

A close-up photograph of an elephant's head, focusing on its eye. The elephant's skin is a mottled grey-brown with deep wrinkles. The eye is a striking, vibrant purple with a bright orange-yellow iris. The elephant's trunk is visible on the left side of the frame.

ELEPHANTS IN TRUE COLORS

LIFE SIZE MEMORIES



R2 FILMS
presents

LIFE SIZE MEMORIES

ELEPHANTS IN TRUE COLORS

a film by
Klaus REISINGER and Frederique LENGAIGNE

Austria - 2012 - 118 mn - DCP - English - German - French



www.lifesizememories.com

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SYNOPSIS

Too often, we view wild animals as generic representatives of their species. Life Size Memories attempts to change all that, discovering individual beings that stand out on their own terms. The film follows as two experienced war photojournalists train their lenses on captive elephants across Southeast Asia to create life-sized photographic portraits of these individuals. They investigate in four different countries to gather elements of their biographies and finally expose the Elephants' Memories.



DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

We were war photographers, witnesses of an endless succession of conflicts, civil wars, disasters and misery. Every photographer is attracted to beauty and for us, came a time when we could only find beauty in nature. We had first encountered the elephants in Burma and, in 1999, we had made our first documentary film about timber elephants.

What is it about elephants that brings so much fascination? Elephants are a myth and a child's dream at the same time.

Details of the animals' lives were kept in little books by the handlers: biographies of elephants dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. With a lifespan of more or less seventy years, elephants are very close to humans. Childhood, puberty, maturity, we share the same time schedule. The bare skin

on their faces seems to reveal their moods and their temperaments.

We lived months with the elephants and it was a privilege. Soon we were able to recognize their features and their characters. Each one had a different face. From mere representatives of their species, we came to consider them as individuals...then persons.

How could we share these emotions with others? By giving them the chance of the experience...

For that, we needed high-resolution negatives to make one-to-one scale prints so people could stand at the foot of a life-sized elephant portrait and see each tiny hair, each pore of the skin and each wrinkle without artifact.

If people could differentiate animals one from the other, they would eventually acknowledge them as individuals and, at last, feel empathy.

*a reference...*At the beginning of the 20th century, Edward S. Curtis, an American photographer traveled across the United States to produce a series of portraits of Native American Indians. Curtis' goal was not just to photograph, but to document, as much Indian traditional life as possible before it disappeared. The magic portraits are the only testimony of the Indians' past grandeur. It was with Curtis' photographs in mind that we set out on our journey through South-East Asia. Our camera, although modern, resembles the wooden cameras that were created in the 1880s. It uses film holder plates and the photographer covers his head with a black cloth while framing the subject. The depth of field is very narrow and the subject cannot move...*impossible to do with elephants?*

elephants' past

Our quest began at the source, in Burma, where domesticated elephants still live and work in the forests the way they have been doing for centuries.

we became the memories of the elephants...

Considering the travel restrictions inside the country, we were extremely lucky to be allowed back to the location of our first documentary. We met again the elephants we had known ten years earlier. Most of them were still alive and working and we could find out what had happened to individuals in this lapse of time. We filmed a ten-year-old youngster whose birth we had witnessed in 1999 and his little brother who was born in the meantime. It was a unique opportunity to show true flashbacks in the film instead of mere reconstitutions.

Nan Cho, a female, posed in front of the camera. There was a baby at her side and they stood in front of a river. She was born in 1947. At the end of the photo shoot, they turned around and walked away.

We witnessed the capture of wild elephants from the forest and the unbearably violent training of young calves. In both events, we found extreme human brutality but also that the ancient sophisticated techniques used by the catchers or the trainers are in themselves an acknowledgment of the intelligence of their victims.

*it was like a war zone...*Burmese elephant handlers say that the purpose of training is to break the spirit of the animal. The sentence itself sounds like recognition of their soul.

Burma is at a turning point in its history and soon the world the elephants have known will be changing dramatically. Like in the rest of South-East Asia, logging will be forbidden eventually and captive elephants will face an uncertain future. We traveled to three other countries - Thailand, India and Sri Lanka - to find out how different cultures influence the fate of the animals and their future.

From the past in Burma to the future in Thailand...like in a time machine...

Thailand has put its national emblem in stables. Most Thai elephants are born in captivity and the jungle disappeared from their memories long ago. Here, people believe that elephants will disappear from the wild and that their only chance of survival lies in captivity. Thailand breeds elephants with all the contradictions inherent to a modern human society: profit and efficiency, boredom and relative safety. However, tourism together with progress brought a new element to the elephants' lives: compassion and this new empathy shed light on the fates of individuals.





Missing the forest...

We choose to visit Kerala at the time of the biggest elephant festival of all, the Thrissur Pooram where bulls stand like statues for hours in the middle of a crowd of hundreds of thousands of screaming men.

Another type of violence comes from the prospect of danger.

Kerala collects male elephants as status symbols: the bigger, the more dangerous animals potentially are, the more respected and powerful will be their owners,

back to the wild to find the original...

Sri Lanka seems to propose another option: the abolition of slavery pure and simple; the end of domestication. There are a few remaining captive elephants in the country and soon they will be counted on the fingers of one hand. Elephants are wild animals and should be in national parks.

People do not accept elephants in chains anymore, thinking that one day we will wonder how we could possibly inflict such predicaments to elephants. Sri Lanka is a small island and conflicts with farmers are an ongoing battle.

Is there potentially enough space left to send the elephants back to the forest?

... the future is uncertain.

The key is the forest.

"As long as there will be the forest, the elephants will be there."

We gathered a collection of life size portraits...

instant memories of 200 elephants ...

a herd of individual beings who can speak for themselves.



The way that humans treat animals speaks as much to our cultural values as it does to the characteristics of the animals themselves. In the case of our treatment of elephants, filmmakers Klaus Reisinger and Frédérique Lengaïne believe the animals can speak for themselves.

That's the guiding philosophy behind "Life Size Memories. Shot and edited over the course of four years, "Life Size Memories" explores the lives of individual captive elephants in Burma, Thailand, India and Sri Lanka.

But unlike most documentarians, Reisinger and Lengaïne approached the project with the aim of telling the story of the elephants with as few human words as possible.

"We didn't want talking people, because the elephant is the main character, so we wanted the elephant to do most of the "talking". Understand them, translate it into a sequence that's told in images but nevertheless has impact emotionally and intellectually - that's the challenge we set out to achieve."

Reisinger an Austrian and his French filmmaking partner, Frédérique Lengaïne, are certainly accustomed to letting images speak for themselves. Both spent years as war-zone news photographers, shooting human chaos from Russia to Haiti to Rwanda. But back in 1996, the two began a filmmaking project, documenting the complex situation faced by wild elephants in Burma, which were coming into increased conflict with farmers. The resulting film, "Elephant Power," was picked up and distributed by National Geographic.

Since then, the two have documented the lives of seafaring nomads off the coast of Burma, explored the trade in rare maral deer

velvet in Siberia and Korea, and continued their work as photojournalists.

In 2006, the pair decided to revisit the elephants they had documented a decade ago - this time with a somewhat different goal.

"We started taking life-sized portraits of elephants with a large-format camera, to be printed at exactly one-to-one scale. So we would take a photograph of the animal, and then measure it so that it could be printed exactly to size."

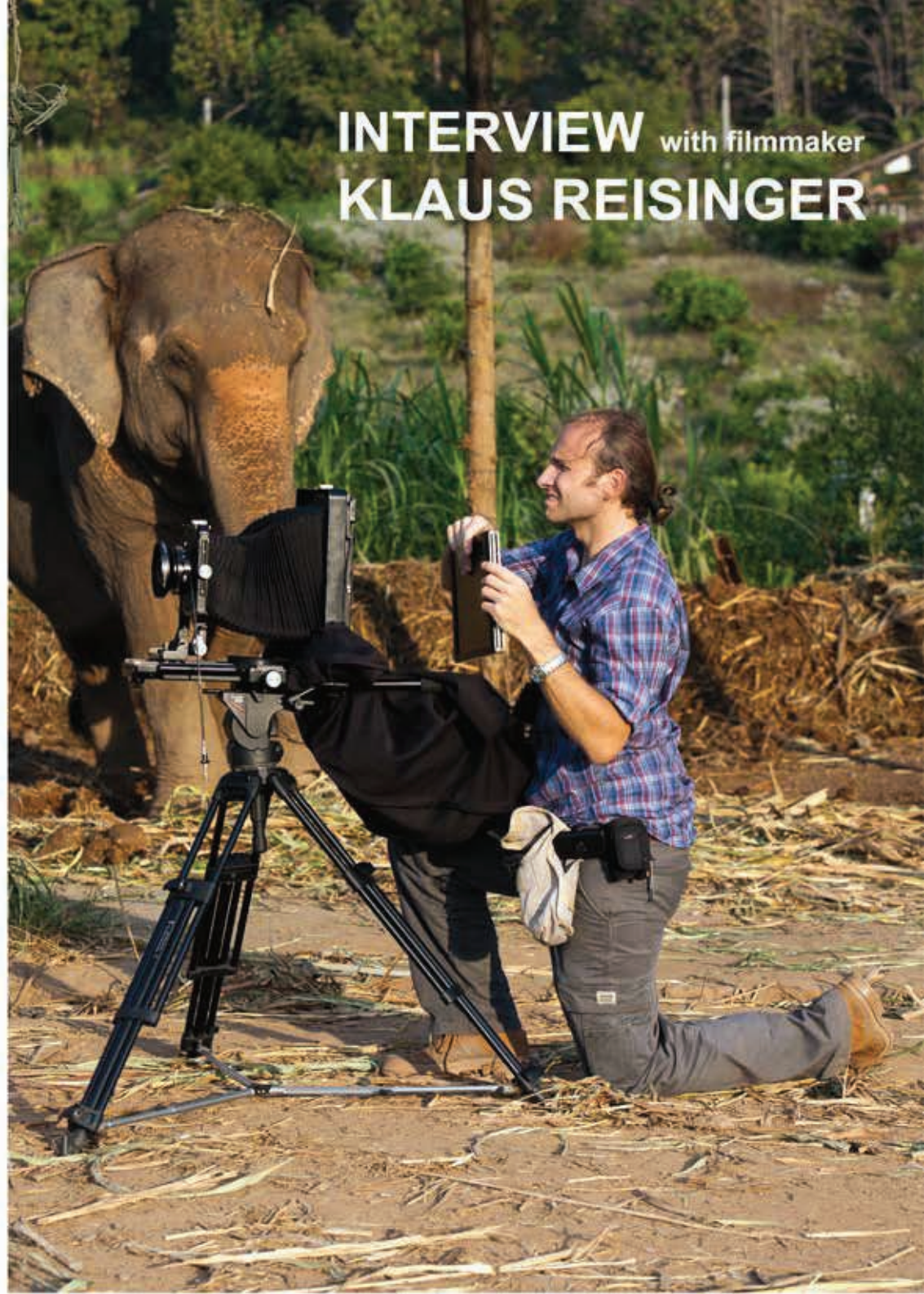
"Then, to go along with that, we also wanted to tell their individual biography of each elephant we photographed - what was his life story, what's his personality. So we interviewed people and got information for that as we went along photographing these elephants."

Amid that project, the two began filming as well, but this time with a more open-ended approach to their narrative.

"There's a narrative, but no spoken narrative," noting that the film attempts to depict not only the conditions but also the pace of life for its subjects. "The point of the film is really to show that every animal - and we use elephants, but this is true for any animal - has a past, a biography, a history. Those are the elements that create an empathy, which is the foundation of conservation and respect."

"We hope that the people should walk out and question their perceptions that they inherit, their previous prejudices. This is a film that doesn't answer any questions; it only asks questions and encourages people to think. This is not about learning or explaining; it's about trying to think differently."

INTERVIEW with filmmaker KLAUS REISINGER





TECHNISCHE FAKTEN

Duration: 120 min.
HD originated
Format: DCP
Sound: 5.1 surround
Languages:
English / German / French

with the support of the
Austrian Film Institute
and
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Abkommen



written, directed and produced: Klaus Reisinger and Frédérique Lengaigne
cinematographer: Klaus Reisinger
sound engineer: Frédérique Lengaigne
original music: Helmut Hödl
editor: Klaus Reisinger
sound editor: Frédérique Lengaigne
additional camera: Frédérique Lengaigne
additional camera Myanmar: U Khin Maung Gyi
camera Washington: Damien Dorsaz and Tiffany Cherix
large format photographer: Klaus Reisinger
still photographer: Frédérique Lengaigne
Production coordinator Myanmar: U Khin Maung Gyi
Produktion coordinator India: Viju Kaimal
Produktion coordinator Sri Lanka: Sunel Rambukpotha
Voice Over: Frédérique Lengaigne

Musicians

cello: Asja Valcic, trumpet: Lorenz Raab, flute: Birgit Ramsi
bass clarinet: Wolfgang Kornberger, clarinet: Helmut Hödl
piano: Marie Vigilante, violin: Gerti Haufmann
violin: Yoo Huiseung, viola: Cynthia Liao, cello: Zita Varga.

Graphic design: Frédérique Lengaigne
colorgrading & Online: Klaus Reisinger
technical consultant: Herbert Fischer
archival footage: COMPASS Films, National Geographic, Digital Motion Archives
post-produktion: COMPASS FILMS
music recording Vienna: Wolfgang Reithofer
voice recording Paris: Django Studio
sound studio: Tonwerk München
5.1 sound master: Eckart Goebel
sound mastering: Arri Studios München
photographic laboratories: Foto Leutner Vienna, Foto Fayer Vienna
film laboratories: Listo Video Vienna
production: R2 FILMS
in association with: Austrian Film Institute
Compass Films
ORF Film/Fernseh-Abkommen
ZDF Enterprises/ARTE
National Geographic Television Intl.
distribution Austria: FILMLADEN
International distribution: COMPASS FILMS



KLAUS REISINGER

Origin: Vienna, Austria, 1971
BIO: Press Photographer since age 15. Works for Reuters, Black Star, US News & World Report. Covers conflicts in former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Haiti... World Trade Center 9/11 N.Y. Founds Compass Films and produces four wildlife documentaries for National Geographic in Burma and Russia.
Media: photography and film.
Themes: gray areas, animals, men & nature, flying.
Influence: Film Salvador, Light and Shadow.
Facts: POY Excellence - Rwanda, ICP-Young Photog. Award, World Press Masterclass. Bester Film: Montana Cine, IWFF, FICA, Finalist Jackson Hole, Scoop WTC 9/11.

FREDERIQUE LENGAINNE

Origin: Paris, France, 1953
BIO: Graphic Arts studies in Paris. Press photographer between 1985 and 1996 based in Paris and Moscow. Turned to film making and founded Compass Films with associate Klaus Reisinger. LIFE SIZE MEMORIES is the fifth documentary they produce and realize together.
Media: photography, sound, video, graphic design.
Themes: nature, animals.
Influence: Romain Gary "The Roots of Heaven", .
Photographer Don McCullin: "I am tired of saying to myself: I didn't kill that man on that photograph, I didn't starve that child. That's why I want to photograph landscapes and flowers. I am sentencing myself to peace."

HELMUT HÖDL composer

Origin: Oberwart, Austria, 1969
BIO: Since 1993 first clarinetist of the Vienna Volksoper Orchestra. Since 1996, composer for Vienna Clarinet Connection & other chamber music ensembles and orchestras: Symphonic Orchestra Vorarlberg, Symphonic Winds, Jeunesse Orchestra, Pannonian Wind Orchestra. Compositions presented at major festivals in Europe and Asia.
Instrument: clarinet, composer for any instrumentation.
Influence: classical, jazz, world, minimal music, avant-garde.
Facts: Artistic director of ClariArte Festival, chairman of Symphonic Orchestra Volksoper Wien, founding member of Vienna Clarinet Connection.
Online: www.hoedl-music.com

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2012** **LIFE SIZE MEMORIES**
GRAND PRIX - NATURVISION Festival Ludwigsburg Germany
Best of Category: Animal/Human issues Montana Cine USA
Finalist IWFF - International Wildlife Film Festival USA
Washington DC Environmental Film Festival USA
Tales of Planet Earth USA
- 2006** **RED VELVET**
Broadcast by ARTE
Best Independent Film Montana Cine USA
Best Independent Film IWFF - International Wildlife Film Festival USA
Finalist Jackson Hole Film Festival USA
Special Jury Prize FICA Brazil
- 2004** **BURMA'S FORBIDDEN ISLANDS**
for National Geographic
Best Film Montana Cine USA
Best Film Cine Golden Eagle USA
- 2000** **ELEPHANT POWER**
for National Geographic
Best Educational Film IWFF - International Wildlife Film Festival USA
- 1995** **THE VILLAGE OF COOKS**

