

Interview with Edward Longmire

Going to Antarctica is a visit to another planet

By Lúcia Vinheiras Alves

Originally from London, in England, the photographer Edward Longmire worked in finance before moving to Eastern Europe in 2001. Nowadays he has been based in Prague, Czech Republic, after graduating from FAMU, the Czech National Film School.

After having traveled all over the world, and passed through countries such as India, Pakistan, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Australia, Morocco, Korea, Russia, among many others, today, the photographer claims to be «convinced of one thing: the world is small, and getting smaller. And the people are basically the same».

Over the next two months (until February 27th), Edward Longmire will present at the MUHNAC-ULisboa the photo exhibition "Antarctica Out of Balance", which opens on December 16th at 10 am. An exhibition that aims to make the majority of people aware of an ecosystem that is in rapid decline due to climate change. We spoke with the photographer who told us about his experience in Antarctica.

MUHNAC: How did your passion for photography start and how did you become a photographer?

Edward Longmire: *I had a camera since as far back as I can remember. My father was a keen photographer and I suppose the decision to have one was instinctive. The ability to record one's life, make a picture in a creative way that would bring pleasure to other people, and the pure gadgetry involved was only held back by the cost of film...for a ten year old, a roll of 35mm film was expensive ! I lost touch with it for a while, but then my passion came back with a vengeance with the advent of digital about 20 years ago....and I've never let go since.*

MUHNAC: At MUHNAC you will present an exhibition of photographs about a trip you made to Antarctica. How did this idea come about? What motivated you?

Edward Longmire: *More and more I was reading newspaper articles about global warming and the havoc it was causing on the environment. With the amount of travelling I was doing, I knew my activities had a price, especially when it came to my use of commercial aircraft. I wanted to put something back into society, and decided to develop the opportunity to present a world out of reach to most people, that was in danger of disappearing forever if we didn't take quick action. But how to get there reasonably cheaply and quickly?*

MUHNAC: How was the experience of the entire trip (how many days did it take)? What will you keep in memory forever?

Edward Longmire: *I got on an organised trip to Antarctica at the very last minute: it had always been my ambition to go there after watching Jacques Cousteau's trips to such extreme environments as a child. The fact I was now equipped with a Nikon 850 seemed almost secondary: I had a significant amount of photographic experience under my belt after attending film school in Prague some years back, and was quite familiar with working in unfamiliar terrain.*

MUHNAC: What's it like to be in Antarctica?

Edward Longmire: *Like nothing on earth. The stillness, the silence, the desolation and yet the enormity, the magnificence and the splendour of it. Truly a visit to another planet. It actually took us 2 days to get the continent itself.*

MUHNAC: As a photographer, what was your approach while photographing Antarctica? What were you looking for when taking a picture?

Edward Longmire: *I'm not a wildlife photographer, nor do I have the appropriate lenses, so I was guided towards more landscape and animal formations by default. Yet this, to me, was perfectly satisfactory because I believe I came away with something different. If I'd had just big telephoto equipment, I probably would have become lazy. I had to view each photo as a construction, not a particular aspect. The wildlife photographs do border on the postcard territory, but this was what was so extraordinary about Antarctica: the animals, despite the total desolation of the place, looked so at home and comfortable. What was it that they saw and I didn't?*

MUHNAC: What is the big message you want to get across with your exhibition?

Edward Longmire: *Let's protect our planet. It's the only one we have. And we're not doing a very good job at it at the moment.*

MUHNAC: Why did you choose MUHNAC-Lisboa to exhibit your work?

Edward Longmire: *It seemed easily the most appropriate place to reach my target audience in a city that I love and I know has many like-minded people living here, so I was delighted that MUHNAC-Lisboa agreed with my idea!*