

25 Years of Photography in Africa "All that I can't Leave Behind"

Soenke C. Weiss - Germany

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In the beginning I wanted adventures. I wanted kicks – the kind of melodramatic thrills and chills I'd yearned for since childhood, the kind of adventure I'd found as a little boy in the pages of my Tintin comic books. I wanted to see the world. I wanted to see Africa.

But traveling isn't always nice. Traveling is not always convenient. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. That's ok. Every journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves traces in your memory, in your consciousness, in your heart and in your body. You take something with you, and hopefully you leave something good behind. My journey through Africa began in Kenya and South Sudan. 25 years ago. It has now taken me to almost three dozen countries. Many years I've lived on the African continent, my daughter Nina grew up in South Africa.

I've crossed a lot of territorial borders, both physical and cultural. But a lifetime would not be enough to claim to know Africa. In my ongoing project | All that I can't leave behind | I combine many of my photos into one overall picture. Just as Africa is an overall picture for me, a mosaic of diversity, a symphony of human existence.

Photography is first and foremost a point of view. It is not seeing itself. A photo is a fragment. A short view. We pile up glances, fragments. Like in real life. Ultimately, however, a good photo is the result of many characteristics: technique, timing, coincidence, psychology, perseverance, sheer chance and, ultimately, common sense. All photos strive to be memorable, to be unforgettable memories. So my pictures are a journey through time. Also through my own story. I believe as art as a link between cultures.

I hope my pictures convey this philosophy, this view of life. Because I don't have an agenda, but I have a point of view. When I see something new. Because recognition means first and foremost taking notice. That, too, is part of my art, my life. Recognition is the form of knowledge that I equate with art.

A virus called Corona has greatly changed our everyday lives. Around the world. New rules of the game in social interaction with one another temporarily influence us. We keep more distance from one another, wear masks and are sometimes driven by fear. I hope this will all be over soon. Or at least under control so we can continue our existence with ease and pleasure and wanderlust.

Because if I'm an advocate for anything, it's to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. Sharing moments with strangers who then become friends, celebrating our diversity. Now, that's the real kick for me. Because as you move through this life and this world, you change things slightly; you leave marks behind, however small. And in return, life and travel leave marks on you. Most of the time, those marks on your body or on your heart are beautiful. Often, though, they hurt the man who once lost himself in the pages of his Tintin books. That's life. That's the real adventure.

In Africa I felt the rain on my shoulders, the sun on my skin, the warmth of the people in my soul. My camera will be with me. Also for the next 25 years. Because there is no such thing as a final photo. There are only new days to come.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sönke C. Weiss is an internationally awarded photographer, writer, journalist and filmmaker who has been working on the African continent for more than 25 years. His ongoing project, |All that I can't leave behind | a visual essay of documentary and artistic narratives, reflects the tradition of engaged reportage. Weiss' work has been widely shown and published since the 1990s (www.soenkecweiss.com).

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