



Ethereal Dune

TOO CLOSE *FOR* COMFORT

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Images: David Yarrow courtesy of The Cat Street Gallery

Photographer David Yarrow speaks up about sacrificing comfort for content, the serenity he finds amongst savage wildlife and remote tribes, blissfully ignorant to the madness of modern society.



Easter Sunday

In a world where infinite content and information are available at the click of a button, David Yarrow is inspired by a desire to prove that the world still offers a wealth of mystery, taking it upon himself to uncover the untouched, the unseen and the unknown.

“More pictures are taken in a week by you and I and people who have mobile phones than in the whole history of film photography – I think that’s worth thinking about. One repercussion of that is that we’re so spoiled with content that we treat the familiar with a bit of contempt,” says Yarrow, who spends months on end meticulously researching and planning journeys to the world’s most inhospitable places and unforgiving terrain. “I think it’s important to take photographs of things people haven’t seen before.”

In his recently published, absurdly large coffee table book, ‘Encounter’, Yarrow showcases 85 of his most powerful images taken over the last 25 years, ranging from wild horses in the Camargue to snow-covered monkeys in Japan, the parched plains of Amboseli to the Inuits of Igloodik and beyond – “no fillers,” he promises.



The Jungle Book Stories



Precious



Family



The Puzzle

“I purposely made the book too big to put on a shelf, which is a bit selfish of me, but unless you’re writing about wizards or bondage, there’s no money in books,” says Yarrow. “I think pictures alone still aren’t strong enough; you need to have contextual narrative and address the question of how some of them were taken and the preparation involved...”

On his adventures to the world’s final frontiers, Yarrow brings with him little more than his photography equipment, a local guide whose expertise is in man-beast etiquette, a cook and, despite a near-fatal plane crash in Africa and a head-to-head encounter with a grizzly bear in Alaska - “it made a great picture though,” - he brings with him a necessary ‘whatever it takes’ mentality.

One of Yarrow’s most iconic photographs is the aptly titled ‘Jaws’, a remarkable predatory portrait of 16-foot Great White shark leaping out of the waters of False Bay in South Africa to catch a seal in mid-air. “If you look at the eyes of both the

shark and the seal, the seal is in fear, absolute fear. And you can see it. It’s almost human,” says Yarrow.

A perfect example of the payoff of patience and persistence, ‘Jaws’ took over 30 hours of sitting and waiting and nine boat trips to achieve, becoming the most published two seconds of Yarrow’s 25 year career as a photographer.

One of the most logistically challenging and physically exhausting expeditions for the acclaimed photographer was to the village of Kibish in Omo National Park in Ethiopia “an anthropologist’s El Dorado” says Yarrow, who spent time there photographing and understanding the lifestyle of the Suri, Africa’s least accessible tribe.

Today, it’s almost surreal to imagine a civilization like the Suri, who have little to no concept of money or material wealth - but to call them uncivilized is hugely incorrect given that the definition of the word is “a place or person not socially, culturally or

morally advanced”. In his introduction to the Suri tribe in ‘Encounters’, Yarrow writes: “The Suri also clearly find the few westerners whom they encounter to be just as fascinating as we find them, and yet we feel no sense of patronization. The tribe has a dignity and grace that to seasoned minds elicit far more visceral emotions than simply their obvious exoticism. There is no sense of cultural or materialistic inferiority on their behalf - indeed quite the opposite. To borrow from the Roman court philosopher Seneca, it is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, who is poor. It is playfully hypothetical, but should the tribal leaders ever spend time in a feral welfare state-dependent community in the UK, they would wonder when the pride was lost and question the ongoing sense of entitlement. Equally, if they explored the life of a stay-at-home, rich Chelsea housewife, they would certainly question the sense of materialism and lack of personal application.”

“There is such intense consumerism in big cities, where a body of people care massively about a new Prada handbag, and I don’t think it’s anything you should

be particularly proud of,” Yarrow muses when I ask what he takes from spending time in a community so far removed from the modern world. “In the Suri community, the values are family and the weakest always gets support. There’s a real collective sense of defiance against hostile terrain, and a happiness that is born of simplicity and a laughter that has nothing to do with what you have materialistically.”

“It does, however, make you appreciate time at The Mandarin Spa that much more,” he adds with a wry smile.

Hey, we’re only human.