

OZOGOCHÉ

un documental de Joe Houlberg Silva



con Sisa Bejarano, Don Feliciano Bejarano y La Comunidad de Ozogoché Alto.
Botón Films presenta "Ozogoché" en Coproducción con Serendipity Films y Docmas Guión, Producción y Producción Ejecutiva Joe Houlberg Silva / Andrés Cornejo Pinto
Coproducción Ellen De Waele / Mirna Everhard Dirección de Fotografía Pablo Secaira Edición Oscar X. Illingworth y Joe Houlberg Silva Post Producción y Laboratorio 2.35 Digital
Diseño de Sonido Nicolás Fernández Pérez Mezcla Juan José Luzuriaga Música Mesías Maiguashca, Juan Diego Illescas y Joe Houlberg Silva
Idea Original y Dirección Joe Houlberg Silva



LOGLINE

In the Ecuadorian Andes, the Ozogоче community await the Cuvivies, culturally celebrated birds who, inexplicably, migrate from North America annually to commit suicide in nearby lakes. However, it is the journey in reverse the Ozogоче people must now make, with the hopes they will overcome its dangers.

SYNOPSIS

Each year, Don Feliciano harvests the Cuvivie, a migratory bird who inexplicably commits suicide in the Ozogоче Lakes in the mountains of the Ecuadorian Andes. The event is a time of celebration and feast for the surrounding communities. Don Feliciano, as one of the elders, passes down the traditions and history of the Ozogоче's relationship with the Cuvivie to his granddaughter, Sisa, and the other kids in the villages. However, facing the decline of the Cuvivie harvest, family members have migrated to the USA; their news coming only through phone calls and TikTok reels. Because nature can no longer provide as it once did, more and more of Don Feliciano's community now struggle with their choice to leave.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Upon discovering the journey of the suicidal birds, plunging into the Ozogoché lakes after months of southward flight, a profound resonance stirred within me. These avian travelers seemed to mirror a deeper connection to my own journey through life and death.

Having spent extensive time away from my homeland, reflections on identity, both personal and cultural, emerged. My country's history bears the scars of colonization and migration, fostering an ongoing cultural metamorphosis. In a society marked by lingering wounds and fears, news from Ecuador drew me to the narrative of these North American birds, the upland sandpipers, that fly to the south every year, only to meet their death in the Ozogoché lakes—a solemn offering of sacrifice. This made me think on what dies in us humans when we leave, and how in a way there is always a cultural suicide.

Like these migrating birds and their changing homes, the essence of 'home' has constantly evolved for me. Life's transient nature, embodied by these birds' perpetual transformation, led me to recognize the beauty and haunting nature of detachment. I now ponder: What is 'home' for the departed migrants? And more poignantly: What defines 'home' for those left behind?

The ensuing six years were dedicated to immersing within the Ozogoché community, a process that unearthed layers beyond the birds' migration. A complex portrait emerged, mirroring wider social struggles echoing across Latin American minorities. What began as a chronicle of avian migration evolved into an intimate exploration of individuals, raising profound questions about existence, time, and our shared

humanity. Through this journey, a profound friendship blossomed with Sisa, Don Feliciano, and the community, a bond strengthened by mutual respect.

The tale of the Cuviví transcends its avian protagonists, becoming a reflection of human migration, akin to the enduring narrative of the Ozogoché land. Migration, a persisting motif, calls us to grasp the birds' sacrifice and perceive the reflection of our own journeys.

As the years unfolded, this journey of filmmaking and my deep-rooted connection with the Ozogoché community revealed invaluable lessons that transcended the mere creation of a film. It illuminated the power of genuine human connection and the profound impact. Through countless conversations, shared laughter, and long walks through the mountains, I realized that our relationship surpassed the boundaries of a final cinematic product.

Currently, as a professor at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito USFQ, we are already engaged in fostering bonding projects that bring together various academic disciplines to address the pressing needs of the community. Leveraging the institution's resources, we are actively involved in planning initiatives that will promote education, socio-economic development, and cultural preservation within the Ozogoché community and beyond. This ongoing endeavor signifies our commitment to nurturing sustainable growth and fostering a legacy of mutual understanding, collaboration, and positive change. This for me is an amazing opportunity, to be able to visit my friends in Ozogoché and continue to collaborate with them.



PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

Ozogoche is a territory in the heart of the andean highlands where the Kichwa Puruhaes nationality lives. It is a hostile place for human life, with limited resources where necessity exposes its inhabitants to emigrate. In spite of this phenomenon, the culture has endured, it has resisted various types of structural and historical oppression. They possess a unique power.

In 2023, Ecuadorians became the second-largest nationality to traverse the Darién jungle, according to a report issued on July 31 by the Panamanian government. In the first seven months of the year, a staggering 248,901 migrants made this journey. Those who reached their destination continued through Central America to Mexico, aiming to cross into the United States. Although precise data on indigenous emigration in the central Andes of Ecuador is scarce, we observed a generational division within the community: few elders, but many children, an indicative of a new wave of emigration

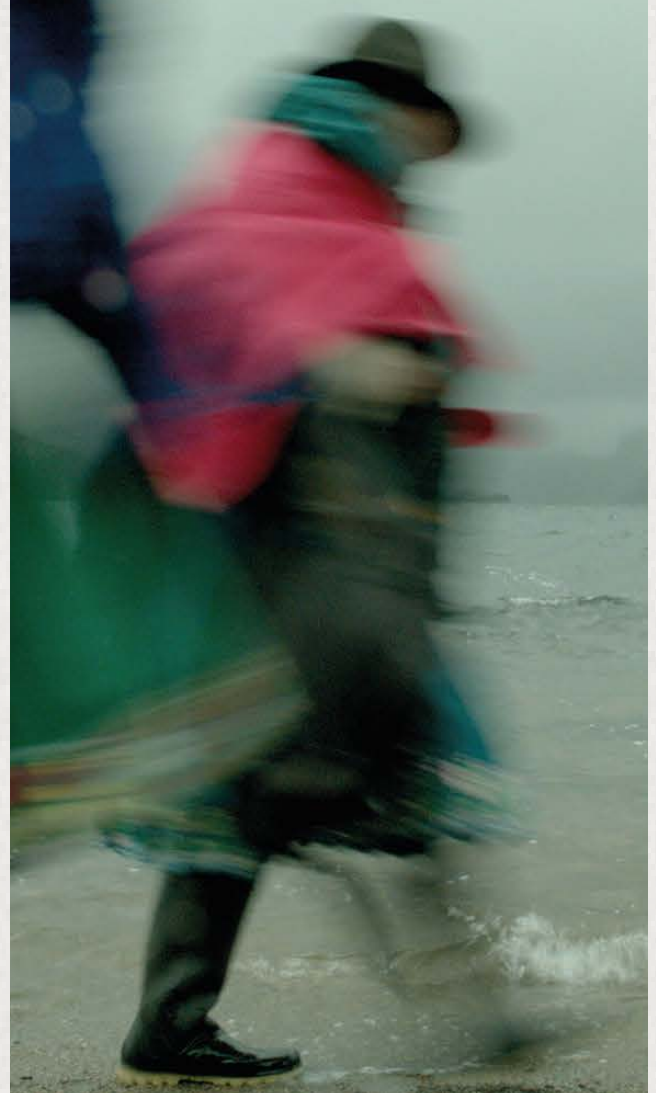
from Ecuador.

Crossing the border to the north with no return means the disappearance of a language, there is a risk that the memory vanishes, customs are changed, unique ways of seeing the world and sensitivities can be altered. The story of the bird is an allegory in Ozogoche.

My stance towards cinema is rooted in a need to tell stories of my country. Local stories that find universality. Intimate languages that correspond to a way of seeing the world that is specific to my place of origin. I look for narratives that take risks at the moment of finding a cinematographic language. I have a background as a director but I couldn't resist producing Ozogoche, I found there a place where I could mature and above all tell a story that I consider necessary to show. The director's proposal convinced me, he is addressing essential issues such as borders, immigration, and death.

When I asked Feliciano about his motivations for participating in this documentary, he expressed: "I want my grandchildren to remember me and the Cuvivies," and "I wish to attract visitors to our community." Feliciano's first answer underscored the significance of preserving his legacy and memories, while the second highlighted a pressing need to stimulate the local economy. This has posed significant challenges, and responsibilities, prompting us to question our methods and intentions in our storytelling. Throughout our six-year journey, we grappled with questions such as, "What does this exchange entail?", "What will our relationship with the community be after the film is complete?" The answers were built as our relationship deepened. It is a process that is still under construction, however this search gave shape to a design and method of the production.

Although Feliciano had never seen a movie, his desire to have his life filmed was palpable. He is acutely aware that he is the last guardian of the tradition of harvesting the birds. This documentary needed to exist, as it captures an invaluable part of human heritage at risk of being lost forever. Feliciano embodies a genuine connection to this ancient practice and nature. The urgency of preserving his fading memories compelled us to conduct numerous interviews. While we decided against using talking heads in the documentary, we felt ethically obliged to document these conversations, providing the community with material for their own use. We listened attentively to the needs expressed by local residents and leaders. We understood that this encounter was nourished through an exchange, our mission went beyond telling their story. That is why we set out to support, in a sustainable way, local initiatives that promote local tourism and education.



Our production adopted a collaborative creative process for script development, involving the characters as in an active creative gesture of self-representation. We decided to create an impact campaign, that is already underway, for local distribution and alternative distribution in Ecuador, striving to foster a deeper and more direct connection with the audience, encouraging reflection on the film's themes and creating the space for the characters to speak for themselves. Communication with the characters and visits will continue as we were invited to accompany and participate in community education and tourism initiatives.

Thinking about the premiere of *Ozogoche* and its distribution does not make me feel like it is the end of one phase, but rather the beginning of another. This film is a tool for future encounters, dialogues, and reflections.

BIOS

Director

Joe Houlberg Silva studied Film and Philosophy at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito and earned an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago SAIC. His professional experience includes directing, assistant directing, and producing film projects. He has produced and/or assisted films of three renowned Ecuadorian directors: "Tinta Sangre" (2012) directed by Mateo Herrera, "El Telón" (2013) directed by Victor ArreguÍ, and Ana Cristina Barragán s first films: "Alba" (2016) and "La Piel Pulpo" (2022), which premiered at Rotterdam and San Sebastian respectively.

In 2019, he founded the production company Botón Films, dedicated to producing independent Ecuadorian films that challenge the audiovisual language from an authentic and intimate perspective.

Currently, Joe is involved in the development and production of several projects, including: "Ozogoche" (2023) his debut documentary, as director and producer, which will premiere at IDFA and received support from various organizations such as Buenos Aires LAB (BAL) at BAFICI, IFCI national fund for documentary production, Co-Production Meeting of the Guadalajara Film Festival (FICG), SANFIC industry in Chile, Nuevas Miradas of EICTV in Cuba, IDFA Bertha Fund Classic, IDFA Bertha Fund Europe Copro, IDFA Project Space, IDFA Forum Rough Cut and the Doha Film Institute fund for post production; "La Hiedra" (2024), as producer and directed by Ana Cristina Barragán, supported by the IFCI national fund for production, CNC Aide aux cinémas du monde, Ibermedia Production fund, Cinemart IFFR,



Brlab in Brazil, Ikusmira Berriak residency from San Sebastian Film Festival, among others; "Amapola" (2025), also as producer and directed by Ana Cristina Barragán, selected to participate at the Locarno Open Doors HUB; the short film "Ave" (2023), that recently had its World Premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival TIFF.

In addition to his filmmaking endeavors, Joe teaches film at USFQ and is an active member of the Association of Independent Directors and Screenwriters of Ecuador and the Academy of Audiovisual and Cinematographic Arts of Ecuador.

BIOS

Producer

Andrés Cornejo Pinto is a non-fiction filmmaker. He earned his film degree from ESCAC (Barcelona) and later completed a master's in directing at Docnomads (Lisbon, Budapest, Brussels). His visual style embraces personal and creative narratives, often experimenting across disciplines. With roles spanning producer, editor, cinematographer, and researcher, his directing work has graced festivals like IDFA, SHEFFIELD DOC FEST, DOCAVIV, HOT DOCS, BUSAN, EDOC, and more. In 2022, he founded DOCMAS, a production company focused on creative documentaries. He currently teaches at the University of San Francisco, while also producing "Ozogoche" and editing "Hijos de la Luz."



Cinematographer

Pablo Secaira, filmmaker and director of photography born in Guaranda in 1986, distinguishes himself in the cinematographic field for his visual and narrative creativity. With his remarkable work in "Ozogoche" he established himself in the industry, gaining experience with music videos for renowned artists. He is recognised for "Huellas, el viaje de la mujer pájaro", which he collaborated with the Museo de Arte Precolombino Casa del Alabado. Currently, Pablo is innovating with "Elías", his most recent experimental short film. He founded Elena Lab, a filmic experimentation laboratory where analogue, still, and moving image materials are reworked and scanned.

Editor

Oscar Illingworth is an Ecuadorian non-fiction filmmaker and editor, he studied Film at the University of Navarra in 2016, in 2018 he was selected to participate in Berlinale Talents BAFICI in Buenos Aires. He has been involved in different film projects in South America. As editor of the Ecuadorian documentary *Ozogoche*, he participated in IDFA Project Spaces 2022. His work explores the language of essay and documentary, making room for materials from different backgrounds. His films have been shown at festivals and cultural spaces in different countries such as: Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Brazil, USA, France, and Ecuador. He is currently developing his first feature film *Amago de un incendio*, where he addresses the historical relationship between his hometown and pyromania.



Sound

Nicolás Fernández Pérez is an acoustic engineer and sound designer. He earned his degrees at UDLA (Quito) and University of Edinburgh (UK). His 12+ years of experience in cinema have taught him that sound can influence the subconscious more than any other sense, so by collaborating creatively with filmmakers, he can enrich their stories with narrative sound design. Part of Berlinale Talents 2022, examples of his work are "*Ozogoche* (doc)", "*Al Oriente* (fiction)", and "*Huaquero* (hybrid)". He currently teaches sound for film in universities (UDLA / USFQ) and plays guitar in two bands: *Páramos Inversos* and *Los Barrelshots*.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

BOTÓN

Botón Films is a recently established Ecuadorian film production company, founded in 2019 by Joe Houlberg. The company's mission is to explore innovative approaches to filmmaking that align with the current reality of the cinema industry in Ecuador. As a production house, Botón Films takes on daring and artistic projects, emphasizing originality in both content and language. Their focus lies in producing projects that take creative risks and are characterized by their unique artistic vision.

Over the years, Botón Films has been involved in various prestigious events and film festivals, such as the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), IDFA, Locarno Open Doors, Cinemart at Rotterdam Film Festival, Encuentro de Coproducción and Ikusmira Berriak at SSFF,

Palm Springs Film Festival, BAL (BAFICI), Co Production Meeting at FICG, SANFIC Industria, Nuevas Miradas EICTV and others.

The company's dedication to excellence and artistic exploration has led to the accumulation of numerous awards and recognitions. Notable credits include being recipients of awards such as CNC Aide aux cinémas du monde, IDFA Bertha Fund Classic and Europe, Doha Film Institute, Ibermedia, IFCI, and several others.

DOCMAS

Docmas produces non-fiction films that spotlight local sensibilities through intimate, creative cinematic languages, seeking complexity and critical thinking within Ecuador's contemporary landscape and memory, all while employing artistic forms that challenge conventions.





SERENDEPITY

Serendipity Films is an independent production company based in Flanders, Belgium, created in 2006 by producer Ellen De Waele. Serendipity concentrates on (co-) producing international author driven feature films and documentaries often highlighting social relevant issues, initiated by young and established, fresh and innovative talent. In 2019 Mirna Everhard joined the company.

Recently, Serendipity Films co-produced OMEN, a feature film by BALOJI, in collaboration with Wrong Men that will premiere in Cannes 2023 in the Un Certain Regard selection.

Earlier productions include HOWLING, a short fiction by Laura Van Haecke, which won several awards. Amongst others the prize for best international short at Palm Springs Short 2021.

DARK RIDER, a documentary feature by Eva Küpper, was theatrically released in June 2021 in the Benelux and had its world premiere at Dokfest München 2021. ON AIR, a

documentary feature by Manno Lanssens, which had its world premiere at the Docville International Film Festival and was selected for o.a. the Rome Film Festival, Doclisboa International Film Festival in 2019; RETROSPEKT, a feature film by Esther Rots with Flemish actresses Circé Lethem and Lien Wildemeersch in the lead roles, which premiered in 2018 at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and was selected for the Berlinale/FORUM 2019; UNE PART D'OMBRE, a feature film by Samuel Tilman with Fabrizio Rongione and Natacha Régnier in the lead roles; STRIKE A POSE, a documentary by Ester Gould & Reijer Zwaan, which premiered in 2016 at the Berlinale Film Festival (Panorama) and is traveling the world since (Tribeca, HotDocs, etc); and DEATH OF A SHADOW, a short film by Tom Van Avermaet starring internationally acclaimed actor Matthias Schoenaerts, which won the European Film Award for Best Short and was nominated for the Academy Award® for Best Live Action Short Film.

.

CREDITS

Cast

Sisa Bejarano

Don Feliciano Bejarano

María Laura Bejarano

Alex Bejarano

Feliciano Bejarano Jr.

Sandra Bejarano

Patricio

Crew

Direction: Joe Houlberg Silva

Scenario: Joe Houlberg Silva / Andres Cornejo

Production: Andrés Cornejo / Joe Houlberg Silva

Cinematography: Pablo Secaira

Sound: Nicolás Fernandez

Editing: Oscar Illingworth / Joe Houlberg Silva

Music: Mesías Maiguashca / Juan Diego Illescas / Joe Houlberg Silva



TITLE: Ozogoché

DURATION: 77 minutes

RATIO: 2.00:1 UNIVISIUM

COUNTRIES OF PRODUCTION: Ecuador - Belgium - Qatar

FORMAT: DCP

CAMERA: Sony a7III

RESOLUTION RECORDING FORMAT: 4k

LENSES: Carl Zeiss ZE KIT 21mm / 28mm / 35mm / 50mm / 85mm

EDITING: Suite Adobe: Premier Pro / Photoshop / Illustrator

COLOR: Color

COLOR CORRECTION: Davinci Resolve Studio

SOUND: Protools

LANGUAGES: Kichwa / Spanish

PRODUCTION COMPANY: BOTÓN FILMS

CO-PRODUCTION COMPANY: DOCMAS - SERENDIPITY FILMS

SALES AGENT: BLOOMING DOCS
Suzanne Nodale – suzanne.nodale@bloomingsdocs.com

SUBTITLES: ENGLISH - ESPAÑOL