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CITY LOVE

Copenhagen: experimental lab for urban living and cutting-edge cuisine



MOUNTAIN BREEZE

Across the Alps with the B-Class Electric Drive

HEARTTHROB

Athleticism, passion, perfection: the AMG GT





POLE STAR

SEBASTIAN COPELAND once had Hollywood celebrities in his camera sights; today, he prefers to photograph icebergs in the polar regions. He is a society photographer turned eco warrior, an activist who uses breathtaking imagery to campaign for climate protection.


INTERVIEW MARGOT WEBER PORTRAIT NIKO SCHMID-BURGK



PHOTO SEBASTIAN COPELAND · PORTRAIT NIKO SCHMID-BURGK, HAIR: THOMAS KEMPER, STYLING: NAPAPIURI



VISIONARY
Photographer and
environmental
activist Sebastian
Copeland.

An aerial, black and white photograph of the Greenland ice sheet. The image shows a vast, textured expanse of ice with numerous crevasses and ridges. A thick layer of snow is being blown across the surface, creating a hazy, atmospheric effect. The sun is visible in the upper right corner, casting a bright glow over the scene. The horizon is visible in the distance, where the ice meets the ocean.

DREAMLAND
Snowstorm over the
Greenland ice sheet,
the largest area of
ice on Earth outside
the Antarctic.

Nobody documents climate change quite as beautifully or as bluntly as photographer and adventurer Sebastian Copeland. Until a few years ago, the 50-year-old worked as a promotional filmmaker and celebrity photographer, his portraits of actors like Salma Hayek, Sandra Bullock or his cousin Orlando Bloom appearing in glossy magazines all around the world. But since 2007, the Brit who now lives in West Hollywood shoots mainly icebergs rather than stars of the silver screen. As a member of the supervisory board of Global Green USA, he campaigns for climate protection in the polar regions in his own individual way: by capturing their perfection in amazing photographic images. During a brief visit to Munich – where Copeland's wife was born – the environmental activist explains what motivates and inspires him. Throughout the entire two-hour interview, Copeland remained alert and focused. That presumably comes from being the extreme sportsman he still is.

What do you say when people ask you what you do?

That's tricky! I'm three things: adventurer, photographer and environmental activist. First and foremost, though, I see myself as an artist. But you could also say I'm simply a guy who tries to pursue his passions.

And what are they?

I'm an extreme sportsman and I need that adrenaline kick. As a child, I was fascinated by the mountains and oceans, I used to sail and ski whenever I could. Later, I took up mountaineering and rock climbing, surfing, windsurfing, parachuting and scuba diving. And photography, of course – I started taking pictures when I was 12. My grandfather, who lived in South Africa, once took me with him on a photo safari into the backcountry. As a child, I read everything I could find about adventurers, mountaineers and explorers – Livingstone, Scott, Amundsen, Mallory and Hillary.

What is it about photography that made you want to make a career of it?

The chance to capture a moment forever and make it immortal. And then to be able to share it with others.

What do you hope to achieve through your photography?

I want people to fall in love with our world so they are eager to protect it.

But ultimately, a picture is just a picture.



Through my photos, I want people to fall in love with our world so they are eager to protect it.

SEBASTIAN COPELAND

Can a photograph really be a force for change?

For me, a picture is an emotional tool. It reaches out to people in a way that intellectual arguments simply cannot.

After studying film, you spent one and a half decades working as a society photographer and promotional filmmaker in Los Angeles.

What did that period mean to you?

Those were important years for me – they shaped my understanding of photography. And they were key in enabling me to discover what I wanted to do with my life.

You took a sabbatical in 2003. Did this mark the end of that phase of your life?

I guess you could say that. I simply felt a growing rift between me and my former profession.

Was that when you began to take an interest in the issue of climate change?

No, I learned about that back in the late 1990s, when I met the CEO of Green Cross, known in the U.S. as Global Green. This organization was founded in 1994 by Mikhail Gorbachev, and although it focuses mainly on climate change, it also deals with the issue of clean drinking water. In essence, the organization looks at the footprint we humans leave behind on Earth and considers the consequences. But I became clear about one

thing during my year out: if I were suddenly to involve myself seriously in campaigning for a better use of our planet's resources, it would be a turning point in my life. My activities as a promotional filmmaker, creating campaigns designed to make people buy more and more, would no longer be compatible with this new life.

So what was the first thing you did with your new life?

In addition to photography, I had one other important string to my bow: a knowledge of advertising and marketing – and a list of contacts. So in 2005, I used my connections and persuaded the actors Salma Hayek and Jake Gyllenhaal to travel with me to Greenland on behalf of Global Green. Our aim was to make people aware how melting ice is threatening the lives of the Inuit. We got a lot of coverage, it was a great success for us.

What came next?

Another Antarctic expedition gave rise in 2007 to my illustrated book *Antarctica*, for which I persuaded Mikhail Gorbachev and Leonardo Di Caprio to write the preface. And I returned to the Antarctic in 2008 with my cousin Orlando...

... the actor Orlando Bloom...

... and once again we succeeded in focusing media interest on the melting ice. After a



CHARACTERS

ICY FOCUS

Sebastian Copeland (left) on an expedition to the North Pole with his most important piece of equipment: his camera. In the Canadian Arctic on Ellesmere Island, he photographed Iceberg VIII in Otto Fjord. The frozen saltwater is as smooth as a mirror.



few years, I began to realize that all my interests and skills complemented each other perfectly.

Why did you devote yourself to the polar regions and not the rainforests?

The poles represent ground zero when it comes to climate change. The ongoing concentration of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane in the Earth's atmosphere is having a major impact on global warming, causing air temperatures and the temperature of the oceans to rise. The first and most visible consequence of this global warming is the melting ice caps. But in addition to that, I have a deep personal fascination for ice landscapes.

Why are they so special?

Ice landscapes are clean. There are no people. They are exceptionally beautiful. And they are the only places in our biosphere that look as if they belonged to another planet.

Is the situation the same in the Arctic and Antarctic?

No. The Arctic is an ocean surrounded by continents and covered with a thin sheet of ice no more than 1.8 meters [6 ft] thick. Whereas the Antarctic is a giant continent, one and a half times the size of the U.S. It is surrounded by seas and its ice extends right down into the depths. Temperatures in the Antarctic are much more stable than in the Arctic, because the colossal volume of ice ensures constantly freezing temperatures.

“ As humans, we have the capacity to reinvent everything. We must now use this gift to safeguard the survival of our species.

SEBASTIAN COPELAND

So the Arctic is actually under a greater threat?

Precisely. Because there is so much less ice in the Arctic, it is much more sensitive to global warming. What's more, the Arctic is under a two-pronged attack – from above, from the increasingly warm air, and from below, from the increasingly warm water. According to forecasts by the World Climate Council, the Arctic will be ice-free in the summer months some time between 2015 and 2035.

What impact would an ice-free Arctic have on the planet?

It would set in motion a downward spiral of events in many areas. The less ice there is on Earth, the quicker the planet will heat up. Meltwater from the poles could also interrupt the flow of the Gulf Stream, which is responsible for Europe's mild climate. The temperature of the seas would rise. At the micro level, this changes living conditions for plankton, and at the macro level threatens the lives of polar bears and the Inuit. It would also have an impact on the infrastructure of entire regions: if the permafrost were to melt – i.e. the permanently frozen ground beneath the tundra and forest regions of North

America and Eurasia - roads and railroad lines would become impassable. But the main problem is that the permafrost contains huge quantities of methane and carbon dioxide. If there were a thaw, these would be released into the atmosphere, driving temperatures even higher.

How do you maintain your commitment, given this state of affairs?

In spite of everything, I have great faith in the human species. I believe we have the capacity to reinvent everything. We must now use this extraordinary talent to safeguard the survival of our species.

Why do you feel a personal responsibility to be campaigning for environmental protection?

It's a kind of moral imperative for me. Where the poles are concerned, I have come to be something of an authority. Today, I have the knowledge to tell stories and scenarios about the ice - and use these to inspire others. It has become a kind of calling: I feel I have to do it. You could put it another way: Would it not be irresponsible on my part if I didn't apply all the skills I have acquired over the years to a good cause?

Is there still a chance to stop global warming or is it already much too late?

That is the fundamental question. I don't know

LIFELINES

Born in 1964, Sebastian Copeland comes from a dynasty of musicians and actors; his father is a well-known French orchestral conductor. He grew up in France and New York and, on graduating from high school, studied film in Los Angeles. Since 2007, he has devoted himself to protecting the environment. His book *Antarctica* was published in 2013, his photographs are distributed through Galerie Bernheimer in Munich.

ONLINE ADVENTURER

From film trailers to personal blog - Sebastian Copeland's website is worth a visit.



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the answer. But I'm not particularly optimistic - and nor are most researchers and scientists.

Why not?

The Earth is around 4.5 billion years old, but there has only been human life here for 175,000 years. That is nothing by comparison. Even flowers have been around for over 135 million years. Despite this, we humans think we are something special. Just because we are able to build spacecraft, computers and skyscrapers, our relationship to Earth is no different than that of a flower, a bird or a tree. To be honest, we are more destructive towards our planet than any flower, bird or tree could ever be. We are more of a virus than a blessing for our planet. The fact is, it doesn't need us and it will continue to exist without us.

How difficult is it not to despair in the face of such an outlook?

Would it change anything if I were to lead a joyless existence? Hopelessness is not what I want to feel.

So you are an optimist at heart?

I celebrate life at the end of the day, just as every one of us should. All I'm trying to do is promote a common awareness that we ought to avoid doing this at the expense of our children and grandchildren.



TIME TO REFLECT
Iceberg XVIII in northern Greenland. Nine tenths of it are hidden below the surface.