



Sebastião Salgado, Chinstrap Penguins on an Iceberg, between Zavodovski and Visokoi Islands, South Sandwich Islands, 2009, gelatin silver print, 36 x 50 inches/91.4 x 127 cm ©Sebastião Salgado/Amazonas Images



Sebastião Salgado, Church Gate Station, Western Railroad Line, Bombay India, 1995, gelatin silver print, 48 x 70 inches/121.9 x 177.8 cm © Sebastião Salgado/Amazonas Images



Sebastião Salgado, Worker Resting, Oil Wells Firefighters, Greater Burhan, Kuwait, 1991, gelatin silver print, 24 x 20 inches/60 x 50 cm © Sebastião Salgado/Amazonas Images

In interviews you've mentioned French philosopher Roland Barthes's idea of photography as a collective memory. Do you feel that nowadays with a constant stream of photographs on applications such as Instagram that it is harder for an image to stand out and attach itself to this collective memory?

It's important to distinguish "images" from "photographs". The advent of digital technology has created a new language of images – more immediate but less memorable, especially when shared on social media. When it comes to important photojournalistic images not getting seen, that problem has always existed. So many stories even before the advent of digital were never published and just sat in archives, forgotten and not performing their duty to inform. Many stories I worked on in France in the 1970s never got published and it's only now, that I am regarded as a photographer with a stronger voice, that finally these photographs can be seen.

Has the role of the photographer changed?

In the past, for example, I would get sent from Paris to places like Bangladesh for a whole month with a proper budget. Everything

now relies on the skills of fast working freelancers with a lot less security. I'd say that photographers in that sense are now probably better as they have to get the story done on much tighter schedules and budgets.

Do you feel that there is a greater sense of urgency now on certain issues, for instance migration?

Today's issue of migration is directly confronting our "protected societies", so it's more in the media limelight, but the

sense of urgency has always been the same – I worked on Migrations (an 8-year project completed in 1999 on migration worldwide). Even then, there were millions of people on the roads in Africa and Asia, but for the most part their destination was not Europe.

I'd like to talk about your "Instituto Terra." The website, in reference to your planting of 2.5 million trees in order to rebuild the eco-system carries the quote "Do you know what is possible in 15 years?" What is your message to a younger generation for which everything happens so fast?

Everything now is faster and faster. Nobody wants to wait, but for things to get better, for us to nurture our environment, we need to find the ability to slow down. We need to take time to consider the importance of issues, including issues that are not right in front of our eyes, and see that they are in fact hugely important, and need our dedication.

"It's important to distinguish 'images' from 'photographs'."



Eyes wide open

Words & photography: Cedric Arnold

Legendary photojournalist Sebastião Salgado talks life and photography while in Bangkok for the opening of his retrospective "The World Through His Eyes" exhibition recently held at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre.

You came to photography while working as an economist. What made you want to change fields?

In 1971, my wife was studying architecture in Paris and she needed a camera for her studies. We bought a Contax camera, and the first photograph I ever took was of her sitting at a window in the Alps, where we would go on walks out in

the wonderful countryside. I found it magical to be able to freeze these moments in time. We had a student room in Paris, and I set up a small lab with a photojournalist friend who taught me how to print.

It was my wife's camera but I used it the most. Every time I returned from missions – where I worked on projects including crop

diversification in coffee growing areas – I realised I took a lot more pleasure with photography than economic reports. Within just over a year of moving to London for my economist job, I made the decision to go back to Paris and start my career as a photographer.