



Tamara Merino

Age: 28

Born: Bogotá, Colombia

Resides: Santiago, Chile

Education: Universidad del Pacífico, Chile

Website: tamaramerino.com

Clients: *National Geographic, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Bloomberg News, Roads & Kingdoms, The Wall Street Journal, Neue Zürcher Zeitung*

Awards: World Press Photo Foundation's 6x6 Global Talent: South America 2018; ARTPI's 2018 "30 Under 30 Women Photographers"; World Press Photo Masterclass Latin America

Best Advice: "Recently I heard Maggie Steber saying, 'It's never our story. It's their story. I like to think the pictures aren't mine. They belong to the people in the pictures.' I've always felt that way, but hearing one of my favorite photographers say it in person makes your heart stop for a second."



Tamara Merino is drawn to stories about identity, women's issues and migration. Some, such as her *National Geographic* story about the migration crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border, bring depth to headline news. Others explore realities that challenged her imagination. She's photographed the Aghor cannibal cult in India, for example, and for her long-term project "Underland," she has

documented communities living underground or in cave houses.

"I feel the need of telling, in the most pure and humble way, the stories that can help question established ideas, show new perspectives, create awareness, and stimulate debates on social and cultural issues," she says. She strives to cast off preconceived ideas before telling a story. Photo editor Mallory Benedict at *National Geographic* says of Merino, "You can feel that when looking at her work, there's an eagerness to understand, and an openness to learn from everyone, which makes her work extremely intimate."

Merino's move from personal projects to assignment work accelerated after she was one of 12 photographers chosen to participate in the World Press Photo Masterclass Latin America in 2015. In the class she began editing her series "Underland Australia" with the help of masters and peers. A fellow participant suggested she pitch it to *National Geographic*, Merino's dream publication. Merino says she was "kind of incredulous," but sent it off.

When Benedict saw the images, she says, she was intrigued by their intimacy and eeriness, and by the story. The magazine published the piece in 2016. *WIRED*, *The Washington Post* and *Der Spiegel* subsequently ran photos from the series, boosting Merino's exposure among photo editors. Today many outlets come to her with assignments, some of which involve subjects in Chile.

National Geographic ran the second chapter, "Underland Spain," in 2018. Merino "believes in the people she's photographing and the stories she's trying to tell," Benedict says, "and it shows."

—MINDY CHARSKI

