGFELD JOHAN LEGRAJE CLAIRE SANFORD SARAH BLUM EDITORS NICK TAYLOR TOM RANDAXHE  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JACOB THUSEN BOBAN CHALDOVICH LAURA NIX INA FICHMAN CO-PRODUCER STEFAN PANNEN PRODUCED BY INA FICHMAN A FILM BY JEREMY XIDO



100 million years ago, she ruled the earth... Now she's for sale.



Intuitive Pictures and Dogwoof present:

# THE BONES

Canada / Germany, 2024, 98'

a film by  
Jeremy Xido

## PRESS NOTES

**World premiere**  
CPH:DOX 2024

Press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#)

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# Short Synopsis

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***The Bones*** traverses the globe alongside paleontologists on a quest to unearth dinosaur fossils that may hold the key to save humanity from extinction. It's a race against time before the bones disappear into the hands of fossil dealers, who stand to make millions by selling them on the open market. A cinematic adventure that reaches from the Mongolian Gobi Desert to the floor of a Paris auction house, ***The Bones*** exposes the clash between science, post-colonial reckoning, and hard-headed capitalism.

## Synopsis

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***The Bones*** is a stunning, cinematic exploration of the high-stakes world of dinosaur bone trading, where obsessive collectors compete with museums, scientists, and high-end auction houses to own a piece of the past. It's a story of intrigue, an illicit caper at the collision of science, commerce, and a dark colonial legacy.

Paleontologist Bolor Minjin, the first scientist to ever repatriate fossils that had been stolen from Mongolia, travels through her homeland training the next generation of Mongolians to be the guardians of the bones. In Morocco, Nizar Ibrahim leads a team into the Saharan desert on a quest to unearth the next great scientific discovery, but must negotiate with fossil dealers who want big money for the same bones.

Meanwhile, French collector and fossil dealer Francois Escuillier introduces us to the questionable world of buying and selling dinosaur bones, which today can be worth millions of dollars. And eminent paleontologist Jack Horner—the man upon whom Jurassic Park is based—changes the concept of a fossil's value by breaking them open, searching for molecular clues that will help him resurrect an actual dinosaur.

Part international thriller, part meditation on the nature of existence, the film reveals the hidden world of passionate, globetrotting scientists and fossil dealers battling over the meaning of ***The Bones***...and our uncertain future.

## Jeremy Xido

Jeremy is a filmmaker and performance artist whose work has taken him around the world in an exploration of complex issues of community and personal identity. His approach to stage and film blends emotionally gripping personal stories with the larger social contexts from which they emerge.

Originally from Detroit, Jeremy graduated cum laude in Painting and Comparative Literature from Columbia University in New York and trained at the Actor's Studio. A Fulbright and Guggenheim recipient is the artistic co-director of the performance and film company CABULA6, voted "company of the year 2009" by Ballettanz, and awarded "Outstanding Artist of the Year 2010" by the Austrian Ministry of the Arts.



Jeremy's award-winning feature documentary ***Death Metal Angola*** has screened at more than 80 film festivals including Rotterdam, Dubai, BAFICI, Sydney, CPH:DOX, and DOC NYC. Reviews in Indiewire and the Hollywood Reporter have described it as "riveting," "absorbing, beautifully shot... superb," "raucously crowd pleasing," and "a cult classic in the making." It opened theatrically in the US in 2014.

Jeremy's three-part solo stage performance *The Angola Project*, developed with funding from the European Union and a residency at the Experimental Music and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), has premiered around the world at venues such as Impulstanz in Vienna and PS122 in New York. The New York Times found it a "marvelously quixotic...jostling collage that is intimate yet informed by sweeping issues surrounding class, race and identity." Jeremy performed a selection of the piece at TEDx Fulbright in 2014; it can be viewed [here](#).

In 2006, he was commissioned by the European Union to create a six-part documentary series called *Crime Europe* which screened in festivals around Europe, on Swedish TV, and in the German Parliament. Since 2012, has been working on cinema and transmedia versions of *The Angola Project* with support from Cinereach, the Jerome Foundation, ARTE, and the POV Hackathon. The film adaptation, entitled, ***Sons of Detroit***, it is currently in post-production. It is being co-produced by ZDF/ARTE.

Jeremy is fluent in English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese and is based in Los Angeles, California.

## Filmography

- 2018 ***Drama Queen*** (Short)
- 2018 ***The Angola Project*** (Documentary)
- 2018 ***ICare*** (Documentary short)
- 2018 ***IDive*** (Documentary short)
- 2012 ***Death Metal Angola*** (Documentary)
- 2007 ***Macondo*** (Short)
- 2006 ***Crime Europe*** (Documentary)

## Ina Fichman

Oscar, BAFTA, Emmy nominated and Peabody award-winning producer Ina Fichman, Intuitive Pictures, has been producing high profile documentary and fiction films, and interactive projects for close to 30 years. Many of her creative documentaries have been released in theatres in Canada and abroad and have played at festivals including Sundance, Berlin, Hot Docs, Locarno, Karlovy Vary, RIDM, CPH:DOX, Venice, SXSW, Tribeca, TIFF and others. Ina recently produced the acclaimed documentary *Fire of Love*, which had its world premiere at Sundance 2022 where it was sold to National Geographic Documentary Films and subsequently released by Neon in the US, Dogwoof in the UK and MK2 in the rest of the world.



Other films include ***Stray***, ***The Gig is Up***, ***Once Upon a Sea***, ***Blue Box***, ***The Oslo Diaries***, ***Inside Lehman Brothers***, ***Gift*** and ***Laila at the Bridge***. Award-winning productions also include Amer Shomali's ***The Wanted 18***, ***Monsoon*** (Canada's Top 10) and ***Vita Activa: The Spirit of Hannah Arendt***.

In 2018, Ina was the recipient of the Don Haig Award from Hot Docs which recognizes the work of a Canadian independent producer. She is currently chair of the national board of the Documentary Association of Canada, sits on the board of the Quebec chapter of DOC, is on the board of Hot Docs, the IDA, is one of the chairs of the Documentary Producers Alliance (DPA) and co-chairs the International Committee of the Canadian producers association, CMPA. For 7 years, Ina sat on the board of the CMPA where she chaired the Documentary Committee. She is one of the founding board members of Montreal Women in Film (FCTNM) and Women in Film and Television International (WIFTI). Ina is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

## Filmography

- 2022 **Fire of Love** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2021 **Blue Box** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2021 **The Gig Is Up** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2021 **Once Upon a Sea** (Interactive documentary) (producer)
- 2019 **Don't Worry, The Doors Will Open** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2018 **Inside Lehman Brothers** (TV Movie documentary) (producer)
- 2018 **Laila at the Bridge** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2018 **Gift** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2018 **The Oslo Diaries** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2017 **Space's Deepest Secrets** (TV Series documentary) (producer, 1 episode)
- 2016 **Judging Japan** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2015 **Vita Activa: The Spirit of Hannah Arendt** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2014 **The Wanted 18** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2014 **Monsoon** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2014 **100% T-Shirt** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2012 **Inheritance** (producer)
- 2010 **The Flood** (producer)
- 2010 **A contre-courant** (TV Movie documentary) (producer)
- 2009 **Malls R Us** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2009 **Partly Private** (Documentary) (executive producer)
- 2008 **S&M: Short and Male** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2008 **Active-toi** (TV Series documentary) (producer)
- 2007 **Family Motel** (producer)
- 2007 **Six Days in June** (Documentary) (producer)
- 2007 **That's poker... Dans la peau d'un joueur** (TV Movie documentary) (producer)
- 2007 **Black Coffee** (TV Movie documentary) (producer)
- 2007 **La quête** (TV Series) (executive producer - 2007) / (producer)
- 2004 **My Brand New Life** (TV Series documentary) (executive producer)
- 2002 **Undying Love** (Documentary) (executive producer) / (producer)
- 1994 **Longshots** (Documentary)



# Interview with director Jeremy Xido

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**How did the idea for *The Bones* come about? Tell us about the genesis of the film.**

It began with a dance piece with the Mongolian military, and I got sidetracked to dinosaurs because somebody gave me an article, and that got me obsessed.

I was in New York when I received an invitation to help develop a dance piece with the Mongolian military, as my background is in dancing, performing and acting. On my way to the airport, I stopped at a theater where I was going to perform after I returned from Mongolia. There, I met with the artistic director, who saw my suitcase and when I told him I was headed to Mongolia, he handed me a New Yorker article that he had read. There was this extra large paper in the printer, so the article that he had printed out for me was giant. I grabbed it and ran off to the airport and hopped on the plane. I couldn't sleep on the flight, so I opened it up and discovered this amazing article by one of my favorite writers, Paige Williams, about the infamous court case 'the United States of America v. One Tyrannosaurus [ed. Tarbosaurus] Bataar Skeleton', which blew the lid off of the existing black market of the dinosaur bone trade.

The article also had a small mention of Mongolian paleontologist Bolor Minjin, which piqued my interest. When I arrived in Mongolia, I was with the military for the rehearsals. And whenever we had a break, I would run off to the museums. I called up everybody that was in that article, and I called Oyungerel Tseveddamba. Oyungerel was actually in the United States at the time, preparing the Tarbosaurus Bataar to be repatriated. So when I was going to be flying back to New York, the Tarbosaurus Bataar was going to be flying to Mongolia, so we sort of passed each other in the air.

I kept thinking about the mention of Bolor in the article, which had a David and Goliath aspect to it—this Mongolian woman scientist in New York at the core of the monumental story of the dinosaur repatriation. Originally, I thought that the film would chronicle her story on the mission of repatriating the Mongolian dinosaurs, but the scope of it grew as I started to understand the extent and the global ramifications of the bone trade. The Mongolian story was very important at that time, but as time passed, I have come to learn that Morocco was one of the main centers of the bone trade, that there was this huge industry, and it was a gray zone. So I ended up meeting Nizar Ibrahim, who was a rising star in paleontology at the time. Gradually, each of these people started putting me in touch with other people, and we started to film and get a broader perspective. I realized that it was a much bigger story than the repatriation story.

***The Bones* opens and closes with the Gobi Desert in Mongolia, traversing the globe, from the Sahara Desert to Great Plains Badlands, from Tucson to Paris. What was your rationale for setting the opening and closing scenes in Mongolia?**

The Mongolian story is the heart of this journey. It starts in the sands of the Gobi Desert, with the joyous child's play, which conjures up mythical, fantastical creatures that are unlike anything humans have imagined. They can fly, they can roar, and when you realize that they were actually here, it lights up your curiosity and you start to wonder about the history of being. People joke that paleontology is a gateway drug to science. But what if that knowledge has disappeared with a theft of fossils? The film moves across the world, weaving together stories, complicated by the legacies of colonialism and late-stage capitalism. As the film closes, it brings you back to where it began, with the starry sky over the Mongolian desert, and people, huddled together around a campfire, contemplating on how one finds their way through the desert by letting rocks guide them, and how one finds themselves in time and space by looking at the stars. At the end of the day, these elemental tools are all we have to unlock the secrets of the universe. The great mysteries.

**The questions of colonial legacy loom large in your film. Could you talk about the pertinence of this topic in the documentary?**

It is almost a clichéd adage that knowledge is power, but in what way is knowledge power? How does it play out? The history of paleontology was essentially formed in several Western knowledge centers, which was inextricably linked with the nations' financial and military ability to go to far-flung lands and bring home ancient fossils. A lot of what we know about paleontology—like the classic Hollywood stars, such as T. Rex, velociraptors and triceratops—comes from North America and a handful of other places. Whereas, there are these vast ecosystems, stretching from Morocco and other parts of the African continent, which hold immense knowledge. That was indeed one of Nizar's points that the very notion of what a dinosaur is was colonized by the limited perspectives shaped by the Western institutions and their interests at the time.

With colonial history being re-examined and fractured, different points of power, knowledge and scientific inquiry are starting to emerge, which require a lot of capacity building and support owing to their rather limited means. This capacity building is a monumental task. And scientists like Nizar, who spans North Africa and Europe, or Bolor, who spans the United States and Mongolia, are able to use the power of these European and North American knowledge bases to be able to build capacity and slowly shift the centers of scientific inquiry away from the traditional colonial centers of power. And scientific knowledge, which is at the center of storytelling, is shifting along these decolonized fault lines.

**There is also capitalism that comes into play, where fossils are suddenly labeled as “goods,” as we observe in the soundbite of Yves-Bernard Debie, the lawyer of fossil dealer François Esculier.**

It is a colonial legacy that has morphed into a capitalist system. One of the intriguing evolutions of the dinosaur market is the move towards the high-end art world, and the way in which art and artifacts are commodified and commercialized. There are stories that are built around them—as, in large part, storytelling elevates their value [auction expert Iacopo Briano explains, “you tell the story, you sell the story”]—but they are also extracted from their actual history and context, and sold as objects. Hence, this system becomes entirely object-focused, circulating items that you can own, buy, sell and collect.

And then the very notion of ownership is brought into question. Can anyone really own the dinosaurs? How does one define ownership of the dinosaurs that were roaming around some 100 million years ago? In the court case ‘the United States of America vs. One Tyrannosaurus [ed. Tarbosaurus] Bataar Skeleton’, there was an argument that claimed that it was essentially like oil rights, where a fossil is identified as a natural resource and could be denationalized and pulled into the neoliberal free market economy. Suddenly those laws do not pertain, and you are dealing with different sorts of legal systems. And Yves-Bernard Debie is at the center of that. He is the lawyer of François, he is the lawyer of that auction house in Paris, and uses his knowledge of the law to the benefit of his clients.

**The film examines another critical aspect, the legacy of socio-political systems that have wrecked local economies to an extent that their inhabitants have no viable alternatives to hunting fossils.**

How can you prevent people from hunting fossils when there is nothing else to feed their families? It is the point that Nizar also makes in the film, recognizing that he can’t say anything to them unless there is a viable economic alternative.

Both he and Bolor are grappling with this question. How do you instill knowledge and empower the local inhabitants who live around those bones, so that they become the guardians of the bones? Part of Bolor’s interest also lies in helping people become the guardians of the bones and understand their value beyond the monetary worth. But that is a very hard ask. Asking the very people whose lives are mired in poverty to stop hunting fossils is also cynical, when the real culprits are higher up the chain who exploit the disparity of wealth, from middlemen to the Paris auction house, which exacerbates returns on fossils.

**As the Mongolian paleontologist said, when a dinosaur leaves, with it leaves knowledge and the understanding of the importance of preserving and studying the fossils. That is what Bolor was perhaps trying to achieve with the Movable Museum project.**

That is the aim. However, altruism is hard. In one scene, paleontologist Jingmai O'Connor, speaks with a farmer in Montana, who owns land in the United States and is relatively wealthy, and he jokingly says: "I am really happy to give you the bones, so they do not end up being sold. But if you come, and we find a T-Rex that I could sell for 8 million dollars, then we have to talk." So of course, as this scene shows, relying on people's altruism, a higher sense of purpose and duty, is not easy. And it is a huge ask, especially when people engage in hunting of fossils out of financial need.

It is a much bigger structural problem, and I think one of the models that Bolor has flirted with is a form of scientific tourism, which could offer a way of generating income using the knowledge, which is what the Field Museum in Chicago does, with their superstar attraction, Sue the T-Rex. You put a part of the collection on display, which brings in visitors who pay tickets and purchase merchandise, perhaps. And it generates jobs and income for the people. And it becomes a place of study, which can fuel further scientific research and preservation programs.

**Let's talk about the music in the film. You have created these disparate worlds, the world of science and the one of trade. Could you tell us about the music treatment of these cinematic worlds?**

I worked closely with the composer. Ram Borcar was brilliant. He went to the museums when he started working on the project and just hung out with dinosaurs to probe musically what the sound of being around dinosaurs would be, the awe of it.

Cinematically, the perception of our centrality in the universe is like the Hollywood close-up: you myopically think you are at the center of the universe, but once you pull away, another perspective unfolds and makes you fathom the absolute insignificance of the human being in the scale of creation. Some of the musical choices were playing with those shifts in perspectives.

And then there is the more carnivalesque aspect of the bone trade itself, which I feel is much tighter in, even if some of the people like François can see the bigger picture beyond it, they are still stuck in the carnival. We were playing with the perspectives in between the mundane and that space of awe and wonder, along that arc, at

different points and with different characters. And so for each of the locations and characters, we developed different musical universes, a kind of a palette of music that immerses you in these different worlds. In that, my role was not to make a judgment or a claim, but perhaps to place those different universes against each other to create the tension, cinematically and musically, and offer portrayals that feel true to the characters and their line of work.

**Moving on to the topic of climate change, which the documentary also touches on. In one scene, they say how dinosaurs have seen it all, the rising sea levels, the loss of biodiversity and climate change, and now humans are at the crisis point too.**

Once you get past the money and buzz that revolves around the big headlines like these giant dinosaurs, you ask the actual questions that are of value. Both Jingmai and Jack Horner radically change the notion of what a fossil or a dinosaur is. Jack sees it in the molecular structure inside the dinosaur. And for Jingmai, it is the tiniest things that everybody overlooks, the seemingly insignificant things that nobody ever imagines to hold answers. Certainly, there are other answers to be discovered in the big, dramatic finds, but when you break the mold of what you traditionally imagine a dinosaur to be, then you start moving towards the future, as opposed to just looking into something in the past. And Nizar's idea is to collect fossils not only to build a dinosaur itself but also to resurrect the entire ecosystems within which these dinosaurs lived and died. That is where we start to get the real information about nature, the nature of life.

**There are also more philosophical questions about human existence, which paleontology reminds us of, that we are all but a passing moment for this planet, like dinosaurs once were.**

One of the early things that Nizar said to me was that astronomy shows us how small we are in space, and paleontology—how small we are in time. So going back to an earlier question, the film opens with the young girls digging in the dirt and burying tiny dinosaur miniatures in Mongolia's Gobi Desert, which represents this nascent bud of paleontology, and then the film closes with people gazing at the stars. Metaphorically, these scenes also allude to our place in time and space, which is a fleeting thing.

**The film boasts a mosaic of different characters and stories. Why did you choose to go far and wide when delving into this topic?**

It originally started with the story of one woman and her endeavors. And as I dug more, I discovered a complex web of different forces colliding and contending. In a

way, the film's form is fitting the subject matter. As opposed to just telling one central story, the documentary is layered. It is about brushing away the layers and getting further and further down. And as you do that, you unearth a much more dynamic, complex view. But what has always been important for me is that at the core there are human beings who are in jeopardy with their deep desires coming up against great odds and they are in pain, and they are trying to find answers. So ultimately, it is a character-driven film, which reveals different layers of the characters, their contradictions and ambitions through these emotional trajectories. When we started shooting with Bolor in 2015, she had a very particular story. And that story has changed. And I think those changes are reflected much more in Nizar's current trajectory. I think they all offer reflections of each other that one would not necessarily see by just looking at one strand.

On the surface, there is this voyeuristic fascination with the trade and the fantastical world of dinosaurs, and all who are enmeshed in it—the bone collectors, the fossil dealers, the auction houses, you name it. There are also those dedicated scientists who are at odds with it. But once you scratch the surface, a more profound story emerges about the colonial entanglements of history, science and commerce, which becomes more pertinent in light of the global reckoning of colonialism.

*Interview by Sevara Pan, March 2024*

# Credits

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Executive Producers	Laura Nix Ina Fichman

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Archival Producer	Nancy Marcotte

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