Artdoc Magazine #4 | 2020

ARTDOC

Photography Magazine

Anthropocene Epoch

Nadia Bseiso
The infertile country

Claudius Schulze
Europe as a natural park

Jasper Bastian
Two border posts along a ditch

Content

Portfolio

Photo Culture

Inspiration

© Jasper Bastian

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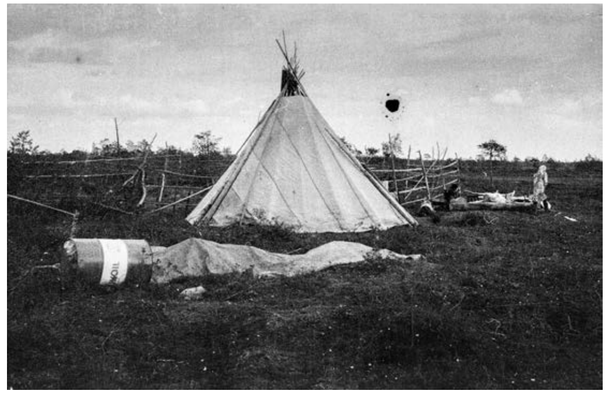

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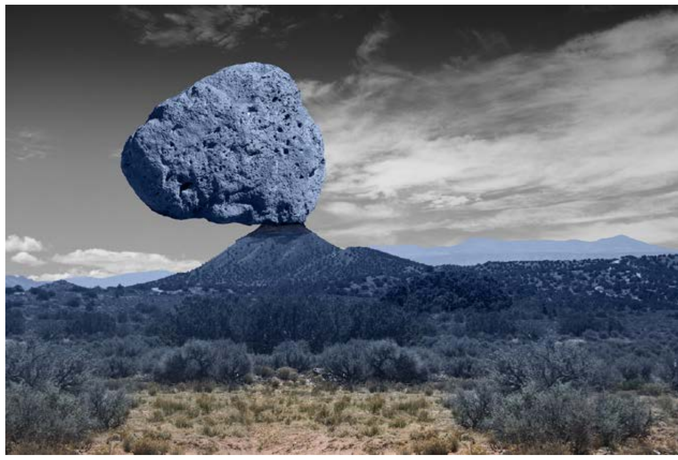

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“In order to read photography as a cultural coded language, we need a critical visual culture.

- The Artdoc Team

From the Editors

Dear Reader,

The Anthropocene is the epoch in which humans have a profound influence on the climate. There is no denial of this worrying fact, but how does it show in our daily life, geography and culture? In this Artdoc issue, we bring the elaborate work of German photographer Claudius Schulze. He shows Europe as a natural park, for which he photographed in a highly aesthetic way landscapes in which civil engineers made constructions to prevent natural disasters.
Jordanian photographer Nadia Bseiso approached the topic from another angle. She made the documentary *Infertile Crescent* of the ongoing drought in the region around the Red Sea. She photographed the dry area and found a group of resilient people who lived there.
In *The Land of Elephants*, Portuguese photographer Silvy Crespo documented in dark and moody black and white images the mining of lithium in Portugal, devastating the countries pristine landscape.
Russian photographer Igor Tereshkov did a very risky project uncovering oils spills by oil companies in Russia. In his project *Oil and Moss*, Tereshkov explores themes about ecology and indigenous peoples, experimenting with various analogue photo techniques.
Quite different is the series *Unexpected Geology* of American artist Ellen Jantzen. She combines mountains and rocks digitally in magical images in which the unreal scale looks surreal.
Since awareness of the pollution of the environment has arisen, a movement has emerged that practices a critical look at invisible pollution by humans. Our Exhibition *Critical Landscapes* shows work by seven photographers who are aware of human traces on the natural environment.
Too often, it is assumed that photography is a universal language that everyone understands, but nothing is less true. In order to read photography as a cultural coded language, we need a critical visual culture. In our long-read, we dive into semiotics, truth, and meaning. According to Roland Barthes, there is no truth in the image but only opposing interests.
Have a good read and enjoy the intelligently coded images in our fourth issue of Artdoc.

- The Artdoc Team

© Nadia Bseiso | Infertile Crescent

The Infertile Country

Nadia Bseiso

Jordanian photographer Nadia Bseiso is working on an extensive project across the border of her country. In this project, Bseiso plans to investigate Jordan's geopolitical position in the Middle East through her photography. The first chapter is called *Infertile Crescent* and deals with the barren area on the border with Israel. In order to change this, Jordan proposed plans to build a ten-billion-dollar pipeline that would bring water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. However, because of political tensions, the pipeline will not be built anytime in the foreseeable future. Bseiso photographed the dry area and found a group of resilient people who lived there. "The inhabitants are as strong as thistles that can also defy desert areas."

Bseiso has divided her project into four chapters, the first focusing on the 180 km long pipeline that must run from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. She has been working on this project since 2016 and expects to continue working on it over the next two years, after which a book about her discoveries is expected to be published. Currently, she is working on part two of her project, involving the Syrian border and Iraqi Border. For this stage she received the Aftermath grant to complete her investigation.
In the 19th century, the present land borders in the Middle East did not yet exist. Partly because of the European presence, the current states came into being. Jordan borders Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Bseiso: “After the British and French colonial period, borders were built between Syria and Jordan. Before that time, the shepherds were able to move freely across the country with their flock. Now that’s completely impossible.

Drinking water shortage
The project not only focuses on the water, but also the political relationships behind it. “It’s about geopolitics to me. Jordan is in the middle of turmoil and conflict. It is fascinating but also very difficult and complicated. As an Arab and Jordanian woman, I see the Middle East as a whole. Everything that happens to our neighbours affects us as well. For example, due to security issues, the borders with Syria and Iraq were closed for a couple of years. This greatly affected our transport and economy, especially agriculture. We also had a huge influx of refugees from Palestine, Iraq and Syria. We are always concerned about our economy, and what comes with it is the issue of water, the subject of my series *Infertile Crescent*.”
Jordan has had a shortage of drinking water for years. Worldwide, Jordan is one of the top ten countries with limited access to water. Due to this, plans have been put in place to build a pipeline from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. “The Dead Sea is very salty. That’s why nothing can live there. However, it’s water has always been in demand because of its healing power, despite the water being unusable. Climate change is causing the water to evaporate more every year, and factories are also drawing water from the sea. Due to many irrigation projects, the river Jordan now also provides much less water. As a result, the Dead Sea is shrinking dramatically. To save the Dead Sea, there were plans to drag water from the Red Sea and build desalination plants along the Dead Sea to provide Jordan with water. For a long time, they talked about this pipeline, but still nothing has been built . There are a lot of political tensions between Israel and Jordan, and as a result of this the project has now been shut down. Apart from the political issues, there were also many ecological concerns. They were going to bring a very different kind of water to the Dead Sea, and this brought the possibility of another species of algae growing.”

© Nadia Bseiso | Infertile Crescent

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> “Due to many irrigation projects, the river Jordan now also provides much less water. As a result, the Dead Sea is shrinking dramatically.

Man, and country

Nadia Bseiso travelled many times along the border where the pipeline would have been, observing the nature around the area and the people who lived there. “In the area with a length of 180 kilometres, I looked at the villages and met people. I wanted to document what that area looked like before the construction of the pipeline. Since biblical times, it has been a historically fascinating area. I have read a lot about Greek explorers in ancient history. I wanted to know more about the people who populated the area. The pipeline will be located exactly half way between the border of Israel and Jordan. I connected with the women in that area, and I saw their resilience. The current developments have put a heavy strain on their economy, and those living there were able to adapt to their new, austere circumstances. The inhabitants are as strong as thistles that can also defy desert areas. There’s great resilience in the people.”

Inertia

The Infertile Crescent project was very labour intensive. Bseiso travelled several times to the same area in order to gain people’s trust and hear their stories. “Just by coming back regularly, I found the right people who wanted to tell their own story. I became connected to the places I visited. Although we are both Jordanian, I come from the capital, and they live in small villages. It was special to find common ground that confirms our connection with the land that once stood fertile.” Bseiso took all her pictures analogue. “For the last six years, I’ve gone back to the analogue medium format. When I returned to Jordan in 2011, I wanted to work with film again; I felt alienated from the digital camera. The process of analogue photography, putting film in the camera and waiting until the rolls are processed, is very slow. It gave me and the project the chance to take our time. It released the work from a sense of urgency. With the fast paced life that we’re forced to keep up with, it felt right to slow things down.”

About

Nadia Bseiso is a Jordanian documentary photographer based in Amman. She completed a degree in photography from Florence, Italy in 2011, returning for a residency in Fondazione Fotografia in Modena, in 2015. She concentrates on long term projects based on personal research in geopolitics, history, anthropology and environmental degradation. In 2016, she was selected for the Arab Documentary Photography Program, funded by The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Magnum Foundation and the Prince Claus Fund, for her project “Infertile Crescent”. She was selected as Time – Light Box female photographers to follow from around the world, March 2017. She is working with several local and international NGO’s since 2011. Clients include The New York Times, The Telegraph, Reuters, Zeit magazine, the Intercept, The Globe and Mail, U.S News & World Report.

© Nadia Bseiso | Infertile Crescent

“We are always concerned about our economy, and what comes with it is the issue of water, the subject of my series *Infertile Crescent*.

The Land of Elephants

Silvy Crespo

© Silvy Crespo | The Land of Elephants

© Silvy Crespo | The Land of Elephants

Silvy Crespo, a dual citizen from France and Portugal, is a photographer whose work focuses on postcolonialism and the aftermath of conflict. Her family migrated to France before the fall of the Portuguese fascist regime. With her series, she tackles the persistence of imperial and colonial politics in today's society. She has been developing projects dealing with the representation of trauma resulting from forced migration within Europe. Over the past two years, she used photography to inquire about the wounds, visible and invisible, derived from the Portuguese Colonial War. Merging her family story and public archive, as well as staged and documentary imagery, she scrutinizes the translation of this conflict in individual and collective Portuguese memory.

Her previous project *Forgotten Wars*, is a personal story about the impact of the Portuguese Colonial war on her family and, more particularly, her father, who served in the Portuguese colonial forces for three years. Silvy Crespo has been working on the project *The Land of Elephants*, in which she is dealing with extractivism in Portugal.

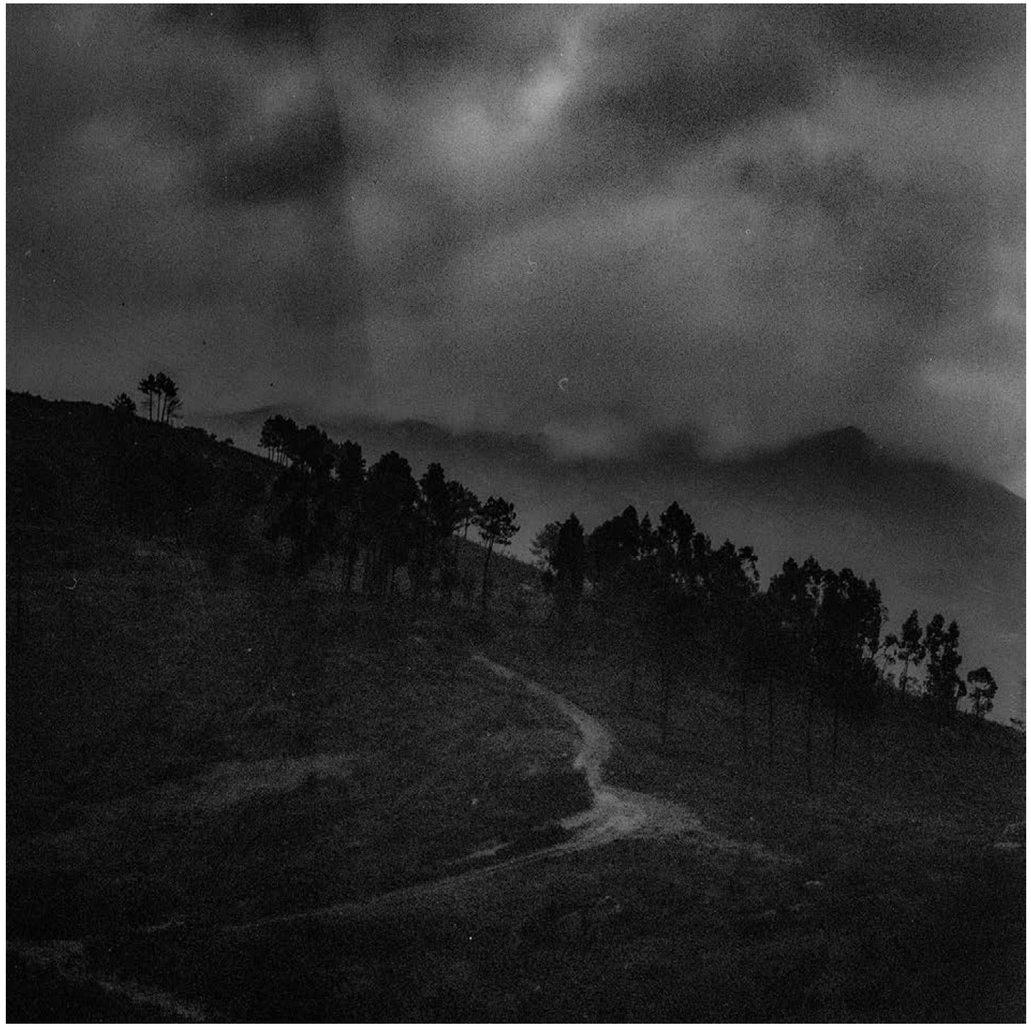
She is focusing on the struggle of local communities against the projected opening of lithium mines as on the trauma inflicted upon the landscape as a result of mining activities.

Her series *The Land of Elephants* addresses the exploitation and resistance in the landscape of the white gold. Underneath the grey rocks of the Barroso Mountains lay a precious silvery-white metal: lithium.

Aware of the irreparable damages that the mining of the resource would cause to the landscape and groundwater supplies, the inhabitants of the region refuse to see mineral rights signed away to foreign corporations in the interest of fast but ephemeral profits.

Portugal is Europe's largest reserve of lithium. Due to growing demand, it launched an international auction of lithium exploration licenses. The promises of the past are the lies of today: the creation of employment and economic growth. But who could fail to read the sermon in the rocks of Barroso?

© Silvy Crespo | The Land of Elephants



© Silvy Crespo | The Land of Elephants

About

Before joining the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in The Hague, Silvy Crespo worked several years as a lawyer. Her past professional experience influenced her photography practice which evolves around societal questions, with a strong focus on colonial and imperial structures. Her photography is documentary oriented, which she combines with research and writing.

© Ellen Jantzen | Unexpected Geology

Unexpected Geology

Ellen Jantzen

In the series *Unexpected Geology*, American photographer Ellen Jantzen investigates how the environment influences someone's psyche. She is intrigued by the shapes and beauty of mountains, but she is also fascinated by rocks. Jantzen combines mountains and rocks digitally in magical images in which the unreal scale looks surreal.

Ellen Jantzen lived for twenty years in Los Angeles, California. Because of the tall buildings of the city, the mountains were difficult to see. “I was 30 years old when I saw a mountain for the first time. I became intrigued by the mountains.” After moving from Los Angeles, Jantzen became fascinated with nature and rock formations in New Mexico. She started with her photo series *Unexpected Geology*, an investigation of proportions and scales of landscapes, rock formations, and mountains. As a viewer of her work, you do not know whether you see a real mountain or a stone from her garden. By her visual art, she gets a grip on her new environment. “I love the mountains and have always been interested in geology, rock formations, and volcanoes. With Unexpected Geology, I’m experimenting with the ratio and proportions of stones. There are many rocks around our house in Santa Fe. I observe stones that are similar to large mountains but having tiny proportions. I wondered how you could picture a close-up of a rock, and more importantly, how you can manipulate an image of a small rock into the context of a mountain as a formation in a landscape. I’ve researched the contrast between big and small proportions.”

New environment

The starting point of the photo series Unexpected Geology originated from her personal life. Jantzen had noticed the impact of her moving from Los Angeles to Midwestern America. She was looking for a way to get used to her hometown of Santa Fe. “My parents grew older, so my husband Michael Jantzen and I decided to move ten years ago to their neighbourhood. They had an area of five hectares, where I spent a lot of time photographing their estate. I became intrigued by the environment and noticed, for example, a significant difference between the seasons. After the loss of my parents, my husband and I decided to stay in the area. We get used a lot to the area and moved to Santa Fe in New Mexico. There I enjoyed the endless views of mountains.”

As an artist, she recognizes how you become personally attuned to the environment where you are and how your mind is influenced by it. There are various aspects to Ellen Jantzen’s work. Her art is a mix of emotional reflection and creativity. “People react very strongly to their environment, but an emotional approach to the environment is not always easy to describe in words. In a city, you feel different than when you are in the countryside, especially when you have moved to another state. You have brought your familiar items such as your interior or computer, but you are completely in a new environment than before. That has an impact on your brain. Everything is new, that makes you more aware of your environment.”

© Ellen Jantzen | Unexpected Geology

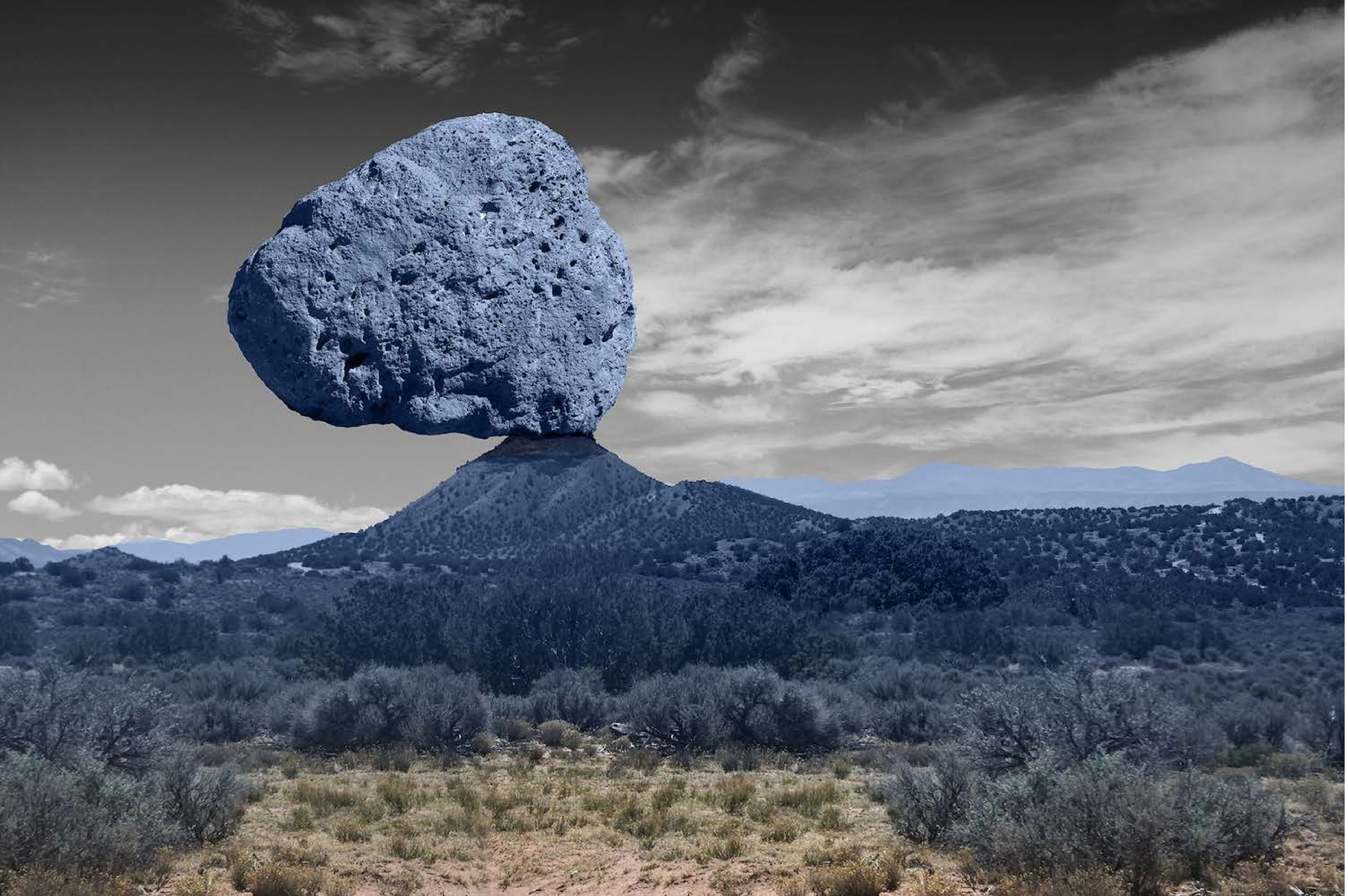


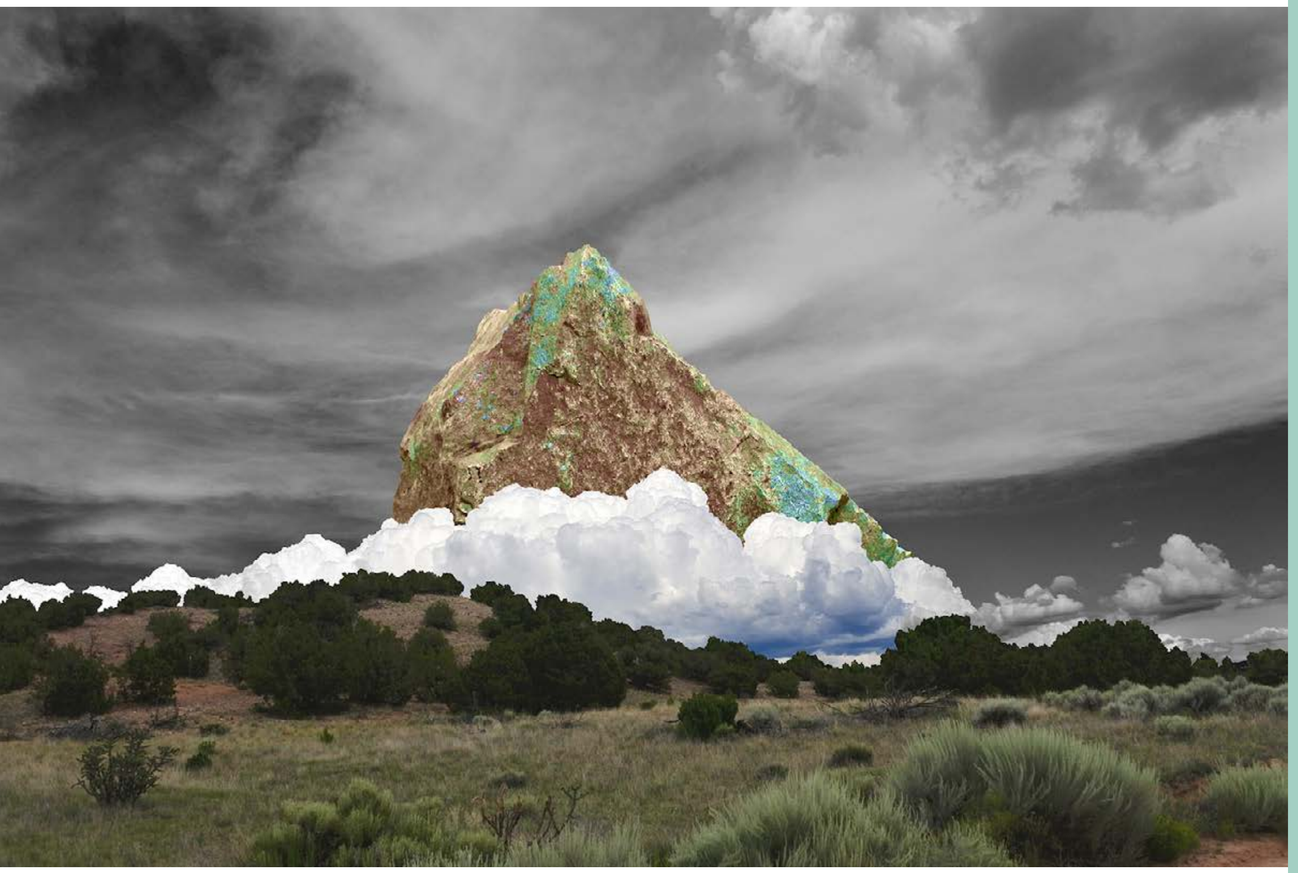
Photo Collage
For *Unexpected Geology*, Ellen photographed different locations at different moments. Each artwork consists of multiple images. “While I am photographing, my improvising grows into a concept. When my ideas melt together, I find a direction for my photo series. Starting from my concept, I go outdoors and take my photographs. First, I search for a landscape and a mountain formation that inspires me. At the moment, the sky is sometimes not interesting enough in the picture. I replace the sky with another one with interesting clouds. Later I add a photo of the stone. I don’t manipulate the explicit image too much, but it’s more of a collage effect. Of course, I have manipulated the sizes of the rocks and mountains with Photoshop, but you hardly see any form of manipulation.”

Mini Stories
Ellen Jantzen sees her work as visual mini-stories to which the viewer can add his own story. “For me, the artwork is finished when the imagination of the viewer gets triggered. I always want to surprise the viewer with something they have not seen before. At the same time, I want to touch the viewer emotionally with beauty. It has been said that beauty in a work of art is not intellectual enough and that art cannot be aesthetic. But I believe that art can be beautiful and intellectual at the same time. People always respond positively to beautiful colours and shapes.”

© Ellen Jantzen | Unexpected Geology

> “I love the mountains and have always been interested in geology, rock formations, and volcanoes. With Unexpected Geology, I’m experimenting with the ratio and proportions of stones.

About
Ellen Jantzen was born and raised in St. Louis Missouri. Her early college years were spent obtaining a degree in graphic arts and later emphasizing fine art. Jantzen spent two years at FIDM (The Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising) in downtown Los Angeles, where she obtained her advanced degree in 1992. After a few years of working in the industry, including several years at Mattel Toy Company as a senior project designer, she became disillusioned with the corporate world and longed for a more creative outlet. Having been trained in computer design while at Mattel, Jantzen continued her education on her own, using mostly Photoshop software.



© Ellen Jantzen | Unexpected Geology

“It has been said that beauty in a work of art is not intellectual enough and that art cannot be aesthetic. But I believe that art can be beautiful and intellectual at the same time.

The need of a critical visual culture

Too often it is assumed that photography is a universal language that everyone understands. If we do not want to give up the positive belief in the communication of photography, how can we produce and consume images in a jungle of interests and a swamp of doubts about the authenticity of photography? The key word of the present time is ‘story’. The story becomes the replacement of the truth; it turns into a surrogate for reality which makes it broadly and universally applicable as a concept.

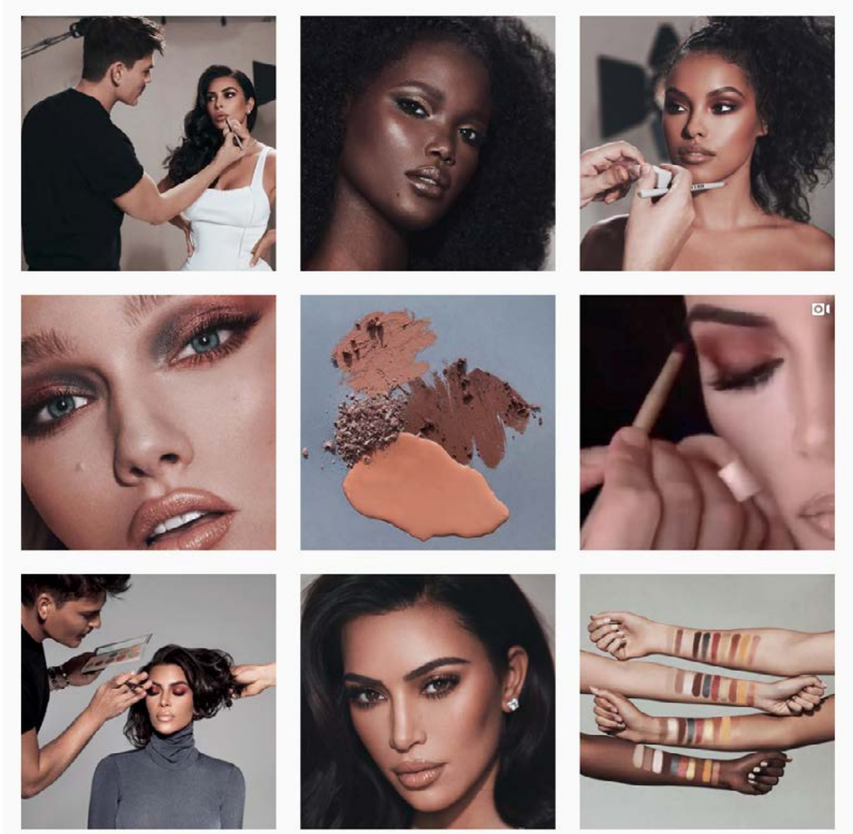
Times Square, New York

The Pencil of Nature

With the advent of digital photography and social media, our culture has become a visual culture par excellence. Millions of photos are shared every day via Instagram, Facebook, Flickr and Twitter, which means that billions of people around the world now communicate with each other through images. Everyone who looks at his Facebook account on his smartphone every day lives a kind of double life: one in the physical reality and one in the virtual world of images. The environment that people experience becomes more and more visual. However, the question is whether all users of photography actually understand the language of the photographic image. We are supposed to be able to analyze countless images, not only based on the information that the images provide, but also based on the context of these images. Who sends these images into the world and what interests play a role in this? Some images might look innocent, but on closer inspection they appear to serve major commercial interests. The popular television personality Kim Kardashian, for example, has more than 155 million followers on Instagram. She posts seemingly non-posed, spontaneous, attractive and slightly sexy photos of herself. On her account you will find a link to the iTunes store, where you can purchase an app to follow even more of her. On clicking you will see advertisements from Giorgio Armani and Saint Laurent. The innocent Instagram photos appear to be part of a sophisticated commercial strategy. Social media appears to be disguised commercial media. It is now clear to everyone that after you've googled on a flight, you immediately see all kinds of advertisements about traveling on Facebook. "Promoted tweets" from TripAdvisor also appear on Twitter immediately afterwards. Images appear on all these digital media, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to trace the origin and unravel the intentions of these images. While photography initially had an unambiguous context that made it easy to interpret photos, it is now part of a rapidly and continuously changing context. Too often it is assumed that photography is a universal language that everyone understands. The worn-out slogan that a photo tells more than a thousand words sounds like an echo from the past in which the naive belief in the truth of the photo prevailed. The English inventor of photography Fox Talbot made one of the first photo books in the history of photography, The Pencil of Nature, in which he wrote that his images were created by the hand of nature itself, only through the effect of light on paper. Underneath the photograph The Haystack (plate X) he writes hopefully and with conviction: "One advantage of the discovery of the Photographic Art will be, that it will enable us to introduce into our pictures a multitude of minute details which add to the truth and reality of the representation, but which no artist would take the trouble to copy faithfully from nature." (Talbot, 1844, 2014)

Truth and Reality

Even though we are almost two centuries later, there is still the often-unconscious belief that the photographic image is a direct and truthful account of reality. We still witness many discussions among photographers, technicians and curators about supposed manipulation of submitted photos for the World Press Photo, in which the veracity of photography is often treated by realists like the holy grail.



Screenshot Instagram Account @kimkardashian

Does photography represent reality and could the photograph actually be called an image of the reality? Many discussions clearly show that we are still stumbling over the old concepts of truth and reality, even without any consensus about them. Journalistic news photos, according to common opinions, should not be manipulated through interventions with Photoshop, because that will affect the truth of the image. The truth? Philosopher Roland Barthes would say that we have created a myth which a certain social class believes. Sociologist Stuart Hall would say that all who believe in photojournalism are engaged in a dominant reading of the news photo. It is clear that a critical philosophy of our visual culture is urgently needed and that it must be taught on all photography courses. We are taught to read and write starting in primary school, but we are never confronted with a proper analysis of images through which we communicate on a daily basis. To fully understand the value of photography in terms of communication, we should consider photos as text, just as complicated, equally subject to grammar rules and style figures and full of layers of meanings. Howels and Negreiros write in their book Visual Culture (Richard Negreiros & Howells Joaquim, 2018) that photos should be regarded as visual texts. Images must be read with the same discipline as texts. We need a literacy of the image. "Visual literacy should not be limited to people with a creative or professional

interest in visual culture. On the contrary, this should be widely distributed."
We often view visual "texts" superficially, namely as images. Images seem unambiguous, but viewed and analyzed as visual texts, embedded with hidden layers, images appear ambiguous. We have to learn to analyze images, and in particular photos, and unravel the cultural codes that have been hidden in them.
Understanding the cultural codes is the key to visual literacy. But this is just one part of the analysis. A photograph always appears in a certain context and comes to the spectator by a particular communication channel. This urges us to investigate the political or commercial interests of the distributor of the image. We cannot separate the meaning of images from the underlying interests, because the images are produced in a culture in which images are part of merchandise. Visual culture has become a part of capitalism. Nicholas Mirzoeff writes in An introduction to Visual Culture: "Capital has made all aspects of daily life a commodity, including the human body and even the process of looking." And visual culture - by assuming that the image is universal - has become an integral part of globalization: images are produced and consumed worldwide. (Mirzoeff, 2009)

Semiology and Marxist aesthetics

To understand both aspects, two methods of research have been historically important: semiology and Marxist aesthetics. They represent the analytical and ideological way of looking at images. Roland Barthes has been the forerunner of the semiology of photography, but in his critical reflections on culture, he also appears to have incorporated ideological aspects. Susan Sontag and John Berger have explained and criticized the ideological backgrounds of the production and distribution of images, inspired by the writings of Walter Benjamin. Both were strongly opposed to consider photography as art, because that would ignore the political and social context of photography. In addition, art has often been analyzed from the point of view of iconography, which often ignored the underlying interests. The theories of Roland Barthes were undermined by himself in his poetic reflections in Camera Lucida. (Barthes, Camera Lucida, 1993) Susan Sontag later corrected herself in her book Regarding the Pain of Others (Sontag, Regarding the pain of others, 2004) and John Berger mainly analyzed painting and the relationship to possession. Jean Baudrillard is a philosopher who went beyond the criticism and analysis of the single image. In his book Simulacra and Simulation, he observed that the enormous quantity of images made them meaningless. (Baudrillard, 1981, 1994) According to Baudrillard we live in a kind of Disneyland of images. They no longer have a direct relationship with the reality that is assumed behind the image, but they are fantasy images: simulacra.
His position seems exaggerated, but when one realizes that by now a quarter of the photos that are made for Ikea are made on the computer using the so-called CGI method without the use of a camera, the notion of fantasy images comes very close. With CGI photography, the reality behind the image appears to have disappeared completely. This means that the original credibility of the photographic image has lost its physical basis, and the digital manipulation, if that word still applies, has taken over the photographic domain. This completely debunks the myth of photographic truth; which Barthes already did in his collection of essays Mythologies. (Barthes, Mythologies, 1957). According to him, our culture believes in many myths, just as primitive people did. One of the myths is the truth in the photographic image. He calls the myth a semiological system, a way of speaking, a language. But, and this has often been underexposed, Barthes also called the myth an ideology. Because, according to him, the photographic language is also a mythical language, there is always an ideology in the photographic image.
According to Barthes, we experience myths as natural. "Here we come to the ultimate principle of myth: it transforms history into something natural." If applied to photography, it follows that the natural truth we attribute to photographic images always turns out to be determined by social motives. Meaning, there is no truth behind the image, but there are opposing social, political and commercial interests. Barthes appears to be more politically oriented and more a Marxist in his Mythologies than in his writings on photography. He continues to say that capitalism and its masquerade, the bourgeoisie as the underlying political and social system, is mythologized. The myth is, according to him, a depoliticized speech: it makes speech innocent.
If we apply this to the truthfulness of photography believed by many since Fox Talbot, photographic images represent an interest which is obscured by the natural connection with reality.

© Shutterstock, Andrey Bayda | Illuminated facades of Broadway theaters on January 6, 2011 in Times Square, NYC

© Annie Leibovitz | Advertisement for Louis Vuitton with Mikhail S. Gorbachev

Mass media and manipulation

The sociologist Stuart Hall takes a step further than semiology. He studies the way that mass media work. Through which media do we receive information and what interests are at stake? Because each photographic image is coded by the person who created and distributed the image, the photo must be decoded again by the viewer. The viewer can therefore only understand a photo if he knows the code behind the image, if he is part of the same visual culture. If you are part of the same cultural group, you take the photo as truth - this is the dominant reading. You share the code in the image. If you disagree in advance with the medium in which the photo appears, you can read the image as manipulation or as propaganda. You reject the underlying cultural code. Both ways of assessing images are not critical. Only if you strive for a so-called critical reading of the image, do you investigate the underlying code for the underlying interests. The interesting thing about this theory is that you, as an audience, always have to evaluate which underlying code is sent with the image. Even a press photo that is not digitally manipulated and accepted as true according to the rules of a competition can carry a cultural code that requires a critical assessment. The analysis of photography is not about a microscopic study of Raw files but about the codes that we accept as true in our, according to Barthes, bourgeois and capitalist culture.

The bag of Gorbachev

But how can we, if we do not want to give up the positive belief in the communication of photography, produce and consume images in a jungle of interests and in a swamp of doubts about the authenticity of photography? The key word of the present time is the story. The story becomes the replacement of the truth, it becomes a surrogate for reality and that is why it is broadly and universally applicable as a concept. The concept of the story in photography clears the road for photographers to create personal images that get a social context through metaphorical references.

The concept of visual storytelling has turned out to be a charming solution to bypass the cliffs of truth and beauty that Susan Sontag has marked off in her book On Photography. (Sontag, On Photography, 1980, 2008)

The ‘story’ as a concept is charming, but at the same time theoretically vague. Nowadays almost all photography, both autonomous or documentary, is labeled as storytelling. The first cliff, the truth, is bypassed by assuming that the story is essentially personal and subjective. A subjective story does not have to be true. Robert Frank was hailed because he made a personal and subversive story about America, absolutely not “true”, but with an important message. The cliff of beauty is bypassed because a visual story is not a collection of beautiful photos that must be experienced as individual art objects, but as a series of photos in the context of the story. However, the problematic concept of narrative photography lacks persuasiveness, since photos tell a story that you can either believe or not. Can we see war photos as a story? Where is the boundary between documentary and autonomous photography if everything is called storytelling? A philosophical solution could be the assumption that there has never been a real distinction and that the space between the two forms of photography, one claiming reality and the other depicting personal, subjective emotions, has finally been filled theoretically. Another answer could be that all forms of storytelling are essentially myths, believed by representatives of a certain culture. Leslie Mullen writes in her Truth in Photography: “In other words, journalists, as participants in a certain culture, are bound by the ‘cultural grammar’ that defines the rules of the narrative construction, an awareness that the notion of the ‘objective’ translation of reality changes.” (Mullen, 1998)

One could conclude that both documentary photography and art photography are both a form of storytelling in different ways, and as such form myths of truth and beauty. And as myths, the underlying interests can remain concealed.

The hidden structure of photographic myths becomes more apparent since the concept of storytelling has been adopted by commerce. Advertisers no longer praise their products with photos that have to prove their quality, but with photos that tell a story. A brand has become a story. A Car is not a car, but the story about the Car that always remains a loyal friend in the rough nature and strengthens your identity. Any brand consists almost exclusively of storytelling. With the story, a brand creates a myth

in which the customer wants to believe, because he needs to distinguish himself by becoming part of that myth. A Louis Vuitton bag is not a bag, but the story about prestige, money and above all, success.
For an advertising campaign, the stories of astronauts, movie stars, and Gorbachev (who drives along the last remains of the Berlin wall in the back of a car) were all photographed by Anna Leibovitz. If the visual story is the central benchmark of all photography, then credibility does not get any clearer. A critical, evaluative attitude when consuming photographic images is needed to investigate the context and origin of the image. As a viewer, we cannot and do not have to believe every story, whether a photo is “real” or “manipulated.”

The power of the media

Different theories about visual culture do not stop at the image itself, they also take the position of the viewer into consideration. Who is the viewer? Is he a New Yorker who watches commercials on Times Square? Or a Moroccan Berber who sees a billboard along the road in Ouarzazate? Or a inhabitant of the capital of Ghana?
In their sturdy book Practices of Looking, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright explain that the position of the viewer determines to a large extent the final reading of the image. Even more, images determine the reader himself. (Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright, 2008) According to them, the viewer creates an identity of himself by looking at images. “The image or visual appearance is not simply a representation or a way of information. It is one of the elements in the broad network in which the subject was created at a given historical and cultural moment.”
The New Yorker will easily identify with an advertising image for an iPhone, while the Berber woman might experience alienation. But we can no longer speak of ‘audience’ in the traditional sense of the word. In the digital world, the audience is fragmented into numerous subgroups, into individualized cells. That is why there is less discussion about mass media and more about social media. The power of the medium is becoming more diffuse. The mass media could easily distinguish a leftist from a rightist newspaper and create the underlying codes of images, the hidden power behind Facebook’s algorithms is not easy to detect. Traditionally, the Marxist theorists have dealt with the power of the media. According to the theorists of the Frankfurter Schule such as Theodor Adorno, the power of the media is created by the disguised propaganda for the capitalist system. The many Instagram accounts that work for major brands prove that once again.

> “ Understanding the cultural codes is the key to visual literacy.

© Nataly Reinch Shutterstock | Advertising billboards, Accra, Ghana

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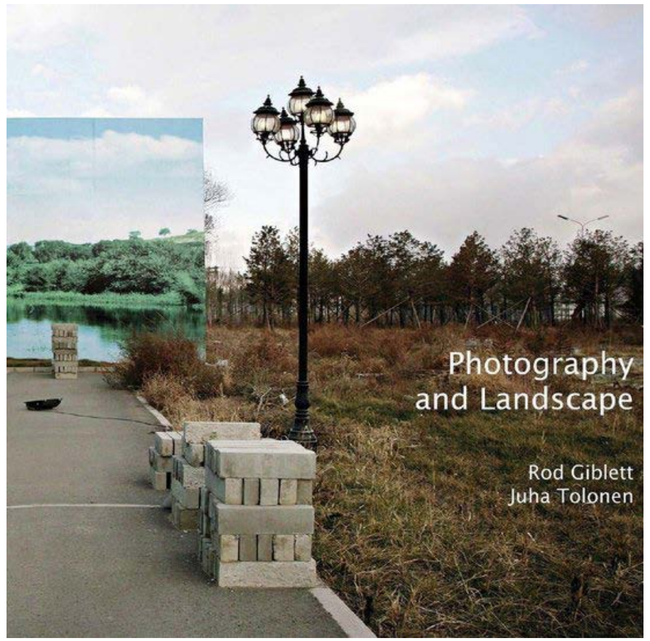
#Photo Books

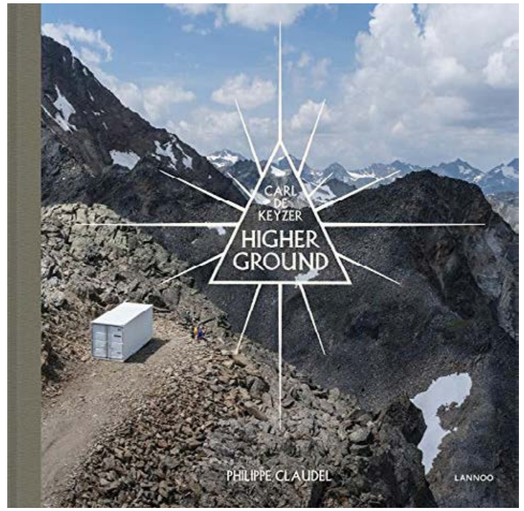


Photography and Landscape
Rod Giblett & Juha Tolonen

With a focus on the settler societies of the United States and Australia, Photography and Landscape is a new critical account of landscape photography created through a unique collaboration between a photography writer and a landscape photographer. Beginning with the frontier days of the American West, the subsequent century-long popularity of landscape photography is exemplified by images from Carleton Watkins to Ansel Adams, the New Topographics to Richard Misrach, all of whose works are considered here. Along with discussions of other contemporary photographers, this extensively illustrated volume demonstrates the influence of settler societies on landscape photography, in which skilled photographers captured the fascination with and the appeal of the land and its expanse.

Anthropocene
Edward Burtynsky

Anthropocene is the newest book by Edward Burtynsky to document human destruction of the earth on a geological scale. In photos as beautiful as they are disconcerting, Burtynsky explores issues such as extinction (large-scale burning of elephant tusks to disrupt illegal trade and the black market, the plight of the last white rhino), technofossils (Nigerian landfill sites entirely of plastic, massive concrete tetrapods to protect Chinese coastline from erosion), and terraforming (mines and industrial agriculture).



Higher Ground
Carl De Keyzer

In Moments Before the Flood, Carl De Keyzer portrayed a Europe on the cusp of drowning, flooded due to climate change. In Higher Ground, the flood has already passed. His images show people that have fled to the high mountains, depicting a fictional world of tomorrow. A large portion of the work is irony, but it bears an uncomfortably close semblance to scientific predictions of the future. In 2006, when Keyzer first began working on Moments Before the Flood, there were a lot of doubts about the extent of global warming. Since then however, the effects of this inconvenient truth have increased by an alarming degree. Where it was once presumed that the sea level would rise 37 cm by 2050, now scientists estimate that there will be a 3-to-4-meter raise. Higher Ground explores what the world might look like if this happens, encouraging the reader to think about the impact of climate change.

Critical Landscapes

Highlights of Artdoc Exhibition

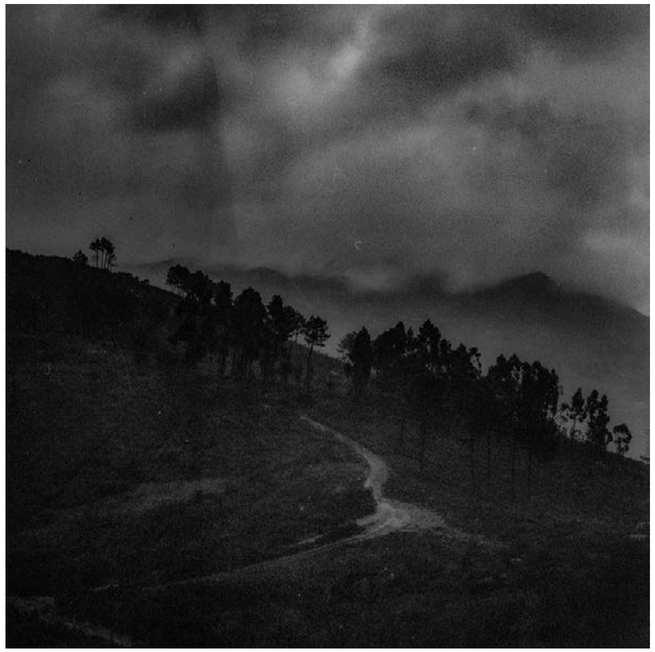
Landscapes are often beautiful to see and appeal to a perception of sublime. But throughout history, not all landscape photographers have had the goal of creating only aesthetic images. There has been a shift from glorifying landscapes to a critical look at the urban world. Since awareness of the pollution of the environment has arisen, a movement has emerged that practices a critical look at invisible pollution by humans. This exhibition shows work by seven photographers who are aware of human traces on the natural environment: Silvy Crespo (France, Paris), Ricardo General Núñez (La Serena, Chile), Maree Horner (Taranaki, New Zealand), Julia Abzaltdinova (Moscow, Russia), Hellen Hernández (Heredia, Costa Rica), Norberto Fernández Soriano (Bristol, United Kingdom), Aliona Londono (Valencia, Spain).

© Norberto Fernández Soriano | Hythloday

© Maree Horner | Baleful landscape

© Ricardo General Núñez

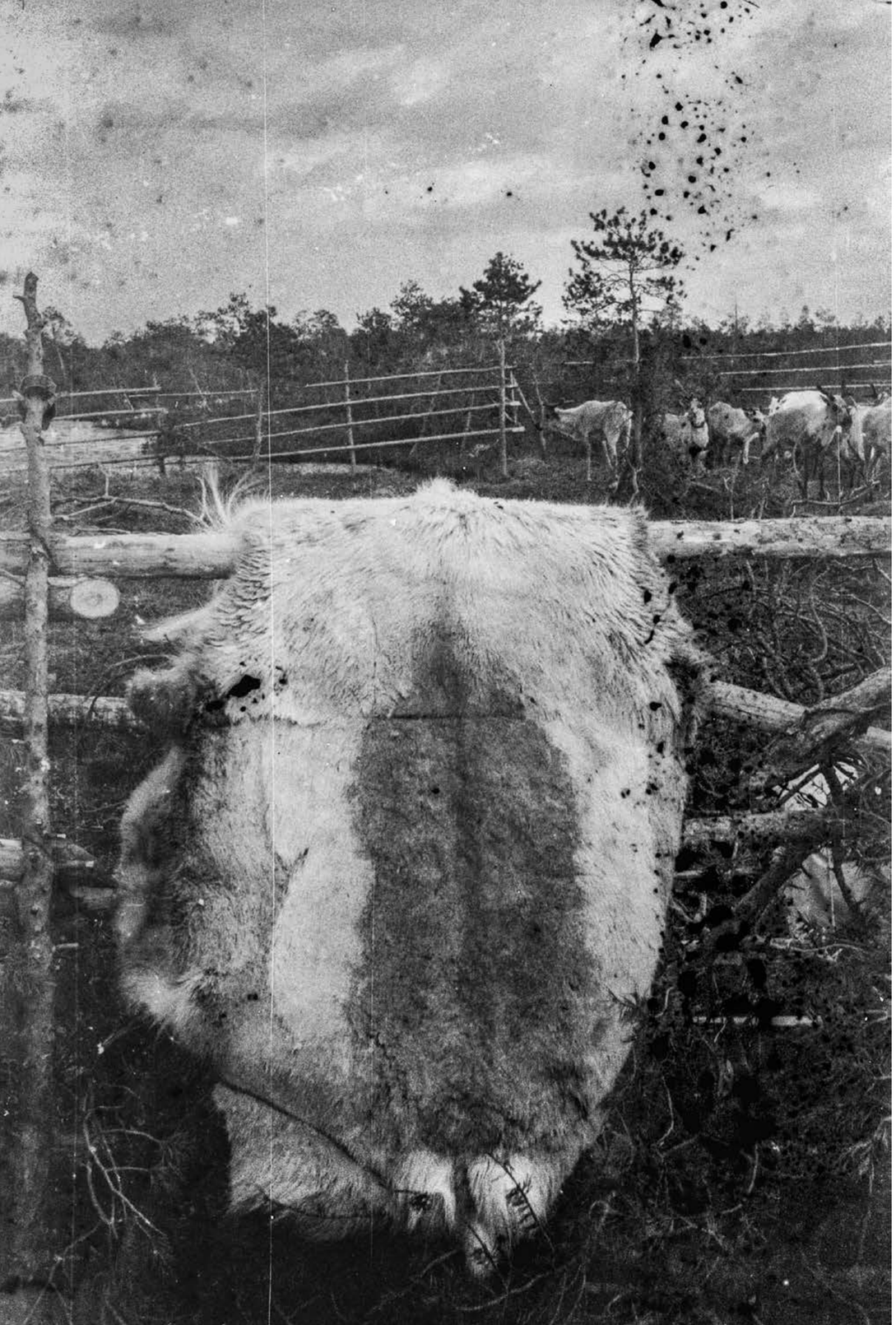
© Hellen Hernández



© Silvy Crespo | The Land of Elephants

© Aliona Londono | Mount Fuji

© Julia Abzaltdinova | Noise in the park



Nomadic life on an oil-swamp

Igor Tereshkov

In Russia, a lot of oil is extracted from untouched nature areas where nomads live with their reindeer. Greenpeace volunteer and environmentalist Igor Tereshkov photographed the result of the many oil spills in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (KhMAO). “I felt that I needed to use my photography skills to picture this problem.” In his project *Oil and Moss*, Tereshkov explores themes like ecology, environment and indigenous peoples. At the same time, he experiments with various photo techniques and development processes of analogue film.

Igor Tereshkov came into contact with Antonina Tevlina from the Khanty people via Greenpeace. She lives in Russkinskaya, near the city of Surgut. Her parents still live a nomadic life, along with their reindeer in their 600-hectare ancestral area. “The nomads with their grazing reindeer, in their ancestral area, were faced with a major problem, the oil producers came to their autonomous land. About 50 percent of the oil in Russia is extracted in this KhMAO nature reserve and permitted win areas often coincide with the abode of the indigenous peoples. Oil leaks pollute water and lakes and destroy the ecosystem, which leads to a reduction in the number of reindeer but also enormously deteriorated living conditions of the indigenous peoples. Several volunteers from the oil spill movement of Greenpeace Russia told me about the environmental problem in the autonomous region in KhMAO. They knew Antonina Tevlina and knew that her parents were still indigenous. I decided to follow Antonina and to document the living conditions of her family.”

Checkpoints
After the meeting with Antonina Tevlina, there were several obstacles to meeting her family in KhMAO, particularly the oil companies. “It was safe to travel in one way or another, but the oil companies did not like photographers or journalists and certainly not Greenpeace people. After I had passed many checkpoints, there were very good roads that were not registered on the map. So, officially there are no roads. Antonina and I drove on and ended up at a swamp where we had to leave the car. We walked for miles through the swamp. With nomads, you never know per season where they live. But Antonina instinctively knew where her parents were.”

Nomads and reindeers
In the photos of Tereshkov, you see the endangered original Chanters at their tents with the reindeer. “They are indigenous people who believe in shamans and holy lakes. Antonina’s family also has a shaman. When Antonina Tevlina was still a child, her family still had hundreds of reindeer, but now there are around 15. The reindeer all likely fall ill due to poor ecological conditions. The people who knew about the environmental problems said that after drinking the polluted water, the animals could not get up. The reindeer die because of the oil in the water.
There are so many oil spills and disasters, but nobody should know it. You can call this oil problem a holocaust. The oil problem is like a vicious circle because of the pollution associated with oil production, and the companies are now placing checkpoints on all roads that lead to the oil wells. Now only close relatives who are on the list can reach the territory of the ancestor countries.”

© Igor Tereshkov | Oil and Moss

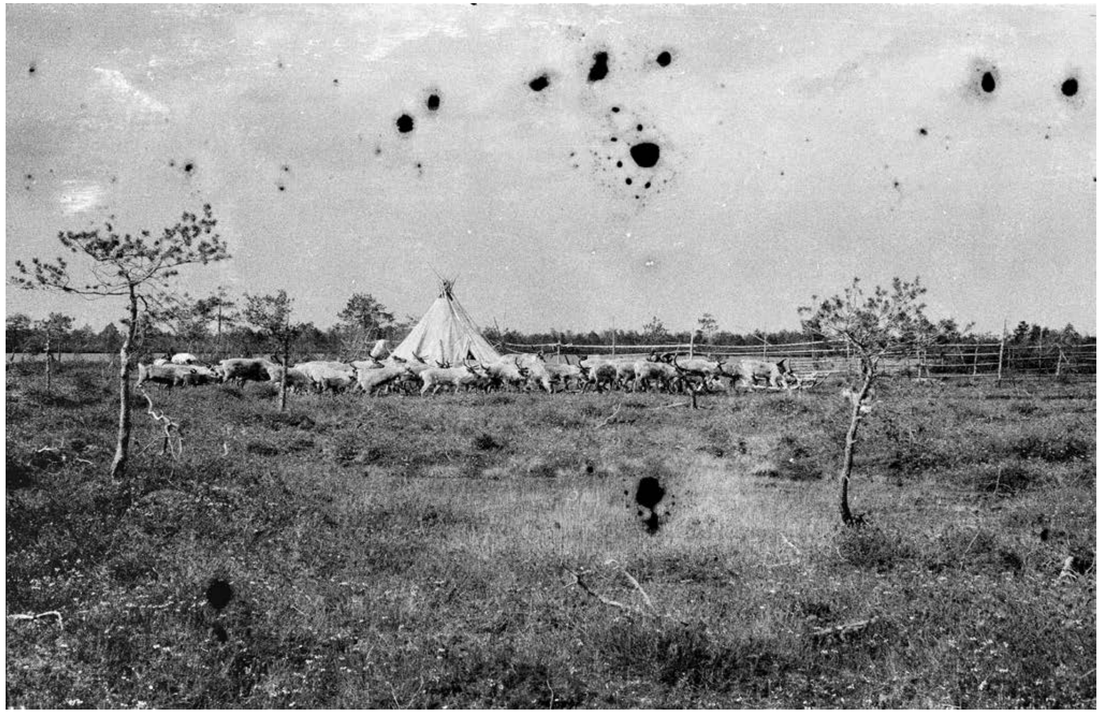
Oil spills
According to official data from the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation, about one and a half million tons of oil are spilled into the Russian environment every year due to accidents and transportation of oil. There are ten oil spills in Russia every day and more than 10,000 leaks per year. The main reason for oil spillage in Russia is rusted oil pipelines with an elapsed lifetime. Igor Tereshkov: “The Russian government is interwoven with the oil companies in all sorts of ways. There are many oil wells in which oil-spills are made. Often it happens in places where I know people. A huge number of people work at the oil companies. There is always someone from someone’s family or circle of friends who works there.

Oil-water in plastic bottles
Igor Tereshkov pictured the oil environmental problem in his own unique way. With a special photogram technique, he explained his own impression of reality over the analog image. “I thought about the polluted water that I encountered in the environmentally polluting oil extraction areas. I brought the water in plastic bottles. During the development process, I mixed the photos like a photogram with the polluted oil-water. I let the film rolls soaked in the water for hours and sometimes a whole night. The result is black spots on the surface, which give the impression of the oil leaks.”

Windows and mirrors
In his photography, Tereshkov refers to the theory of windows and mirrors by John Szarkowski, the American curator and historian. He divided photography into mirrors of the soul and windows of the objective reality. Tereshkov's series *Oil and Moss* should work as a mirror and a window for the viewer because he combined his introspective view and the reality into one image. In this way, his photos become documentary art photography. Tereshkov was also inspired by the theories of Susan Sontag and her ideas about cinema: "Susan Sontag wrote that cinema becomes visible as a light on the wall and that photography as a frame is a physical object that you can take in your hand. But I thought: in modern times, you usually see photos of your digital image, just like in the cinema. For me, that is also the reason that I shot this photo series with film. For Oil and Moss, I wanted to show more than a flat photo. I came up with a development method with which I applied my own expression to the image. In my photography, I not only want to show the problem but also what it does emotionally with me."

> “The Russian government is interwoven with the oil companies in all sorts of ways. There are many oil wells in which oil-spills are made. Often it happens in places where I know people.

© Igor Tereshkov | Oil and Moss



© Igor Tereshkov | Oil and Moss

© Igor Tereshkov | Oil and Moss

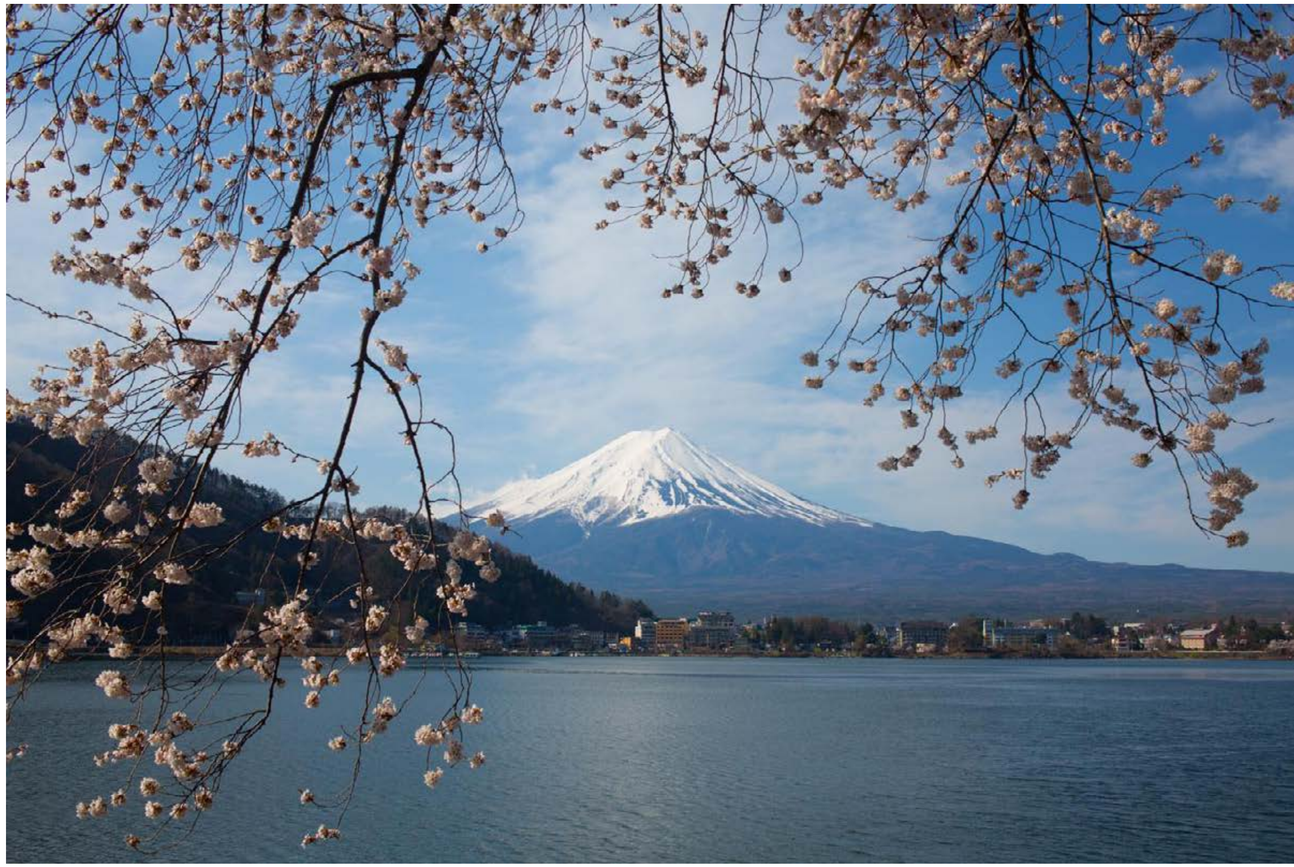
About

Igor Tereshkov (Energodar in Ukraine, 1989) lives and works in Moscow, Russia. Tereshkov studied documentary photography and photojournalism at the School of Modern Photography Docdocdoc in St. Petersburg. He is the winner of the Santa Fe CENTER award in 2019, nominated by the Lucie Foundation 2019 and nominated for the Photography Grant award 2018.

“In my photography,
I not only want to
show the problem
but also what it does
emotionally with me.

Mount Fuji

Aliona Londono



© Aliona Londono | Mount Fuji

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I love Japan, and I always go there twice a year in my favourite seasons, spring and autumn. This spring of 2020 was different, I was supposed to be there only one month, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, I ended up spending three months there. As the situation in Tokyo was getting worse because of the virus, I decided to go to the countryside. Since I love nature, I felt blessed to spend six weeks in Kawaguchiko, a lovely and charming town with amazing views of Mount Fuji.

While I was there, I did a small tribute to the great Japanese artist Hokusai (1760-1849). Hokusai was not only one of the giants of the Japanese art scene and a legend of the Edo period but also an inspiration to Western modernism. He inspired painters like Van Gogh, Gauguin and Monet. His well-known woodblock prints series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji gives me an important message: whilst life changes, Fuji-san stands still. This series depicts Mount Fuji from different locations, perspectives, weather conditions and various seasons. Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji contains three of Hokusai’s best-known designs: “Under the Wave off Kanagawa”, “Fine, Wind, Clear Weather”, and “Rainstorm Beneath the Summit”. The set features scenic views of Mount Fuji, seen from the city of Edo (now Tokyo) and other places in eastern Japan. The individual designs emphasise the permanence of Fuji amid a world in flux and contrast the dangerous majesty of nature with the brief and fragile lives of humans. There is the same important message here: while life changes, Fuji-san stands still.

It was the first time I was at the same location as his Rainstorm artwork. I could observe how nature was changing, and I could notice all the small details. When I arrived in Kawaguchiko at the beginning of April, it was still a winter landscape. The mountains were brown-yellow. Little by little, they became green. Japanese have a word for this new green that marks the start of spring: Shinryoku. Mount Fuji had a lot of snow on the top when I arrived, and when I left Kawaguchiko at the end of May, almost all the snow was gone.

© Aliona Londono | Mount Fuji

For me the Mount Fuji is magic. Japanese people learn about Fuji-san, their affectionate name for this beloved mountain, from birth, through songs, poems and pictures. Since childhood, Mount Fuji is in their hearts. As one of Japan's most iconic emblems, Mount Fuji has inspired countless artists and poets over the centuries. And I can see why. I never got tired of admiring this majestic mountain.

Every day was different, every hour, every minute. These photos are meaningful because of everything going on in the world right now. I felt very lucky to be in such a magical place at this difficult time. It was like living in a dream, watching the news about the dire situation worldwide, especially in Spain, where I am from, while I was surrounded by beautiful nature and had the possibility of going out. Usually, Kawaguchiko is a crowded tourist destination. This time it was almost empty; I saw only very few locals out and about. Sometimes I even forgot about the pandemic. I will never forget our time with Mount Fuji. I was also lucky because I was with my parents; I don't see them often as I would like. Being with family was a special gift.

About

Aliona Londono lives in Valencia, Spain. Since she was a child, she loved photography. Aliona took her first photography course in 2005, and she hasn't stopped since then.

© Claudius Schulze | Emosson

Europe as a Natural Park

Claudius Schulze

Geologists call the current geological era the Anthropocene, the epoch in which the climate is strongly determined by human influence. As a result, the experience of nature has also changed. What we once considered picturesque now has a human layer. The beauty of nature is no longer equivalent to that of Ansel Adams' romantic photography. In his *State of Nature* project, Claudius Schulze approached nature as an utterly human construction. He aesthetically photographed landscapes that show constructions made by civil engineers to prevent natural disasters. "These concrete structures are an inseparable part of our nature. The European landscape is no longer wild nature, but a large landscaped garden; a park in which we must feel safe."

Claudius Schulze travelled for five years through Europe where he started his photographic search for iconic plates of nature, in which human input is visible. “The motivation to do this project came from two sources, my own experience and the theoretical background. I was climbing in the mountains, and I was impressed by the large scale of the structures I saw there. My sister is a social geographer, and through her I understood how many civil works were done in the mountains to prevent natural catastrophes. The engineers are not at all interested in whether humans cause climate change or not. They see that something is changing in nature, and they respond to it. I agree with that approach. Most importantly, we have the strength to change it. And we have to do that too. It doesn’t matter who is responsible for it.”
To complete his project, Claudius Schulze travelled a total of 50,000 kilometres with his specially purchased aerial work platform to “I have travelled all over Europe, to France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. The crane could rise as high as 11 meters, but I usually did not go more than 6 or 7 meters. I started in the mountains of Switzerland, where I photographed along rivers.”

Water

If you look at the images you can see a lot of water, and it seems as if the project is a warning of the rising sea level, but for the photographer that is not the case. Schulze: “The subject of my project is not only about the rising sea level and the fear of it. I am interested in climate change and natural disasters, and what is now being done to prevent this. Nowadays, many dykes, ground, concrete sea walls and dams are being built, and I have mainly looked at that. Of course, you will see many waterworks on the coast in the Netherlands, such as the Delta Works. I have travelled all over the Dutch coast. So that’s why you see a lot of water in my images. However, water is not the subject itself, but part of it.”

© Claudius Schulze | Silvretta

© Claudius Schulze | Oosterscheldekering

© Claudius Schulze | Wissant

© Claudius Schulze | Blackpool

> “Nature in Europe has been designed and changed by humans for centuries. We wouldn’t be able to enjoy skiing in the mountains or a day at the beach if the landscape wasn’t designed.

Aesthetic and sublime

According to Oskar Piegsa, who wrote an essay in The *State of Nature* entitled Trust not the picturesque, the style of romantic aesthetics in European art is still the most commonly used to depict nature. The Germans even have a magazine, named Landlust, that celebrates the beauty of country life. The magazine has one of the largest print runs in Germany. “The picturesque thing is defusing nature in a landscape park. In the scenic approach, nature should only be enjoyable and consumable,” says Piegsa.

Claudius Schulze plays with this cultural legacy. In his pictures, you can see picturesque landscapes: mountains, rivers and sun-drenched beaches. The images give the viewer a reassuring feeling that it is pleasant to stay in European nature. But the opposite takes place in the photos. There is no untouched nature to be seen at all. Everywhere appears to have traces of human intervention. Schulze explains: “The beauty in the photos stems from my own observation and from our culture. As dangerous and threatening as nature is now, we still have the perception that nature is always an aesthetic sensation: aesthetic and sublime, as the philosopher Kant put it. But there is a big gap between the reality of the threats to nature and the perception of nature as beauty. From this typical background of European art history, the concept of beauty enters my images. To me, we cannot call the structures changes in the landscape; they are part of the landscape itself. Nature in Europe has been designed and changed by humans for centuries. We wouldn’t be able to enjoy skiing in the mountains or a day at the beach if the landscape wasn’t designed.”

Ansel Adams

Schulze’s photographs have a unique mix of the aesthetic style of Ansel Adams’ landscapes and the critical attitude of the new topographics. “Ansel Adams photographed nature as sublime, so grand and unspoilt, and that still is the American perception of the landscape to this day. This is also due to the myth of the wild bears. I have read that more Americans die because they fall off a donkey than are eaten by a bear. But the Americans continue to perpetuate the myth of the wild bear. In his well-known books, from the series The Camera, The Negative and The Print, Adams writes in his preface that it was his job to show the beauty of nature so that people can appreciate nature. He was also a wilderness advocate in national parks. You see this approach a lot in America. There are similarities between my work and that of Ansel Adams, but then we had the countermovement of the new topographics, photographers like Stephen Shore and Robert Adams, who focused on the human-made environment. I see my work as a combination of these two major trends in landscape photography.”

Mirror?
Does Claudius Schulze want to hold up a mirror to the viewer and show that the wild landscape has disappeared, and that due to deforestation and pollution, there is no longer a primeval forest left in Europe? “I don’t want to be didactic and tell with a raised finger how the world works because that creates boring art. But I hope my art can influence people’s minds. The mind of man is complex. I believe that because they are aesthetic, and because they have a conflicting message, my images will encourage people to reflect. At first glance, you mainly see the beauty, but if you peak more on the details, confusion arises. you suddenly see a concrete construction. I hope people will start thinking about how and why those structures got there. In my images, I often place the viewer as the person who is experiencing the beauty of the landscape. There is no one in the photo at work. I didn’t do this to show nature as pleasant, but as a form of identification, to show that the photos are about us. We ourselves walk in that raked park called Europe.”

Photography
How does Schulze see the function of contemporary photography? “For me, photography is both an act of perception and a way of making a statement. I am not cheating my viewers. What you see is reality, but I give my vision on it. I formulate an argument with my images. Theoretical, scientific research is fundamental in my work. I spent a lot of time researching how and what I wanted to photograph. But photography is also an investigation in itself. I present my research results to the public through my images. My photo projects are similar to a master thesis, except that I present my findings in a form that scientists would not choose. I have not written any texts for this; the photos themselves are the results. We can all look at photos, so anyone can “read” my findings. To emphasize the scientific character, I have chosen to include essays by two researchers in my book.”

© Claudius Schulze | Bort les Orgues, France

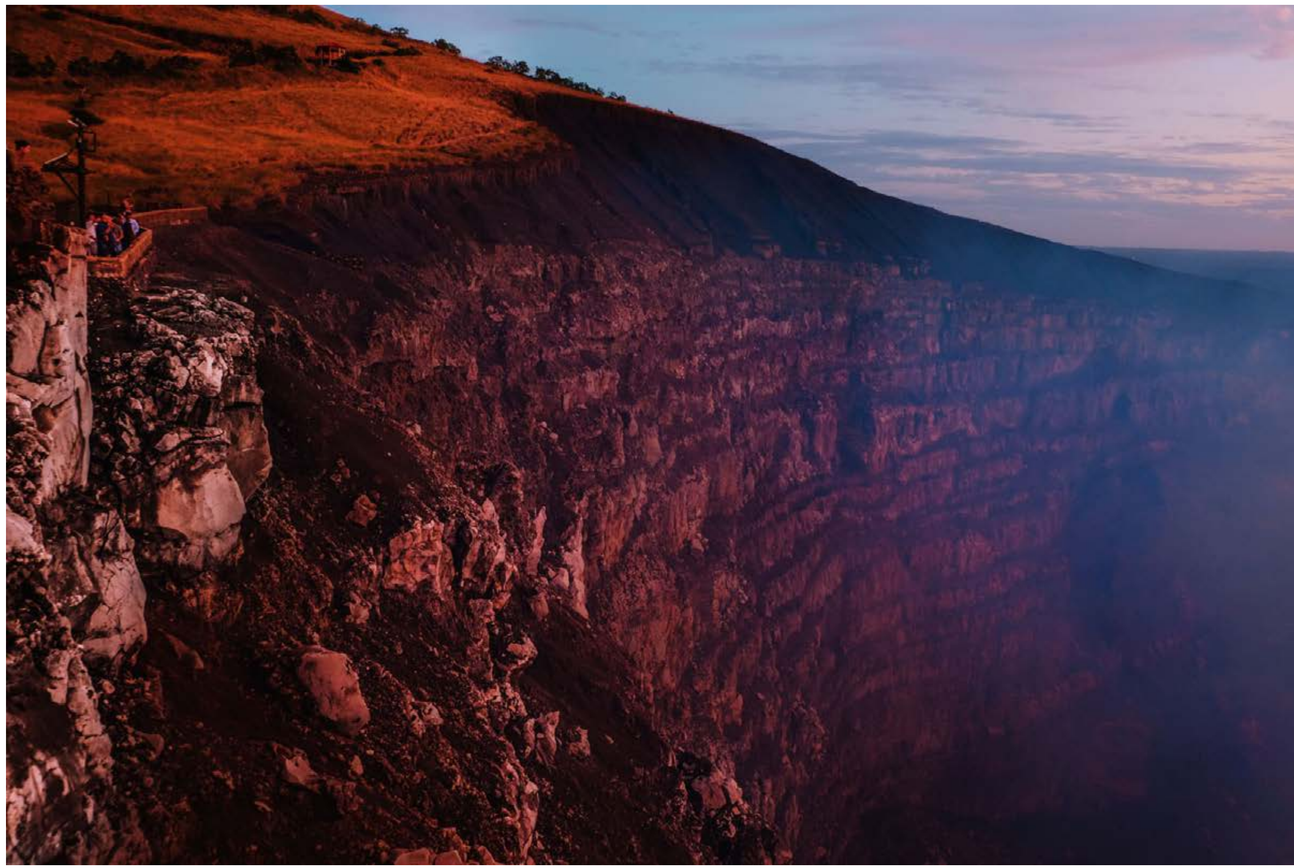
About
Claudius Schulze (1984) is a photographer and researcher. His work has appeared in numerous international publications, including GEO, Stern, Der Spiegel, National Geographic Traveller and GQ. His works have been exhibited in London, New York, Istanbul, Berlin, Rencontres Arles and Amsterdam, among others, and are held internationally in private and public collections. Schulze worked with a 4x5 inch analogue technical camera with 90, 150, 210 mm lenses, of which he used the 150 mm the most.

© Claudius Schulze | Grimselpass

“The subject of my project is not only about the rising sea level and the fear of it. I am interested in climate change and natural disasters, and what is now being done to prevent this.

Stillness of the Suspended Moment

Hellen Hernández



© Hellen Hernández

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In my photography, I want to illuminate beauty amidst chaos. I’m calmed by the simplicity of a graceful line and the stillness of the suspended moment. I want to share my impression of the serenity I find there. I capture the ephemeral movement of light on organic forms to preserve that mystical moment that stills time for me. Photographing intuitively – what I feel, as much as what I see – and informed by a background in painting and art history, I portray a personal interpretation by layering the images digitally with colour and texture to find a balance between the real and the imagined. I am interested in how my experience of image-making engages my thinking, memories, and emotions and how the images may become an experience and palette for the viewer to consider their ideas and feelings, place and plans.

© Hellen Hernández

© Hellen Hernández

About

Hellen Hernández is a documentary photographer based in Costa Rica. Her areas of focus include human rights, cultural heritage, memory, and scenic arts. Hellen's involvement with photography deepened in 2017, having discovered an affinity with the photographic image when taking pictures of her family. She studied photography at the National Institute of Learning of Costa Rica.

© Jasper Bastian | An empty house on the Belarusian side of the fence in Kulkishki. In comparison to the Baltic countries, which orientated themselves westwards upon their independence, in Belarus there was no fundamental rejection of the old Soviet system. Kulkishki, Belarus, 2015.

Two border posts along a ditch

Jasper Bastian

The border between Lithuania and Belarus was once an insignificant line on the map, until the Soviet Union fell apart and Lithuania became a part of Europe. Now the border area represents the dividing line between two cultures. Over the course of three months, photographer Jasper Bastian made three trips to this border area, where he made his project with the title *A road not taken*, as his graduation project for the University of Dortmund. His images have subdued colours, partly due to the atmosphere of winter, but also because Bastian deliberately kept the saturation of his analogue shots low. “Winter is the hardest time for the people there and I wanted to show that. The isolation and loneliness are most visible in winter.”

Symbolic of the whole series is a picture taken in Pašalčis. The picture shows a ditch with a brand-new border post on both sides, one on the Lithuanian side and one on the Belarusian side. The photo tells a small story of a border, but it says a lot more about the large borders that run between two different cultures and economies. “The situation was surreal, because within a metre you could walk from Europe to Belarus. For me, the photo has a lot of meaning in the context of the broad discussion of migrants and the European borders.”
How did Bastian choose this border area as his subject? “Before this project, I made a series in Kosovo called Across the River, about Mitrovica, a city on the border between Kosovo and Serbia on both sides of the river. This sparked my interest in the problems of border areas. Here people live separated by a border and have such a strong hatred against each other. My project was also about conflicts between national identities. After this project, I was looking for a new story with different aspects of borders and nationalities. This is how I came across the border between Lithuania and Belarus. The border between these countries has changed four times in the last century. In the thirties the same people lived in Poland, then it became Germany, then it became the Soviet Union and then Belarus and Lithuania. Some residents were given different passports four times without ever leaving their homes. There were also areas where people lived together for a hundred years without worrying about their nationality and suddenly ended up in a completely different world”.
The biggest change is that the border between Lithuania and Belarus has now also become the border between the democratic and free Europe and the still dictatorial Belarus. “There are people who live on one side of the village in Europe and on the other side, behind a big fence, the same villagers live in a communist system. Entire families are separated because of this. I met someone whose sister lived on the other side of the border. Or even worse, I met a woman whose husband lived on the other side of the border. The man got a job on the Belarusian side of the border and went to live there temporarily. She continued to live in her mother’s house and he travelled up and down to his wife, but since they can no longer cross the European border, they live completely separated. Now they haven’t seen each other for seven years, while it’s a distance of only ten minutes by car. It’s very bizarre.”

> “Winter is the hardest time for the people there and I wanted to show that. The isolation and loneliness are most visible in winter.

© Jasper Bastian | Vanda’s parents are buried in the cemetery in the Belarus town of Gerniony, close to the border. Although Vanda used to walk to their grave regularly, she now makes the trip only once a year, since it involves almost a full day of travel. Kačėnai, Lithuania, 2016.

© Jasper Bastian | A small river marks the border in Pašalčis. The two painted stones designate the boundary of Lithuanian and Belarus territory. Pašalčis, Lithuania, 2016.

© Jasper Bastian | Stanislav (62) lives alone with his dog in Norviliškės in the last house before the border. His aunt, Yanina, lives 400 meters away on the other side. In order to visit her in Pizkuny, he has to travel almost 150 km. round-trip. The border check-point in Norviliškės is open only three times a year, on Easter, 1st November and Christmas. He could cross directly then. A visa is, however, required, which is too expensive for Stanislav. Norviliškės, Lithuania, 2015.

© Jasper Bastian | A scene of everyday village life in Ažubenis, an ordinary, tiny border town. Ažubenis, Lithuania, 2016.

Lonely person

Stanislav lives with his dog in the border village of Norviliškės, the last house before the border on the Lithuanian side. In the picture, we see a gloomy looking man sitting on a wooden bed in a shabby interior. Stanislav's aunt lives 400 meters away in Belarus. To visit her in the village of Pizkuny he has to drive 150 km. The border in the village is open three times a year, but to cross the border Stanislav needs a visa, which is too expensive for him.

"I have visited him several times. He lives very close to the European border. His village and that of his aunt's were originally one village, but is now separated into two parts. He is the loneliest person I have ever met. Near his house, the border control with dogs runs up and down. Sometimes he is allowed to talk to his sister on the other side of the fence. He shouts loudly so that residents of Pizkuny hear him on the other side of the border. They call his aunt so he can talk to her."

No future

Jasper Bastian photographed on both sides of the border. One would expect that the economic situation on the European side would be much better, but that turned out not to be the case. "During my visits, the Lithuanian side wasn't much wealthier than the Belarusian side. There was an economic malaise in both areas. People live in small villages far from the big city and its economic progress. Most people I met were retired or unemployed. They used to work in the Soviet kolkhoz and when the economic system changed, there was no work for them anymore. They couldn't get used to the European way of working and still had nostalgic memories of the Russian system. There was more security and safety for them in those times. All the young people from this region disappeared to the capital Vilnius. I've only ever met two young people in this completely isolated area."

In one picture you see a ladder against a tree, most likely someone planning to saw off and collect branches to heat their house. However, you could also take the picture metaphorically. The stairs lead nowhere, no future at the end of the steps. "Most people don't have a gas connection. They depend on nature. There are no supermarkets to buy food or other things. There's just going to be a driving car-shop."

© Jasper Bastian | Leokadija (56), one of the last inhabitants of Norviliškės, is separated from her husband. She married in 1994, at a time when border control was still lax. Her husband, Iwan, had a job on the Belarus side and had acquired a Belarus passport. When the border closed, he decided to stay in Belarus. The last time they saw each other was seven years ago. She can afford neither a divorce nor a visa to visit him. Norviliškės, Lithuania, 2015.

Analogue

Why does a young photographer still work analogue in this digital time? Bastian: “I’ve been working with a Mamiya 7, an analogue viewfinder camera with one or two lenses, for the last seven years. I like it when I don’t immediately see the images I’ve shot. This way I don’t have to look at a display all the time, which would be very distracting when trying to talk to people I’m photographing. This allows me to concentrate better on the moment. I can only capture ten shots per film, which makes me very aware of every shot I take. It slows me down. When I approach people who are not used to photography, my analogue equipment turns out to be less threatening. I also like the special quality of film.” For Jasper Bastian, photography plays a role in his vision of how we communicate around the world. I only want to deal with subjects that I consider important. I take a lot of time to explore my themes. I think the addition of text to photographs is key, as not all information can be portrayed through one image.”

© Jasper Bastian | A photograph from 1992 shows two Belarusians, Jonas and Arturas, from the neighboring bordertown of Kanbaliskes. They have not seen their Lithuanian cousins Ona and Terese from Stalgonys since the photo was taken. Stalgonys, Lithuania, 2015.

About

Jasper Bastian, b. 1989, is a German-American photographer. He holds a BA in photography from the ‘University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Dortmund’ and studied photojournalism at the ‘Danish School of Media and Journalism’. Applying diverse visual strategies, Bastian’s photography addresses modern concepts of territory and the intricate relationship between identity and place. He is Based in Dortmund, Germany.

Bastian was a finalist for the ‘Leica Oskar Barnack Newcomer Award’ (2014). He was also selected as one of the winners of the ‘30 under 30’ competition by Magnum Photos (2015) and nominated for the ‘Unseen Dummy Award’ (2017). His photographs have been published in The New Yorker, Financial Times Weekend Magazine, The Washington Post, Die Zeit, among others.

© Jasper Bastian | Galina lost in thought at the river Merkys in Ažubenis, which has been the natural borderline between the two countries for ages. Ažubenis, Lithuania, 2016.

“There are people who live on one side of the village in Europe and on the other side, behind a big fence, the same villagers live in a communist system. Entire families are separated because of this.

“Photography is the art that combines reality and vision, feeling and truth, psychological depth, and political awareness.

- Artdoc Magazine

Artdoc Magazine #4 | 2020

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