

# Leopard

Honouring the Muse

豹



豹

# Leopard

H O N O U R I N G      T H E   M U S E

C E L I N A  C H I E N



*For my YeYe*

*with gratitude to the wildlife, from which I continue to learn.*

# Why are we enamoured by the

Why do we smile  
when we can hear  
the birds sing?

Why does the  
towering silhouette  
of an elephant  
command our  
respect?

Why do we relish  
in the warm glow  
of a sunset?

Nature is a part of us, just as we are a part of her. But the divide between human beings and the natural world has never been greater, particularly in the Global North. It's this alienation from the forces that give us life that is the root cause of the environmental and existential crises that humanity faces today. I use art to bridge this divide; to extend the reaches of our empathy beyond our own species and stories, and dissolve the idea that we are separate from the natural world.

I have had the extraordinary privilege of seeing, studying and defending many of our planet's fortresses of natural beauty. But my intrigue with the leopard, *Panthera pardus*, has followed me everywhere. Of all the world's forty-odd species of cats, leopards once occupied the largest range on the planet and have left an indelible cultural footprint on the human societies that have lived among them.

Before their spots were printed on fabric, humans killed these magnificent cats to wear their skin and fur on our bodies; the use of leopard fur dates as far back as Ancient Egypt. Although prevalent in indigenous cultures as a symbol of status or deity, wearing leopard skin was said to have been popularised in the 1960s by Jacqueline Kennedy.

Our misplaced admiration for their beauty fuelled their demise, with thousands of leopards slaughtered for their coats. The same characteristic that allows these leopards to vanish before their predator and prey became the very target on their back. Thankfully, leopard furs are now far more difficult to acquire, and fashion houses can celebrate the beauty of leopard rosettes without condemning their muses. But the dissonance remains: how many of us truly acknowledge the living, breathing creature whose beauty has inspired the print?

It is time to honour the muse and rekindle the connection between the animal and the design. We must reclaim the leopard as a symbol of our collective reverence rather than its legacy of exploitation. And we're running out of time. The demand for their skin, human expansion, and the strains of co-existence between leopards and humans in an industrialised world are all to blame for their status on the edge of extinction.

The leopard print is a fashion constant – it may go in and out of season, but it never goes out of style. So how much longer before the spots are back in season, but the creature that inspired it has been extinguished from this Earth?

I want every  
eye that falls  
on this design  
to remember  
its origins.

To remember  
the beauty and  
pulsing life of the  
leopard – and to  
be compelled  
to protect it.

# spots of the leopard?



# Leopards are everywhere.

They once lived across the deserts of Persia, the jungles of South-East Asia, the winters of Siberia and now, even in the cities of India. They often share their ecosystem with larger, more powerful cats like lions or tigers, yet, they thrive nonetheless.

Leopards teach us a beautiful lesson: they aren't the biggest or the strongest, but they are **resilient**, winning the admiration and respect of millions all over the world.



What is it about the  
beauty of the  
leopard's print –  
with its unique and  
artful rosettes – that is so  
seductive to us?

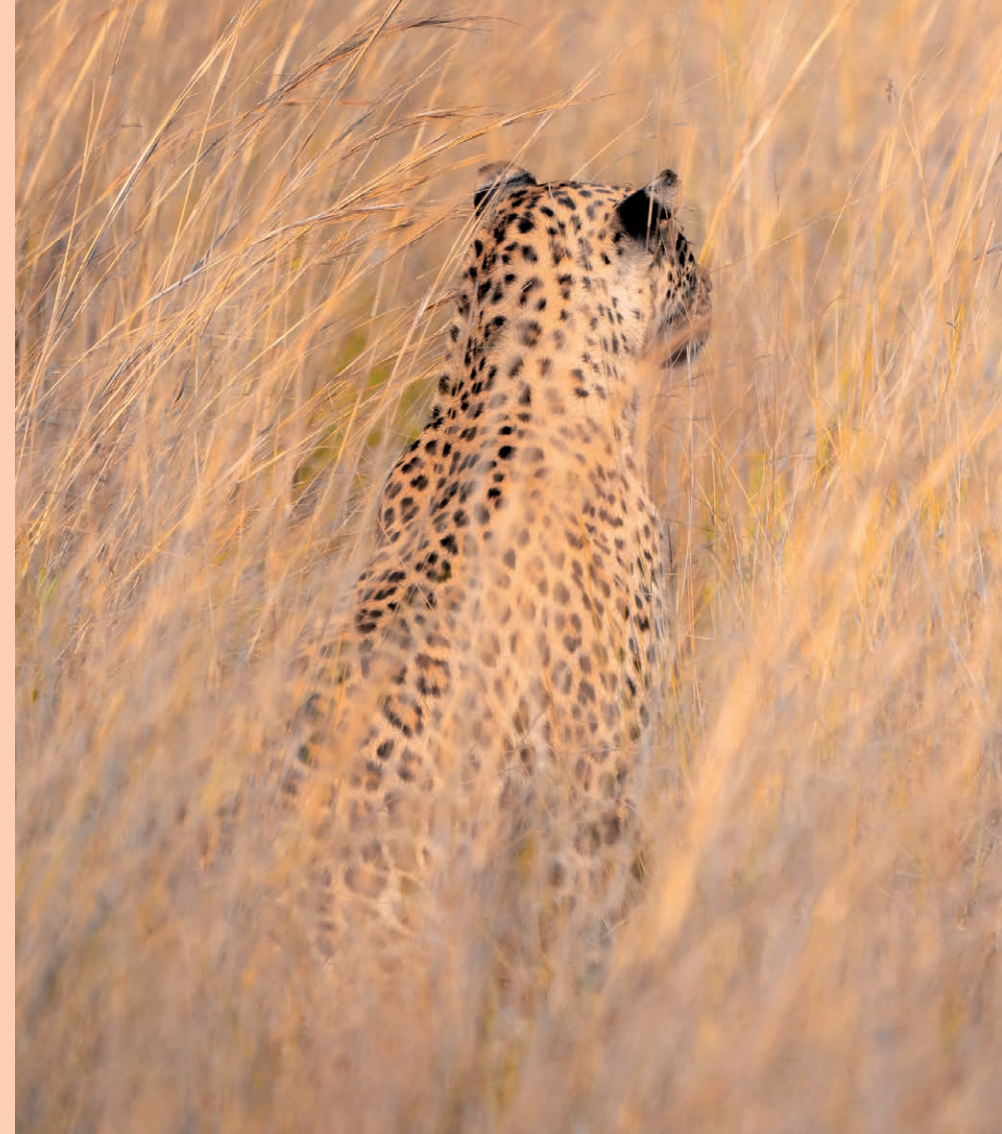
Regardless of culture  
or class, we all  
*consume\** it.





*The very thing that  
should conceal them*

popularises  
them.



Conservationists call leopards the world's most persecuted big cat.  
Eliminated from 75% of their historic range and extinct in 13 countries.  
The targets of killings.  
Prey populations lost to bushmeat hunting.  
Habitats destroyed in the wake of human activity.



And so the tension of leopards and humans coexisting  
continues to intensify, until the day when we're forced to ask,



what happens  
if everyone  
in the world  
recognised  
their spots but  
leopards  
themselves  
were extinct?

We tend to think the people to blame for the demise of leopards are poachers. The people who set the snares. But those that are actually responsible are the ones purchasing their skin, fuelling demand and paying the smugglers. More often than not, poachers are just desperate people, even as they risk imprisonment, or death. I think of all the wildlife rangers who were once poachers, now protecting animals they know are worth more alive than dead.

Leopards aren't a victim  
of poachers – they're a  
victim of our desire.







In Mandarin Chinese, all spotted cats  
across the world share the same name: bào

豹

豹子

Leopard or panther

云豹

Clouded leopard

美洲豹

Jaguar

豹猫

Leopard cat

雪豹

Snow leopard

猎豹

Cheetah





We must be courageously ambitious in demanding the world we want to build. We must hold onto our imagination, our naive idealistic hearts, and articulate a future beyond the ruins of war, the legacy of colonialism, and the injustices of human society...

**By protecting the leopard's  
home, we protect all the 豹  
ecologies that they safeguard.**





I remember the story  
behind every animal I've  
ever photographed. They  
feel like old friends. I  
wish everyone could feel  
the intimacy of being  
with them, of sharing  
space with one another.

There's something  
special about sharing  
the warmth of sunlight  
together. It's that feeling  
of kinship we have with  
all living beings.

That's all I've ever tried  
to do – to pass on that  
kindred feeling, to tell  
their stories, and to  
inspire any one of you to  
protect them; all with a  
bit of light and a frame  
preserved in time.


*Celina Chien*

C E L I N A  C H I E N

Celina Chien is a multi-hyphenate environmentalist, combining her roles as an ecologist, photojournalist and actor to tell stories, harness empathy for change, and advocate for biodiversity in the Anthropocene. Celina is an outspoken advocate of environmental and social justice. She is also a professional actor and is equally passionate about narrative storytelling.

Celina is a TEDx speaker and serves on the board and council of numerous international NGOs such as Panthera, Rewriting Extinction, Reserva Youth Land Trust, Girls Who Click and more. In 2021, Celina placed in the 57th Wildlife Photographer of the Year and was awarded as a highly commended finalist, and in 2023, she will be on the judging panel of the same competition. Celina has a BSc in Biological Sciences and MRes in Tropical Forest Ecology from Imperial College London.



**Relentlessly ambitious.**  
**Compassionate without being soft.**  
**Committed to outrage.**  
**Still believes in true love.**  
**Always best dressed** 

Notes from the Editor

The latest incarnation of **Celina Chien** –  
activist, ecologist, photojournalist, actress.

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**And of course, everyone that ever believed in me.**

DOLCE & GABBANA



Garlic  
agency

*Celina Chien*