

Women eyes

An enormous passion for nature and a strong aesthetic sensitivity characterize the work of our host, a Dutch photographer. Award-winning and competent, never over the top.

Meeting with the author of Ioannis Schinezos

Welcome to Asferico Heike and thank you very much for being with us! Can you introduce yourself and your background in a few lines?

Born and raised in the Lake Constance region, the southern Part of Germany, I have been living since my 16th in the southern part of the Netherlands. I studied for graphic designer in the late 80th and got work bij a Newspaper. In this time I got my first analog camera (Minolta XE1). Since 2002 Nature photography has been a part of my life and I spent all my rare free time with it, mostly during my photography trips (vacation) hoping to slowly exchange my work partly for photography. Unfortunately my health made this no longer possible. For several years I have hardly taken pictures due to illness and I try to find new ways to give my passion more life which happily slowly succeeds again. My work has been awarded in several international competitions among which 'Wildlife Photographer of the Year' (WPOTY) and 'European Wildlife Photographer of the Year' (ENJ).

How did you get into photography? Why nature photography?

I'm more an image thinking person so my love for pictures I have since my early childhood. As a child I was already fascinated by images and wildlife photography in particular. I dreamed to stand once behind the camera and photograph lovely landscapes and wild animals. I never thought that it once would come true. A lot of years later I was finally able to afford my own camera, since the moment I felt like I had the potential to become a professional photographer I gave it my 100% effort.

And although I prefer to photograph in nature, I also tried out the other genres in photography, from portrait photography in a studio, reportage photography to sports photography but nature photography still fascinated me the most, gave me the feeling of happiness and a place where I belong. Far from the hectic world, looking for ever-changing motifs and lighting situations and enjoying all the beauty of nature. Staging an image in a studio with different poses and studio lights was not challenging enough for me and working with people costs me a lot of energy. I like to work with existing light and changing circumstances and adjust my photography accordingly.

Which photographer(s) have inspired you?

I have a deep respect for the great photographers/photojournalists who are so committed to conservation, who gives the voice to the voiceless, such as Britta Jaschinski, Brent Stirton and many others. I wish that I would be able to do so too.

There are also so many great photographers around the world. I enjoy those great images of many nature photographers and have a lot of respect for their work, but I don't have any special names who have influenced my work directly.

Do you have a favourite field of application?

I like to photograph nature in a broad sense, from macro, landscape and abstract to wildlife, but photographing (intimate) landscapes is still my favourite.

What have been the crucial moment of your career professionally speaking?

That's a good question that I don't really have an answer to. Actually, the moment my photography became known in the scene passed me by without realizing it ... Suddenly I noticed that other photographers knew me, without knowing why, so it more „happened" to me.

A special moment, which feels like recognition for myself, was my highly commended by Wildlife Photographer of the Year in 2015.

What's your opinion about competitions?

Competitions are not that important to me, even if I have won a few prizes over the years. There are 2 to 3 competitions for me where I like to take part every year. Participating in a competition allows you to confront you with your own images, to learn to look at it differently, without your emotions from that moment you made that image. I don't take photos from the point of view of a competition photographer, but from the soul of what I like and not what the judges or the crowd might like and always keeping in mind that nature comes first. No photo is worth using violence against nature also not for the best picture of a competition. This must be also a major challenge for the jury to recognize whether the correct rules of conduct have been maintained.

And of course, it also takes a bit of luck to win a prize. There are so many great images and every new composition of a jury has a different points of view.

What's your photographic philosophy?

Nature photography is a huge part of me. It's a place of rest, a place to breath. I feel small and unimportant when I'm in the nature and I can become one with my surroundings. Nature has beautiful structures, shapes and colors. I enjoy the little special moments, the chuckles and the amazement that it gives me when I observe and photograph the wildlife. It's a never-ending search with the camera, looking through the viewfinder and enjoying what I can capture with my camera. My inner-self longs for a certain harmony and peace in the images.

Nature photography is just like a book, that no human being can really read, every time you enter nature it is as if the book gets thicker and thicker.

What's important in making a great photograph?

For me, a good photo doesn't require words. A photo like that touches someone deep inside, the photo pulls you in and doesn't let you go.

Every photographer has their own way of creating a photo. A technical perfect photo that meets all the standard rules does not have to be a great photo. For a great photo, it needs above all a good eye to capture more than just what one sees objectively. Even though the photo is not technically perfect it will appeal more than the technically perfect photo without any soul.

Are you interested to a specific habitat or areas (Europe, world)? Or specific subjects you prefer to shot?

I have lost my heart in the arctic and antarctic regions. I love the emptiness and roughness of this nature which makes you feel small and insignificant.

The question perhaps is foregone but I have to put it: did you ever have problems of every kind as a woman practicing nature photography?

The only thing is, that I don't really feel safe with my equipment alone in nature, especially in the more populated areas such as the Netherlands, where I live. Even though nothing really happened so far, except one time I was chased for a while. In Scandinavia, for example, I had no problems there at all.

In recent years, there seems to be more attention for women behind the camera and how she can hold her own in the mans world. I've never noticed something bad, at most in sports photography. The only thing I often felt was that I was not taken seriously as woman with a big camera. I didn't mind because of this I had more peace in the field and could do my own thing.

Could you describe your photographic style?

I always find that difficult to answer. A well-known underwater photographer and highly valued colleague of mine, Willem Koolvoort, said once that he always recognizes my photos (without seeing my name under the picture) "by the beautiful and balanced composition."...

I photograph as it suits my soul. I recognize that my images are in balance, radiate a certain silence or tranquility, less is often more ... and sometimes with a wink too...

Are there things you don't like actually in nature photography and nature photographers? Do you have professional relationships with other colleagues?

The digital age has made nature photography booming. Fortunately, there are a lot of nature photographers who are really conceived for nature and treat it with care. But unfortunately there is also the other group of nature photographers, for whom the best picture is number 1 and must be made at all costs, with all the bad consequences for the nature. This negative phenomenon also applies by many workshops where you only see the goal but lose sight of the path (nature).

In collaboration with a group of nature photographers from the GDT, a few nice projects have already been created, such as a book and multi-vision show about nature in the southwest of Germany to bring nature closer to the indigenous population.

Are you a fan of lenses, cameras and things, I mean do you like possessing equipment?

To me, cameras and lenses are tools and not collectibles. I am therefore no one who follows the latest trends. Only when it is really useful for me, I consider a purchase. Due to my broad interest in nature photography, I do own a large telephoto lens for wildlife but also a macro lens. I am also not eager to change brands every time because the other brand just has one better feature... I know my system and what I can make with it. It is mainly about craftsmanship and a good eye and not only about gear. Great images can also be taken with a simple camera...

Do you run also workshops?

I have never given a workshop. In the beginning, my free time with a full-time job and busy life was so tight that I wanted to use the time to photograph, and now I enjoy the tranquility of nature and prefer to photograph rather than teaching others. If I think so, there are already so many workshops everywhere that many areas are already overcrowded. So it's also a good thing that I don't give workshops too.

What are your future photographic goals? Where would you like to see your photography career ten years from now?

The world is changing enormously, climate change is taking off rapidly. My biggest wish is that I can go back to the arctic regions to photograph as long as there is still enough ice and a reasonably intact nature. And that I with this project can contribute to a better understanding of the need to preserve these areas and to slow down climate change.