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Berlinale Forum

PRESS KIT

FLYING TIGERS

A FILM BY MADHUSREE DUTTA
WITH MI YOU AND PURAV GOSWAMI

Camera Riju Das, Isabelle Casez, Guligo Jia Yanan | **Sound** Abhijit Chetiya, Pascal Capitolin, Junyi He | **Art** Suresh BV, Nina Sabnani | **Editor** Federico Neri | **Music** Bo Wiget, Monika Rinck, Chandril Bhattacharya, Upal Sengupta | **Sound Design and Mixing** Bobby John | **Image Post Production** wave-line Berlin | **Executive Producer** Meike Martens | **Line Producer** Tarshia Dutta, Xiaodong Guo, Mina Chen | **Commissioning Editor** Kathrin Brinkmann | **Producer** Alex Gerbaulet, Merle Kröger

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FLYING TIGERS

A FILM BY MADHUSREE DUTTA

LOGLINE

Flying Tigers is a film on memory, war and infrastructure. Following a historical fragment which resurfaced during her mother's Alzheimer's disease, Indian filmmaker Madhusree Dutta embarks on a meandering journey with Chinese media scholar You Mi and Assamese writer Purav Goswami. On the driving beat of the Song of Infrastructure they move between times and territories facing the *end of the distance*.

<u>Length</u>	105 minutes
<u>Country</u>	Germany, India 2026
<u>Shooting format</u>	2K
<u>Screening format</u>	DCP
<u>Sound</u>	5.1
<u>Languages</u>	Bengali, Miya, English, Mandarin, German and Polish
<u>Subtitles</u>	English / German
<u>World premiere</u>	76. Berlin International Film Festival / 56. Forum 2026

Download Director's portrait: <https://nx72786.your-storageshare.de/s/7x8pDi4AfyY9Y3J>

Download film stills: <https://nx72786.your-storageshare.de/s/39tdeRWSZqxbcfk>

Download film clips: <https://nx72786.your-storageshare.de/s/eTTkxSDYFRrSztm>

CONTACTS

<u>Press relations</u>	Kleber Film PR Dagny Kleber dagny@kleberfilmpr.de, +49 (0) 171 4024 803 Katharina Maas katharina@kleberfilmpr.de, +49 (0) 178 8642 721
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<u>World Sales</u>	pong film Skalitzer Str. 62 10997 Berlin www.pong-berlin.de Email: mail@pong-berlin.de
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<u>Distributor Germany</u>	Arsenal Filminstitut e.V. Gerichtstr. 31 13347 Berlin www.arsenal-berlin.de distribution@arsenal-berlin.de
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<u>Director</u>	madhusreedutta@gmail.com
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FLYING TIGERS

A film on memory, war and infrastructure

by MADHUSREE DUTTA

SYNOPSIS

Close the windows. The tiger is coming. I can smell it!

Alzheimer's disease triggers a fragment of memory to surface in an old woman's mind, witnessed by the daughter, Indian filmmaker Madhusree Dutta. She follows this trail, left by her mother, back to the times of WWII. In the northeastern state of Assam, in 1942 the US Army had implemented the first airbridge across the Himalaya, to send military aid to Kunming in China, carried out by the special air force unit *Flying Tiger*. The building of an enormous infrastructure destroyed the ecological balance of the jungles, and real tigers appeared in the tea plantations of Assam, where the director's mother was growing up.

In the course of this research, Madhusree and her friend, Chinese media scholar You Mi, whose friendship could only develop in a third country like Germany, discover a common moment of history between two countries with closed borders. They are joined by the young Assamese writer Purav Goswami, driven into the research by his interest in landscape, soil and terrain.

In a growing audiovisual web of personal anecdotes, letters and messages, they embark on a journey between times and territories, between fragile memories of pasts unknown, and invisible corners of the present.

Like *chars* in the powerful river Brahmaputra, floating islands of narratives appear and disappear throughout the film, fertile but not fixable as political or dramaturgical territories.

In this, the filmmaker makes us see the world through a different lens, like Alzheimer's. The autobiographical turns hybrid, maybe even hallucinatory.
*End of the distance.**



FLYING TIGERS

<u>with</u>	Madhusree Dutta, Mi You, Purav Goswami
<u>featuring</u>	Devika Hazarika Akangkhya, Bishnu, Darshna, Kabyashree, Mriganka, Nandini, Prajnasri, Rajashree, Rashmi, Tanushree, Tejaswini, Zinnat, Moji Riba, Kazi Sarowar Neel, Abdur Rahim, Begum Asma Khatun, Shajahan Ali Ahmed, Kuzma, Ge Shuya, Prof. Yang Yuxiang, Cheng Xinhao, Mankong Ho, Mehmet Ozgur Bahçeci
<u>Script&Direction</u>	Madhusree Dutta
<u>Camera</u>	Riju Das (India), Isabelle Casez (Europe), Guligo Jia Yanan (China)
<u>Sound</u>	Ahbijit Chetiya (India), Pascal Capitolin (Europe), Junyi He (China)
<u>Assistant Directors</u>	Cora Czarnecki, Jayadhar Boro, Kazi Sarowar Neel, Purav Goswami, Terry Wang
<u>Art Director</u>	Suresh BV
<u>Animal Masks</u>	Hemant Kumar
<u>Tiger Animation</u>	Nina Sabnani Piyush Verma
<u>Montage</u>	Federico Neri
<u>Dramaturgy</u>	Merle Kröger Bina Paul
<u>Music Design</u>	Bo Wiget
<u>Sound Design&Mixing</u>	Boby John
<u>Audio Post Production</u>	Pratibha Studio Mumbai
<u>Grading&Mastering</u>	Matthias Behrens
<u>Compositing&Credits</u>	Domingo Stephan
<u>Video Post Production</u>	wave-line Berlin
<u>Text Editor</u>	Mitra Mukherjee Parikh
<u>Postproduction Assistant</u>	Saehee Hwang
<u>Executive Producer</u>	Meike Martens
<u>Line Producers</u>	Tarshia Dutta (India), Xiaodong Guo, Mina Chen (China)
<u>Commissioning Editor</u>	Kathrin Brinkmann
<u>Producers</u>	Alex Gerbaulet, Merle Kröger
<u>Development Support</u>	Goethe Institute, Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion, Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln

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Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für Kultur und Medien,
Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg

Postproduction funding

German Films

A production by
In co-production with

pong film
TCG Studios
ZDF/ARTE

TIGER TRAP SONG

Lyrics Chandril Bhattacharya
Composition Upal Sengupta
Vocalists Vedadit, Arhaan, Shuvro, Mehuli
Mixing Thirthankar Majumdar

SONG of INFRASTRUCTURE

Lyrics Monika Rinck
Composition Bo Wiget
Vocalists Anna Clementi, Bo Wiget
Mixing Werner Däfeldecker

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MADHUSREE DUTTA

Madhusree Dutta is a filmmaker, author and cultural producer living in India and Germany.

Her area of interest are hybridity within public and urban culture as well as documentary and archival practices. She is the founder and former director (1998–2016) of Majlis, a center for interdisciplinary art initiatives in Mumbai; and former artistic director (2018–2021) of Academy of the Arts of the World (Akademie der Künste der Welt), in Cologne, Germany.

With *Flying Tigers* Madhusree Dutta returns to filmmaking after twenty years.

FILMS (SELECTED)

I Live in Behrampada, 1993, 45 min.

Memories of Fear, 1995, 57 min.

Sundari: An Actor Prepares, 1997, 30 min.

Scribbles on Akka, 2000, 90 min.

Made in India, 2002, 38 min.

From Here to Here (co-directed with Philip Scheffner), 2005, 60 min.

Seven Islands and a Metro, 2006, 100 min.

Cinema City Shorts (Compilation), 2009

Please see also: www.madhusreedutta.net/



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENTS

SHORT DIRECTOR'S NOTET

(January 2026)

What started as an intimate conversation with my Alzheimer's-affected mother has grown into a cross-continental journey through sites of wars and infrastructures.

The term *Flying Tigers* belongs to US military history. It came to me as a backdrop of the time and the land where my mother had spent her childhood – in Assam, India. It had no connection with my lived-in experiences and work practices. As a filmmaker and curator I have been invested in urban cultures, feminist narratives and post-colonial identities. Border lands and military histories never engaged me artistically or politically. But a riddle thrown by my ailing mother, before she died, landed me at the centre of cultural issues around military endeavors. And then the distant past engulfed my present and all my political and artistic preoccupations.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

(January 2023)

The term *Flying Tigers* belongs to military history. It came to me as a backdrop of the time and the land where my mother had spent her childhood. It had no connection with my lived-in experiences, neither had that kind of history interested me before. As a filmmaker and curator I have been invested in urban cultures, feminist narratives and post-colonial identities. Border lands and military history never engaged me artistically or politically.

But a riddle thrown by my ailing mother, before she died, landed me at the centre of cultural issues around military endeavors. She was suffering from Alzheimer's and repeatedly said – 'Tigers are coming! Close the windows!' Everyone else thought it was delusional. But my study on the disease confirms that Alzheimer's patients never make up a new story – they only mix up the chronology, perspective and scale of an event. Measurements such as memory and experience, major and minor, near and distant lose their specificities in the agitated brain of an Alzheimer's patient. Thus the riddle of the tigers stayed with me since 2015. While thinking around it, I gradually got interested in memories, both personal and cultural – how they survive, change contour, sometimes remain latent and occasionally surface. Resolving the riddle of the tigers became a way of tracing the life of my mother, who lived an apparently quiet and discreet life in 1936–2015. And then I came to my ordinary mother's extraordinary connection with the military initiative of World War II in Assam. A monumental operation by the American army to send military aid from Assam to China across the Himalayas disturbed the wild animals and brought them to the human settlements.

I almost got obsessed to understand how a little girl had perceived and chose to remember the mighty military operation. As I began to talk with my mother's siblings it got clear that there were two parallel streams – the excitement of experiencing something wild and the family's apprehension about the girls going haywire due to sudden change in demography and social structure. 'Tigers are coming' – was the first and 'Close the windows' – was the second. My long term interest in feminist biographies and the construction of women's memoirs got rekindled in the process.

In 2020 I decided to make a trip to Assam, where my mother was born and apparently met the tigers in the 1940s. But I was stopped. The Indian state was executing stringent citizenship laws to eject out the 'doubtful' people. That exercise turned violent and a mini civil war had ensued that came to be known as Anti NRC (national registration of citizenship) Movement. Many of those, who were marked as 'doubtful' and were facing immediate deportation, were Bengali (which is my mother tongue) speaking people in Assam. Though they speak a completely different version of Bangla and they broadly belong to the community of Muslim farmers from the coastal land. That makes their affinity with me quite thin. Yet, it was deemed too dangerous for me, with a Bengali name, to visit Assam in 2020. This incident made me aware of the demographic problems in border regions, which are coveted for their wealth of mineral resources. This also foregrounded the problem of ultranationalism in post-colonial countries. When was war?

Interestingly, around that time I came to Germany to lead an art institution in Köln. In the year 2021, during a break between pandemic lockdowns, I met You Mi, a German-Chinese media theorist, in a pub in Köln. As it was the pandemic time our conversation inevitably turned to illness and mortality. I began to tell my friends my experience as a care giver during my mother's last days. I mentioned my mother's tiger stories and their connection with the American army operation across the Himalayas. You Mi looked stunned. Her parents' families were living in Kunming, the China-end of the operation. She had grown up hearing about stories of the people under siege waiting for the American aid to arrive from Assam. Every story has multiple sides to it – what was a story of destruction in Assam turned out to be a story of solidarity in Kunming. But the realisation that shocked me was why I never thought of exploring this story from a China angle. After all, China is the neighbouring country to India (the shared border area is more than 4000 km). But grown up under colonial education, China has always been the Far East for us. China's self-isolation till the end of the 20th century also fueled the alienation. Additionally, India and China are engaged in a long drawn military conflict around the Himalayas. Hence it was impossible to even imagine that we could have had a common family legacy, a shared moment in world history. We had to meet in Europe after 80 years to find our common umbilical cord. Sometimes dislocation is necessary to find one's self.

2021 was already 10 years after the inauguration of the legendary Chongqing-Duisburg cargo train route – the new Silk Road of trade between China and Europe. Different infrastructure, different logistics, different skills, different hybridity and also a different urban culture. Duisburg was close to where You Mi and myself were living during the pandemic. We witnessed the train transporting life saving vaccines and equipment both ways. This train changes its track gauge when it leaves China and then again when it enters Europe. Could it be the central strategy for exchanges and solidarity – adjusting the track gauge constantly and still evolving newer ways of interfacing? Thereafter, our respective search for moving goods led You Mi to the Central Asian territories of the old Silk Road and I ended up in Małaszewicze on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Meanwhile I fell ill with a life-threatening disease. The long months of isolation in hospitals provided enough opportunities to solve the riddle. By now enough clues were collected from diverse sources. While connecting all the dots across times and geographical zones, the Flying Tigers turned into a project about thresholds. Thresholds between territories, economies, memories and mortalities.

Discovering a family legacy that I was not born into, realizing that the colonial upbringing still influences one's worldview, my impatience towards the contemporary trend of simplistic call for de-colonisation, my disappointment over the emergence of post-colonial ultra-nationalism in India and other Asian countries, my interest in the fragility of women's memories, my experience of working on multicultural projects in the volatile region of NRW (a post-industrial region in Germany), and then my brush with mortality – have seeped in and coloured the narrative. Thus, researching the background of my mother's childhood has actually brought me to the summing up point of my own life.

Hence, this project is widely historical as well as deeply personal. In my earlier works I have never featured myself. That has never been my style. But in this film I feel compelled to place myself as a protagonist – it is a film from my mother to me.

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FLYING TIGERS

ART WORKS

Tiger Animation by Nina Sabnani



Installation Art by Suresh BV



Performance Art by Purav Goswami



Video Art by Mi You ("If On The Silk Road A Traveller")



LYRICS

***DETENTION CAMP* von SHAJAHAN ALI AHMED**

(translated from Miya)

With you in her womb
the woman moved shy and fearful in the crowd.
To birth you a man gathered all his virility.
The rays of the sun made you cry.
Others laughed.
You learned to walk, talk and sing
of spring and eternal monsoons.

Like a citizen you dreamt of rice, clothing and shelter;
you longed to drown in the enchanting eyes
of the princess of your dreams in springtime;
you were to journey downstream in your wonder boat
into the kingdom of light.

You had dreamt of giving a name to your sperm,
but the poisonous wind killed it all –
in the light of day, in full view.
A dark room kept waiting for you
but unknown to you
oneday the address got lost.
Nothing is different in your blood from theirs.
But they love the sky, they keep alive
tales of rain, floods, drought and spring.

The child of Khalek is now taking baby steps
learning to say Dad
while being far away.

For like you
their address too is now

Detention Camp.

SONG of INFRASTRUCTURE by MONIKA RINCK

contained container contained container contained container contained

aluminium
bricks, coal
airport and camera
gasoline and opium
ammunition
ointment and rails
jeep and fur
tobacco and molasses
aeroplanes

infrastructure infrastructure infrastructure infrastructure

It will take you.
And forsake you.
It will suck you up and will
spit you down (down down down down down)

It will tell you	Echo-Choir: (customs clearance)
where to go and wohin nicht!	Echo-Choir: Travel Ban! Stay with us!!

on reconstructed roads, in rivers without water

Infrastructure will inform you
what to build
how to walk
(like a dog)
where to go
(you can't pass)
where to go
(to go, to go
Where to go
(to go, to go)
VERTIGO VERTIGO VERTIGO

Smart sind die Borders. In einer weiten Welt aus Geld,
die für Waren viel schneller als für Menschen ist.

Do you know do you know do you know do you know that?
Tu le sais, tu le sais, tu le sais, tu le sais

Tigergeister, Geistertiger
Tiger Ghosts Ghosts of Tigers

Wo ist der Tiger? It's in the distance.
But there is no distance.

Infrastructure will inform you:
what to build
how to walk
(like a dog)
where to go
(you can't pass)
where to go
(to go, to go, Vertigo)
Where to go
(to go, to go)
VERTIGO VERTIGO VERTIGO

You may go and you may not
In einer schnellen Welt aus Geld

Where is the tiger
Not in the distance
Tiger is close. War on the tiger.
Tiger's arrival
Up in the air

End of the distance

Aggressive Menschenkatzen.
Wenn sie kommen, fliegen Fetzen.

Menschenkatzen stellen Fallen, und danach die Felle sellen!

Flagge Unterhemd im Wind, flatter flatter flatter,

Tiger starrt vor Waffen. When is infrastructure?
War on wild winds.

Infrastructure Infrastructure Infrastructure Infrastructure

It will suck you up up up up up
it will eat you
and once your eaten:
it will spit you down (down down down down down)
And where you are now: we will build a road!