

Of Great Wonder
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Human experience lives in the supranatural space between solid realities and phantasmic imaginings. Mind and eye vie, play, and ultimately blur as matter turns to memory, and memory affects encounters. These are the transformative moments when fantasy magics the tangible into the metaphysical.

Inka Lindergård and Niclas Holmström's sublime photographs capture these moments. As subjects both human and spectral suspend between reality and fantasy, we question what holds them there. In the following scapes, the answer lights as wonder.

We live in a highly oversaturated age. Images siphon through screens and pixilate to the point of hyper-reality. Phone glows and browser frames consume more visual space than bona fide surroundings. And while these upgrades offer a kind of ceaseless stun tactic, Lindergård and Holmström's images deal in an elemental, and arguably more powerful, kind of awe. Far away from networked alterworlds, these pictures reflect the private excitement of age-old exploration.

Like their subjects, Lindergård and Holmström are out for awe-driven adventure. As they travel the world's most visited landscapes, these peripatetic observers capture other travelers reacting to new vistas and natural phenomena. A woman gazes over the vast glacier. She is tiny against deep splits of earth and unbounded horizons. A grey tuft of hair doubles as mountain camouflage, and she melts further into the landscape. A couple lounges on a rock ledge and looks into the vast night, instead of at each other. Their skin matches their seat, and their teeshirts and shorts play chameleon with the wisps of nearby trees. Like the furtive ornithologist or the sporting arctic explorer, Lindergård and Holmström seek to preserve the perfect moment when subject and surroundings engage and harmonize. They are fascinated by that instant when travelers go still, becoming carefully placed relics of the captured experience. In this way, they are anthropologists as much as image-makers.

While similarities in process and motive can be drawn to great photographer-wanderers like Robert Frank, Joel Sternfeld, Richard Misrach, and Alec Soth, Lindergård and Holmström take a less documentary view. Where Frank and Soth map practices and places rooted in cultural, ethnic, and temporal specificities – in series like “The Americans” and “NIAGRA” – Lindergård and Holmström convey experiences where time, race, and nationality are non-existent, or at least less important. Misrach captures a natural world that is majestic and almighty, but one that is tormented by society. In lieu of mining the raw realities of contemporary living and its effect on our surroundings, Lindergård and Holmström's animus is the sustained, soul-stirring relationship between humans and nature. It is a studied, romantic view where the camera acts as a curious set of binoculars or a quixotic kaleidoscope.

The expedition photographer Herbert G. Ponting's accounts of arctic travels recall the awestruck immersion evoked by Lindergård and Holmström's tourists-cum-adventurers. On a 1910 voyage alongside the infamous Captain Robert Falcon Scott, Ponting reacts to a mighty glacier:

Then I paused, for the prospect that opened out was of arresting grandeur. [...] An eerie feeling crept over me in the presence of this majesty of silence: a feeling of exhilaration and awe, as I thought of my remoteness from that great pulsating throng of life so many thousands of miles away. The desire to break the magic spell was irresistible, so I shouted a loud 'Coo-ee!' To my astonishment the precipice immediately responded, and shouted back Coo-ee! It was thus I discovered one of the finest echoes I have heard in any land.

It is this kind of wonderment that powers—and is gorgeously rendered—in the following images. A surprise of great beauty; an exhilarating, fearful moment; rapt awe; and a happy conversation between a human and nature is revealed in sweeping tableaux, lush color fields, and small, but undeniably engaged individuals, couples, and groups. Whether deeply involved in the

conversation, or expectant that it will happen, the subjects bare a desire for this connection.

Patterns in the actions and aesthetics of Lindergård and Holmström's wayfarers reinforce these moments of fundamental rapport. Subconsciously blending with their new environments, many wear the colors that surround them. Others wander off alone, freezing in the face of a handsome view or inviting curiosity. Some gather together, forming constellations that map topographies. These habits, set in big landscapes with radiant color schemes, iconize the subjects as testaments to primal bonds.

Lindergård and Holmström give us more than observation of experience – they seem to divulge what, and how, their subjects see. Those images without people might embody individual impressions – micro views of realities extended and accentuated. A deep-red rock oozes fluorescent sherbet, or the remnant goo of melted sun. Icy pink stalactites stand guard at the entrance of a Yeti's playfort, or double as the maw of some ancient sea monster. As wonder overcomes time and place, Lindergård and Holmström invoke the abiding mysticism inspired by human-nature relationships.

John Ruskin, a critic-philosopher known for his deep trust in nature's ability to arouse creativity, would have been excited by Lindergård and Holmström's images. As our photographers zoom in and out of human experiences, Ruskin's 1856 conjuring of an aspirational stone feels wonderfully present: "For a stone, when it is examined, will be found a mountain in miniature." Through Lindergård and Holmström's lens, stones become wild, sensory, intimate curiosities – instances of wonderment made from wandering.