



4YS

AN INTIMATE JOURNEY TO THE NORTH

A shared love of Europe's northerly landscapes inspired Sandra Bartocha and Werner Bollmann to embark on a four-year project, culminating in a book and multivisual show



[Left, top to bottom]
Raging Sea 1, Raging
Sea 13, Far North 10
[Right, top to bottom]
Calm Waters 11, Silent
Forests 9



SANDRA Bartocha and Werner Bollmann were already well established nature photographers in Germany when they first conceived the idea of working together on a major documentary that would “pay tribute to the Nordic light”. It was 2011 and Bollmann had just finished his first book, *Nordische Momente: Tiergeschichten aus Taiga und Tundra (Nordic Moments: Animal Stories from Taiga and Tundra)*, a collaboration with fellow photographer Winfried Wisniewski. “I was still very fascinated about this region,” recalls Bollmann. “Sandra and I knew each other at this time and were good friends and what was very important was that we had the same opinions of aesthetics, we had the same ideas and we wanted to do something together about the North.”

Bartocha was renowned for her ethereal compositions of plants and landscapes, while Bollmann had gained hard-earned respect in a highly competitive field for his studies of European birds and mammals. But it was their feeling for natural light (particularly Nordic light), where they shared the same level of intensity.

In both Danish and Norwegian, the word for light is Lys (pronounced ‘Loose’). It became the working title for the project and served as a constant reminder of the main theme linking every picture in the photographers’ subsequent journey from the Baltic Archipelago to the Arctic tundra.

Bartocha explains: “When we tried to find a concept for the book, we thought that light is very important because the North always has a special light. You have the midnight sun, you have the polar light and the polar night; in



We tried to keep light or the absence of light as our main focus in every picture.

SANDRA BARTOCHA



[Left, top to bottom]
Bright South 1,
Bright South 9, Silent
Forests 33
[Right, top to bottom]
Silent Forests 23,
Open Tundra 15
[Next page] Authors
Sandra Bartocha and
Werner Bollmann



between times you have these very long twilight days. So we tried to keep light, or the absence of light, as our main focus in every picture.”

Soon a subtitle was added: *An Intimate Journey to the North*, which conveyed the spirit of discovery and exploration that kept the photographers driving onward. It was to be a vast undertaking, covering the entire European North, from the bright Danish woodlands and pastures in the south to the imposing glaciers of Spitsbergen in the Arctic; from Norway’s storm-lashed west coast to the dark forests of Finland in the east.

Before embarking on any field trips, Bartocha and Bollmann selected the locations they believed would best represent the varying landscape and changing light. They decided on six subject areas, which became the chapters of the book.

Each title was worded to reflect something of the light and mood to be encountered: Bright South, Calm Waters, Silent Forests, Open Tundra, Raging Sea, Far North. They deliberately avoided the more popular Scandinavian destinations such as Norway’s fjords, the Rapa Delta and Sarek National Park. “It was more about the biomes as such, a more universal approach,” says Bartocha.

To fulfill their ambitions, the duo realised they would need to step beyond their comfort zones, “to grow as photographers”, as Bartocha puts it. This is something they now remember as one of the more positive experiences. “We had a different focus to begin with, so I specialised on plants and landscape and Werner has always been good with animals. The challenge in the project ➤➤



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WERNER BOLLMANN



LYS: An Intimate Journey to the North was self-funded by Bartocha & Bollmann, who printed 2,000 copies in total, with 400 pre-sold. There are two editions: Standard (1,700 copies), €65, and Special (300 copies) €110, each numbered, signed and sold with a special LYS slipcase. To order your copy, go to lys-publishing.com.

was to push beyond our own limits and try out other aspects of photography.” Bollmann adds: “When I started I’d never really done a very good landscape image, so I had to learn how to practise, how to do landscape photography, and it was very interesting. New horizons!”

The project was always going to be more than a book. From the beginning, Bartocha and Bollmann were committed to producing a multi-visual presentation for screening at nature photo festivals all over Europe and ultimately for a DVD, scheduled for release this April. “We knew the multi-visual would be part of the whole thing because you just don’t do four years of work just to produce a book!” says Bartocha. “We immediately started thinking of things we would need additionally to form a multi-visual, like transitional images and video sequences, so we were trying to keep this all in mind and do it all at once.”

A friend of the duo, the composer Torsten Harder, was commissioned to produce the music, and drew inspiration from the images sent back from the field. “During the four years of travelling, we constantly supplied him

with our images, ideas and concepts so he could kind of travel with us in a visual way,” says Bollmann. “He’s a lover of photography too, which was good because he had a chance to follow us emotionally.”

The finished multi-visual ran to 45 minutes and had its premiere, with the book launch, last October at the annual GDT International Nature Photography Festival in Lünen, Germany. More screenings are planned across Europe throughout 2017.

Looking back, Bollmann reckons he and Bartocha spent a year in the field. “The longest trip was over two months when we were in the tundra in the most northern parts of Norway.”

Remarkably, their cameras coped with the extreme conditions, from lashings of salt spray on the windswept Norwegian coast to -40°C temperatures in the Finnish winter, without any major issues. “It was astonishing,” he says. “We had no problems.” Bartocha chips in: “Except when Werner dropped his camera on the last trip in the Baltic Sea. But that was not the camera’s fault!” ×

Keith Wilson