

Marcin Kania**A photographer among greenery, that is about portraying nature**

One can write about photography endlessly, always with the uncertain hope that the words will keep up with the image and all the descriptions and interpretations expressed by them will reflect the content of the analyzed view. Words and images interpenetrate, coexist. There is a view that photographs without descriptions are „incomplete and weakened”, because they are the words that broaden the fields of their interpretation (Mikuriya, 2017), for example by providing more information about the content of a given performance and its context. On the other hand, images enter the world of text as visualizations, allowing the reading of the code to be enriched with the reading of a view other than the imaginary one. In this article, an attempt will be made to discuss selected issues related to a particular type of imaging, which is nature photography. Visualizing the natural environment, the life of wild nature (sometimes completely inaccessible to humans), are an element that broadens our knowledge about the world. What's more - communing with a photocopy can (and even should) encourage you to see and feel (experience) the original, it should also preserve the appearance of places that have disappeared (or will soon disappear) from the landscape as a result of human activity. Such photography becomes not only an impulse for an aesthetic experience, but also takes on the features of a document. Thus, expansive, predatory human interference in the landscape poses new tasks for the photographer. One of them is the urgent need to document what is fleeting and defenseless. Therefore – in the words of Tomasz Kłosowski (born 1949), co-author of, inter alia, in the highly regarded album *Ptaki biebrzańskich bagien* (Kłosowscy, 1991) – a contemporary photographer should be a thinker first, and a hunter later (Kłosowski, 2020). For the thinker does not interfere in the world; he analyzes it and experiences it on many levels of cognition, and only then „hunts” for a prey, which is a successful photo. As a thinker, he knows what to „hunt” and how to present a given topic. Such a photo is sometimes a kind of a portrait of nature, because - as Roman Ingarden suggests – portraiture is said everywhere „where there is a function of reproducing specific objects, defined as unique, and where the recreation is the main function of the presented objects”. According to this thinker, a painting or photographic representation of Morskie Oko or Giewont is therefore also a portrait (Ingarden, 1966).

Let's take a look at the photographs that illustrate these considerations: (1) a red-and-yellow sunset over the Biebrza river, (2) a line of trees marked with an expressive play of light and shadows, (3) „A three-legged lonely tree has stopped on a winter walk” (Jawor, 2009), (4) The Karkonosze Mountains, the swift stream

strokes the majestic stones, and the long exposure time transforms the water into a ribbon, (5) the eagles fight for territory, their sudden movements „froze” the sudden release of the shutter, (6) again a quote, this time from Sir Arthur C. Clarke (1917–2008): „Oh my God, it’s full of stars there!” (Clarke, 2008), (7) a roe deer goes into the snowy distance... and at the end of this presentation we see (8) a meadow after a very hot day, where the light - although still invasive - slowly loses its power... Each of the above descriptions is an interpretation, only a few contain a hint as to the place where the photo was taken. Are geographic data necessary for us? Yes, if, for example, we want to follow the trail of our artists to get to know the charms of the place shown or to confront the photographic copy with the original. Then these shots will acquire the features of commemorative, popular-utility or scientific-documentary photography (Paule, 1984), in which the authentication element plays an essential, if not the most important role. Otherwise, the mere sight of the universal beauty of nature and the apparent possibility of communing with it mediated by the image, and in fact: a chance to commune with the representation or interpretation of the place obtained by the artist, is enough for us. Other aspects related to the photo, such as: location, date of the shot or exposure parameters will not be of great importance in this case.

Let us return to the photographs presented: they represent various subjects, different imaging techniques (analogue or digital image), different involvement in the issue and the degree of mastery of the photographic artistry, while all the authors mentioned are sincerely delighted with nature - the dead and the animate (i.e. the world) of plants, animals and stones), and - what is extremely important - reflection on the subtle presence of man in space which, although belonging and subject to him, should remain as long as possible in its original state, otherwise it will undergo undesirable changes, and maybe even pass away. forever. Each of the authors cited selected a fragment of the world around us, from the river of time he „took” a fraction of a second (one hundredth, one thousandth, while in the case of water imaging (4) and astrophotography (6) - from several dozen seconds to even several hours of exposure) after it is to stop this sight, share it with others and - seemingly - immortalize it. Apparently, because photography in fact does not change anything, „it is only an interpretation of this world”, atomizes it, manipulates it, sometimes distorts or modifies it in accordance with the creator’s intention or the recipients’ expectations (Sontag, 2009). However, many times it contains the truth - about the subject of the performance and about the representative itself. It is also a testimony based on a simple analogy: „I was photographed, so I existed” (Soulages, 2005). Most importantly, however (as Susan Sontag wrote about it): „photographs are an inexhaustible source of encouragement to deduce, speculate and fantasize” (Sontag, 2009), and also (or perhaps above all) to inspire others. It is thanks to this inspiration that there is a continuous relay race of generations among photographers, which forces subsequent generations to get up before dawn or wander after dusk, „wade” in a still sleepy or already falling asleep landscape and catch new (unique) frames from it. For setting up associations and photography circles, blogs, vlogs and other forms of photographic or photographic activity (one of its great promoters is the master

of landscape imaging, Marek Waśkiel). Sometimes it forces its admirers to take the risk of losing health or equipment, because remember that during photography (as in any activity performed with passion and commitment), more or less unforeseen situations can occur. For example: during a decade of work „in the field”, the person writing these words smashed one light meter and two lenses („small tele” 70-200 f/4 and „fifty” with 1.8 light), damaged and then lost his tripod, while in the darkroom he broke at least several 6 × 6 cm films. However, this did not prevent him from photographing further, and the sum of such once-sometime events will certainly contribute to the story of the „veteran”.

The first of the cited photos was taken by Wiktor Wołkow (1942–2012), one of the most prominent (next to Włodzimierz Puchalski and Paweł Pierściński) post-war landscape and nature photographers. The author of the second photo is the esteemed Henryk Rogoziński (1934–2004) - a great artist from Podlasie, whose name is the name of international cyclical competition „Such a landscape” (Tomaszuk, 2020; Tomaszuk, 2020). The next shots belong to the artist photographer (afRP) Stanisław Jawor from the Myślenice Photographic Group, Eduardo Barrento - a master of wildlife photography from Portugal, Aneta Konik (afRP) - a member of the Polish Photo Club and the Art Fokus 13 Creative Group, an artist awarded in 2018 with the medal „For merits for Polish photography”, Robert Komora - an author associated with the Bełchatów Photographic Society and Artur Ostafin - a graduate of the Krakow Academy of Photography, and now a student of the Tvůrčí Fotografie Institute in Opava. The last frame was made by Magdalena Włodarska - an amateur who is just learning the art of recording images with a digital camera and lens.

Let's look at the technique in which the presented works were created. Wiktor Wołkow immortalized the beauty of north-eastern Poland all his life using analog cameras. He even used to say that he was not interested in the rest of the world, just as he was not interested in modern forms of image recording (Berendt, 2002). Therefore, he used cameras for the so-called small (35 mm) or medium (120 mm) picture (Hasselblad, Mamia). Henryk Rogoziński did a similar thing, who additionally enriched the obtained shots with darkening treatments (the photo presented in the article belongs to the pseudo-polarization cycle). The remaining works were performed with Canon, Nikon and Sony digital cameras of various classes: from devices with full-frame sensors with dimensions of $\approx 24 \times 36$ mm and a resolution of 24 million pixels and above, to a device currently dedicated to amateurs (8), equipped with an APS-C sensor with resolution ≈ 8 Mpx. Wildlife shots required the use of specialized (and at the same time not cheap) optics with good light speed and fast and precise autofocus: telephoto lenses with a range from 300 to 600 mm and a maximum aperture of f/4 or even f/2.8 throughout the entire focal range. Because, as Michał Kość teaches - an experienced press photographer and author of excellent shots of bison from the Białowieża and Knyszyn Primeval Forests - you cannot approach wildlife with a mobile phone and a flash. Such irrational behavior causes, inter alia, stress in animals, and scaring them off is unethical behavior (Kość, 2017). It is the duty of a nature photographer to leave the surroundings intact, not to interfere with it, not to change it. The wildlife photographer humbly registers what he sees and does not try to arrange specific situations. Piotr Chara - a graduate of the Agricultural University

in Szczecin, author of the albums: *By nie tracić piękna* (2014) and *Ujarzmanie rzeki* (2008) - suggests: „In nature photography, the most important thing is to show the harmony of nature. The effect then matters less. „ Then she adds (perhaps somewhat idealistically): „Beauty is everywhere, because life is beautiful. The photographer’s duty is to reach beauty” (Chara, 2018). Let’s remember this thought, because we’ll come back to it later in this article.

For now, consider what nature photography is? Generally, we can assume that it is a method of imaging living and / or inanimate nature, most often in natural conditions (backwoods, meadows, swamps, rivers, etc.), using a number of specialized devices, which include: an analog or digital photo camera, a lens or a set of lenses (from wide-angle glasses to telephoto lenses) and a certain group of additional equipment, the presence of which depends on the level of the photographer’s advancement. Heavy tripods, camouflage nets, tents and pontoons emerge with increasing needs and challenges. Thanks to their use, breathtaking images of wild nature are created - one that a „snapper” or „passerby” has no chance to get even a step away. A photographer who builds special stands, waits hours or days for the right moment to release the shutter, invests money in equipment and skills, deserves respect. Perhaps it is thanks to his dedication and work that the next generations will learn about the customs of species that are already extinct today.

The number of topics that a photographer going out in the field can take up is huge and actually depends on his perceptiveness and perseverance. To quote the title of a well-known book by Włodzimierz Puchalski (1909–1979): photographing nature is a „bloodless hunt” (Puchalski, 1954), from which both sides of this activity emerge victorious - man and nature. Man, because he brings home and can boast of many interesting shots of plants / animals / landscapes, while nature - because he can „breathe” with relief, because no antlers or fur have hit the wall as a trophy, no butterfly has been pierced with a pin, even the flowers remained in their flowering places and did not become dried leaves stuck between the albums. Meanwhile, good nature photography can have an interesting effect. Since „global society is a visual society” (Mirzoeff, 2016), the photographic material published in the media will certainly interest many Internet users. Some of them, locked in hyper-sterile office buildings, choked with tight collars, will surely enjoy it during a break from work or download it to their computer in the form of wallpaper. Research shows that one of the most recognizable contemporary landscape photographs was the work by Charles O’Rear (born 1941) *Bliss*, used as the default wallpaper of the Windows XP operating system (*Luna* style). The shot showing the sine-shaped landscape was taken by O’Rear with a medium format Mamiya RZ67 camera in 1996 in Sonoma County, California (near road 12/121), using high-quality photographic film (js, 2014). After it was developed, he did not interfere with the picture. The fact that the digital work environment has adopted an image of analog origin as its hallmark can be (without any malice) described as a history’s giggle.

Whether we work with a camera with a digital image sensor or with a traditional analog SLR, the images captured sooner or later will be digitized and found on the web. This is the face of progress. What counts is the involvement of the photographer, persistence in the effort, consistent development of own skills, careful analysis

of the imperfections of the image / composition / color, watching the masters, reading the thematic press and portals about photography, and above all: practice, practice and more practice... a large number of trials, many exercises and a thorough understanding of the technical capabilities of your device give you a chance to obtain good and, consequently, very good results. That is why many teachers give simple advice to students of photography: first read the instruction manual that came with the camera, then act.

The world of plants is an extremely rewarding subject for the first photographic searches. Plants are patient models: they don't rush anywhere, they don't sulk, they don't remind you of the GDPR, they just exist and wait to fill your eyes with them. The leaf photographed with the f/1.8 and f/8 aperture allows the photographer to see and understand the background blur phenomenon (*bokeh*) and the ways of filling the frame with one element. The same leaf, photographed with light and then in opposition to the sun, allows this adept to find out about the phenomenon of flares, solarization or overexposure, and to break the first barrier between learning the basics and experiment (there is a break with the canonical recommendation: do not shoot against the light!). Learning what constants is important, but in every person there are layers of creative expression and imagination that does not tolerate limitations. Therefore - as Piotr Chara aptly notices - each photographer at some point passes „from the stage of a less conscious «snapper» „[...] to [the stage of] a seeker of nuances [and] small details that make the frame unique”¹.

After the first fascination with the possibility of recording the image, our „snapper” slowly advances to an amateur (meaning: admirer) and then an advanced amateur. The present world provides him with many stimuli for development and self-realization. Shops and sales stands are filled with old, new and newest photographic equipment, extensive thematic websites (e.g. Szeroki Kadr, Optyczne.pl) strive for the reader's attention on the Internet, books on all kinds of technical imaging (including an excellent series of books by Scott Kelby), and trade magazines (for example „Foto Kurier” or „Digital Camera”) are waiting in press lounges. There are also associations and more or less formal groups of enthusiasts, bringing together professionals and amateurs. The extremely valuable activity of the Association of Polish Nature Photographers deserves a separate, extensive article. The effect of twenty-five years of intense activity of this organization has become the promotion of the work of native nature photographers in the country and abroad and the acquisition of young talents. The organization of the „Visions of Nature” International Festival of Nature Photography is a particularly valuable undertaking of the Association. This year, the 14th edition of this event took place. Inspirational examples of photography can be found in magazines (such as „National Geographic”, „Vouge”) and in the advertising industry, which has mastered the art of image editing and correction. In this favorable crucible of knowledge, skills and experience, our amateur photographer has a chance to find the necessary information, inspiration and sometimes more or less constructive criticism.

1 Snapper/clicker – pol. pstrykacz – a person who is not really interested in photography and takes photos mechanically.

For the teacher who conducts classes in the subject of geography, biology and nature, photography can be an additional stimulus to scientific, educational and ... recreational activity. As Andrzej A. Mroczek, an expert on the subject, writes: „Wandering along dirt roads, paths and balks, along forest paths, on the banks of rivers or lakes, you can get tired physically, but at the same time regenerate mentally. Everyone, regardless of whether they are an artist, ambitious or modest photo amateur, finally has time only for themselves” (Mroczek, 2018). A good photo illustrating a specific issue or phenomenon will certainly broaden the cognitive horizons of students. And we are not only talking about photographing wildlife - fighting eagles or running deer - dealing with such photography requires appropriate equipment, time and a lot of experience. Snow-covered fields, long icicles on trees, sunrise or sunset over a frozen horizon, or ice floes on rivers unfortunately become an artifact of bygone times. The increasingly warmer winters are not conducive to such weather phenomena as: blizzards or snowstorms. Stanisław Jawor, the author of the picture of the snow-covered tree (3), captured not only a certain status quo of the existing landscape, but also a kind of historical truth: here used to be winters here, thanks to which the surroundings of Myślenice gained a different dimension of beauty. The artist says about his work as follows: „Photographing the landscape is extremely grateful, we are at the right time in a previously selected place, we expect previously imagined scenes, but this scenario is rarely true. Nature will rather surprise us, we will see more, we will notice something that was not there before. Such an experience awakens the creative imagination, the frame that was previously arranged in the imagination begins to expand its boundaries”².

The hour is extremely important for landscape photography. Soft light appears at the so-called golden seasons: a quarter of an hour before sunrise and a few to several minutes after sunset. Getting up before dawn is not easy. The artist photographer Aneta Konik knows this very well, whose works - made just at dawn - have received awards and distinctions at numerous competitions in Poland and around the world (Konik, 2019). Few can understand this passion, although many are eager to watch and often use works created in various, sometimes extreme weather conditions.

The photographer's personality - from a snapper to an advanced (demanding) amateur - is shaped according to the challenges taken. Over time, imaging leaves, flowers, meadows or haystacks is not enough. There is a need to capture the elusive: the secret life of wild forest animals. Robert Komora, an experienced fauna and flora observer, characterizes his activity as follows: „For me, photographing nature is not only a passion, but also a great pleasure and responsibility. It is being part of this nature and feeling symbiotic with the world around me. It is observation and union with the landscape. When I manage to record the beauty and mysteries of nature - I am happy. However, it is associated with a great responsibility not to disturb its order with its presence and not to introduce danger, confusion and destruction. It is not the photo that is most important, but the harmony. Let us remember: when we go to the forest with the camera, we are guests at the animals house”³.

2 Based on a private correspondence between M. Kania and S. Jawor, september 2020.

3 Based on a private correspondence between M. Kania and R. Komora, september 2020.

Photographing wildlife requires not only good recording equipment, persistence and skill, but also thorough preparation. They resemble the efforts of a hunter who carefully plans every trip, while on the spot carefully masking his presence, blurring tracks, changing the smell, all in order not to scare the game. Releasing the shutter of the camera triggers a kind of ambush: the unconscious animal is immortalized on a film or a digital matrix (hence the increasingly popular camera trap). The superiority of the photographer's activity over the hunter is that the essence saves what is most important: life. Nature photography is focused on life. As Eudardo Barrento judges: „For me, nature photography must respect life and truth.” These are, however, canonical values.

Our amateur photographer is maturing. He „hunted” for leaves, plants and shrubs, several times he went to the meadow at dawn, and captured the sunset from the nearest hill or window of his apartment in the „antstone”. In addition to the basic 50 mm lens (with 1.8 or 1.4 light), it currently has a 70–200 mm or 70-300 mm telephoto lens and several others (maybe even slowly discovering the charm of manual lenses). Birds on roofs and butterflies in the meadows do not have to worry - they already have their portraits, as well as most of the flowers in the nearby meadow and almost all the household members. This is no joke, this is most often the early stage of a photographer's maturation. Often, a young photography enthusiast decides to buy a macro or/and macro rings. Then the adventure begins with this kind of imaging, which - a bit fairy-tale - leads our observer into the mysterious and extraordinary world of detail. If our photographer is a teacher, thanks to macro photography, he can obtain excellent illustrative material for his students. The view of the structure of the insect's wings, the ant's abdomen enlarged to A4 or A3 format, and the structure of the flower petals will certainly become an element diversifying the lesson. The shots of insects, animals and landscapes (landscapes) can also be added to a school magazine (wall or copied) or become the basis for creating a separate display case with the current „achievements” of the photographer's keen eye. They can also be found on the school's website or its profile on a social networking site. Remember - nature is not politically involved, does not represent an idea or ideology, it is neutral and its views can become an excellent promotional material for a given educational institution. Finally, if a teacher's fascination with photography is strong enough, his passion may help in organizing a separate photographic club - in a school or community center. Many of yesterday's adepts of this type of extracurricular work are now recognized photojournalists or photographers. But remember: in order to kindle someone, you have to burn yourself! Therefore, photography, even amateur photography, must be rigorously followed, meticulous, and taken seriously and humbly.

Tomasz Kłosowski, the master of photography, quoted at the beginning of these considerations, defines it as „being with your eyes open”. Eyes wide open, attentive and inquisitive gaze really help a person in a conscious and wise life. Photography teaches how to look, it also teaches how to find dependencies and follow cause-and-effect processes. And above all: to anticipate. Finally, it teaches that „to be a thinker, not a hunter,” that is, to derive pleasure and wisdom from contemplating a given charm, and not from running after fleeting pleasures.

Sunset over the Biebrza river, shadow cast by a tree, snow-capped hills, sky-high migrations of birds, stars realizing the majesty of the Universe, deer sneaking through

the winter landscape, streams quietly murmuring in the thicket, finally: meadows and everything that lives in them (see photo 9) is just a fraction of the enormous amount of inspiration nature has for a photographer. Photograph it all? No, luckily it is impossible. It is important for the photographer not to be boring, to express a certain truth about the world, to reveal inaccessible to viewers, to leave part of the Secret to future generations of seekers and to tell a specific story. It is very important not to forget that images can be told as interestingly as words, and the following sequences of photos should develop, strengthen or suspend the narrative in order to prepare the viewer for a memorable ending⁴. Thanks to this, viewers will not only reach the finals, but may also want to see the presentation again. Grab the viewer's attention - it's a victory. Encourage you to re-read or even multiple times - it is a real success!

To sum up: photographing nature is as fascinating as it is not easy. Contemplating the landscape or freezing a swift stream of a river in motion is not the same as hours spent in special hideouts, water or mud in order to capture the life of wild nature - the one completely invisible to the eyes of an ordinary passerby. Therefore, nature photography is a field that will allow photographers interested in various topics to realize themselves. It will bring joy to the „fixer” of flowers, trees and stones, it will bring fulfillment to the insect seeker or observer of the secret life of the smallest creatures, and finally it will allow the „bloodless hunters” to prove themselves - those who, in solitude, persistently ambush the „big game”. Of course, for photographic purposes only!



Phot. 1. Wiktor Wołkow Sunset on the Biebrza river (made available by Marek Tomaszuk)

⁴ Tomasz Tomaszewski, an outstanding photographer associated with „National Geographic, teaches us to create a narrative by the images.



Phot. 2. Henryk Rogoziński, from the solarization cycle (made available by M. Tomaszuk)



Phot. 3. Stanisław Jawor, winter in Myslenice county



Phot. 4. Aneta Konik, waterfall in Karkonosze



Phot. 5. Eduardo Barrento, „Fight”.



Phot. 6. Artur Ostafin, „It's full of stars”.



Phot. 7. Robert Komora, the deer in the snow.



Phot. 8. Magdalena Włodarska – an amateur photographer, highly interested in nature photography.



Phot. 9. Marcin Kania, butterflies on a date.

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A photographer among greenery, that is about portraying nature

Abstract

The topic of the article is nature photography. This type of human creative activity is currently very popular among artists and audiences. The article discusses several important issues related to the creation of the image of nature. Photographing nature can be enjoyed by both — beginners and professional photographers.

Keywords: Photography, photo techniques, Wiktor Wołkow, Henryk Rogoziński, Stanisław Jawor, Aneta Konik, Eduardo Barrento.

Marcin Kania, PhD

Pedagogical University of Krakow, Poland
email: marcin.kania@up.krakow.pl
ORCID: 0000-0003-3551-0513

