

Documenting the Problem Is Not Enough — We Must Shift Attention toward Solutions.

An Exclusive Artistic Interview with

Prince Reza Pahlavi



Perhaps the political issues surrounding **Prince Reza Pahlavi** and his activities in that sphere have been so prominent that little space has been left to recognize and introduce another dimension of his identity—as an artist. Yet photography has, for many years, been an inseparable part of his life and personal preoccupations.

Born in Tehran on **October 31, 1960**, Reza Pahlavi developed a serious interest in the art of photography during his teenage years—an interest that, from the outset, was closely aligned with nature photography. Over time, this fascination not only endured but gradually evolved into one of his principal modes of personal expression.

In recent years, he has shared a body of his photographic work, as well as occasional short films focusing on marine environments and the ecosystems of seas and oceans, through social media platforms created specifically for this purpose. These works reflect a contemplative, conscientious approach to nature and the surrounding world.

In a comprehensive conversation, **Ansel Magazine** explores this lesser-known dimension of Prince Reza Pahlavi’s creative practice—an interview you are invited to read in the pages that follow.

How did your engagement with photography begin, and how did it, over time, become an integral part of your life and the way you perceive the world? What qualities inherent to photography led it to become your primary mode of expression among the various artistic disciplines?

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

I was around twelve or thirteen years old when I began to engage with photography in a much more serious way. At that time, professional cameras were relatively scarce and largely confined to the hands of professional photographers. With the introduction of 35mm film cameras such as the **Canon F-1**, a new photographic format became widely accessible. Compared to the cameras then in use—such as Hasselblad systems, which employed 6×6 medium-format film—this format introduced a rectangular frame that, from my perspective, offered far more compelling possibilities for composition and visual framing.

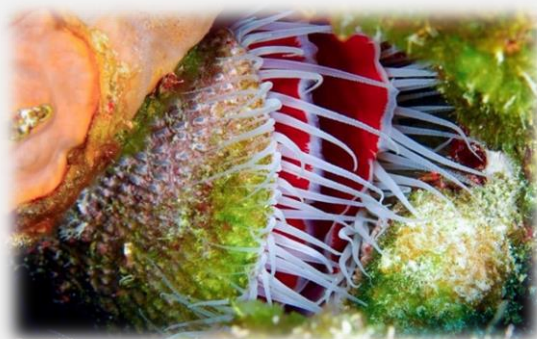
I began my journey in photography with this 35mm Canon camera. I was particularly drawn to it because of the accessibility and ease with which its lenses could be changed. Prior to that, I had also taken photographs with other cameras, such as the small and widely available Kodak models of the time. Many of your readers may never have encountered—or may no longer remember—such cameras. Back then, Instamatic and Polaroid cameras were also common, each with its own distinct relationship to the immediacy of image development.

Nevertheless, acquiring a Canon F-1 at the age of thirteen marked the true beginning of my more serious engagement with photography.

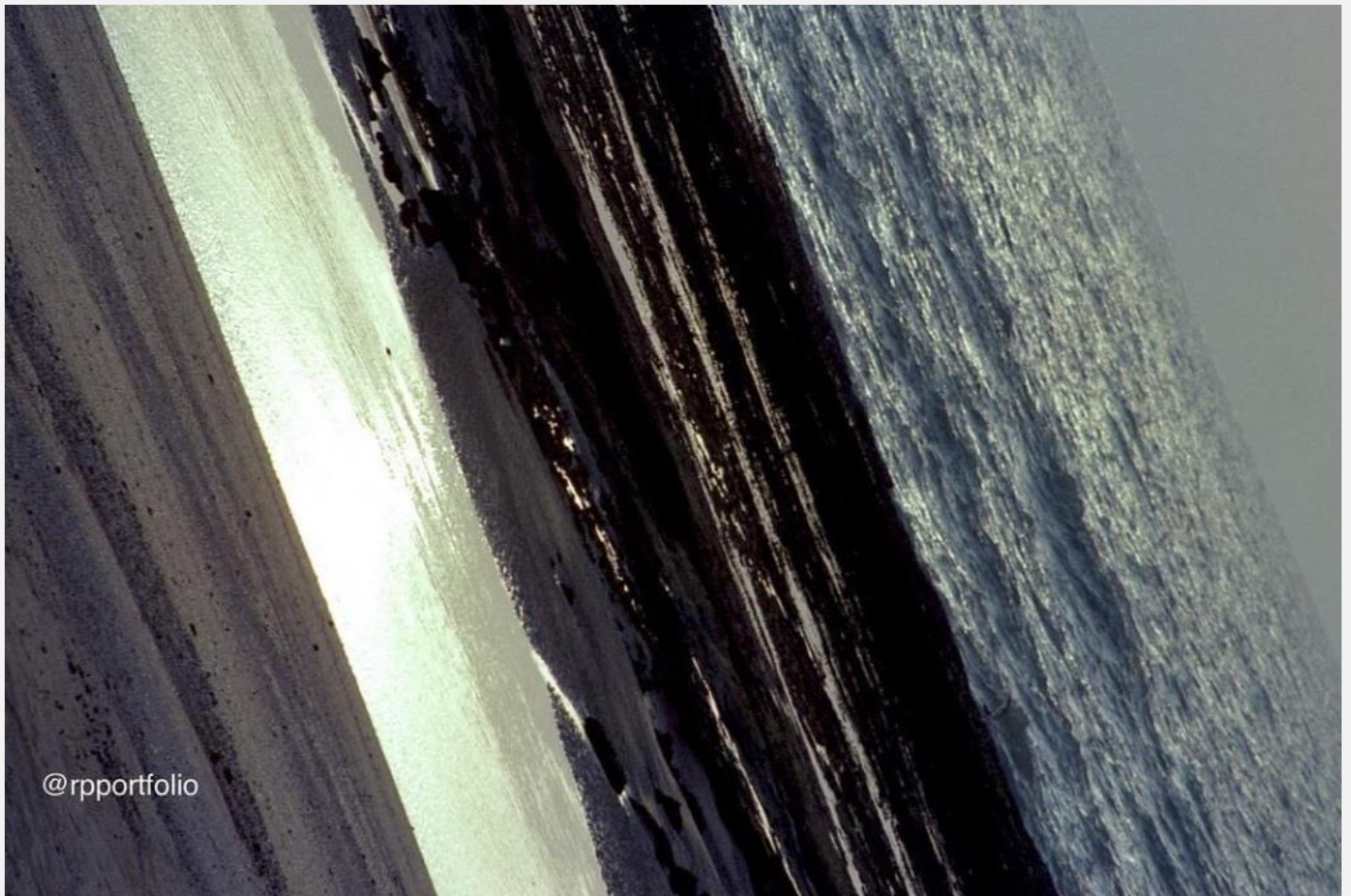
From the very beginning, my primary subject in photography was nature, rather than architecture or human figures. This was rooted in a longstanding connection to the natural world—an interest that began early on and continues to this day. On one hand, there was my deep affection for nature; on the other, there was photography's unique ability to preserve a fleeting moment within a landscape or natural subject, transforming it into a lasting memory. Together, these qualities made photography more compelling to me than other artistic disciplines.

Over time, I gradually became drawn to macro photography, as I found the close-range focus on the finer details of a subject particularly compelling. In essence, macro photography allows us to enter a visual world of details that remain invisible from a greater distance, and it is precisely this quality that makes it so captivating. If you look at my underwater photographs, this approach becomes especially apparent.

Overall, I should note that from an early age I learned photography largely through experience, in a self-taught and exploratory manner. Although the school I attended did offer limited photography courses, these were primarily concerned with technical aspects and mechanical processes rather than the artistic or theoretical dimensions of the medium. Over time, I developed a distinct approach to composition and framing—one that might be described as a personal visual style, or what photographers often refer to as an artistic “signature.”



Rough Fileclam (*Lima scabra*), Nassau, Bahamas, 2016



Prince Reza Pahlavi:

In this approach to composition, I deliberately avoid strict vertical and horizontal axes, instead seeking more diagonal lines through which to frame my images.



Prince Reza Pahlavi filming with his Super 8 camera at the ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of His Majesty King Baudouin of Belgium, Brussels, 1976.

It is often assumed that an engagement with the arts can play a role in tempering the positions and outlook of a political figure; however, there are numerous examples that challenge this assumption. One such case is George W. Bush, who pursued painting alongside his political career, or, in a far more extreme and exceptional instance, Adolf Hitler.

This raises the question: in your view, can a meaningful relationship truly be established between a politician's interest in art and their ethical or humanistic outlook?



Prince Reza Pahlavi:

Without limiting this discussion to politicians alone, I would like to affirm that individuals who are artists, or who have a genuine engagement with the arts, generally possess a more delicate, calmer, and gentler temperament. This is, in my view, a reality. It can hardly be otherwise. When one experiences the emotions inherent in the act of artistic creation—and seeks to transmit those feelings into the work and share them with others—it becomes clear that such emotional, affective, and humane sensibilities are fundamentally at odds with harsh or radical positions.

The example you mentioned—someone like Hitler—falls into the category of rare and exceptional cases. By contrast, history also offers other figures, such as Emperor Hirohito of Japan or Puyi, the last emperor of China, who showed a far greater interest in science and the natural world than in politics itself.

When we turn to history—particularly in the context of photography—it is, by necessity, modern history that concerns us, since photography only became a widely accessible art form in the early twentieth century, when the public display of photographs began to take on a broader presence. Alongside this, politics constitutes a separate sphere altogether. One may be a fully professional politician, or simply exist within the political realm without having chosen it as a vocation—something that applies to me as well. It was my circumstances that brought me into politics, rather than a deliberate professional choice.

Therefore, if I were to describe myself as someone living in the contemporary world—engaged in photography while also present in the political sphere—I would say that my artistic perspective is shaped by a deeply emotional, humane, and compassionate outlook, one that is also informed by environmental sensitivity. I have always sought to convey this perspective through my photographs, and it is something I regard as essential.

In truth, these environmental concerns—and the conditions facing the natural world globally, and particularly in Iran—are of greater importance to me than politics itself. This concern is not rooted solely in a personal affection for nature, but also in broader considerations. For instance, if Iran's future development is to rely in part on tourism as a significant economic resource, then the drying of rivers such as the Zayandeh Rud, the destruction of Lake Urmia, and the many other environmental challenges facing the country will ultimately erase Iran's natural attractions. In such circumstances, there would be little left to sustain tourism or draw visitors. It is in this way that I connect my engagement with nature and the art of photography to the political world in which I find myself.



Prince Reza Pahlavi:

I have been practicing photography for many years, but prior to the emergence of social media, there was no real possibility for broadly sharing my work. With the advent of these platforms, I decided to create a dedicated space where those who wished to see my photographs—or, for instance, images taken during my travels—could do so. The intention was simply to provide an environment in which these works could be shared.

In fact, the experience proved to be a very positive one. These platforms gradually became a space for dialogue, allowing for artistic exchange and conversation between myself and the viewers of my photographs. From this perspective, the development is undeniably beneficial. There were artists in the past—Picasso being an obvious example—who created their work in relative isolation, with little immediate opportunity to receive feedback or engage directly with their audience. Today, however, the ability to share one's work and then enter into a direct exchange with viewers represents a truly unique and valuable opportunity.

When a viewer writes to you, offers an opinion, or asks a question—and you are able to respond—this creates a dynamic that simply did not exist before. It has introduced an entirely different set of conditions. This world is fundamentally distinct from the realm of politics, which operates according to its own assumptions, frameworks, and debates. These are, in essence, two separate worlds.

I often illustrate this distinction with a simple metaphor: a railway track composed of two parallel rails. For a train to move forward, both rails are essential, yet they remain separate, running alongside one another at a fixed distance, each fulfilling its own function independently.

Ansel Magazine: As you noted, politics and art occupy two distinct realms. In photography, however, there is a well-established notion that one can integrate professional expertise or lived experience from another field into photographic practice, and through this synthesis arrive at a distinctive visual language or personal signature. One notable example is Kadir van Lohuizen, who for many years has pursued projects addressing the consequences of climate change, seeking to draw the attention of policymakers to the future of the planet and to warn of outcomes such as forced migration from regions at risk of environmental collapse.



Niseko Region, Hokkaido, Japan, 2017

Given your interest in nature, your photographic practice, and your presence in the political sphere, do you see the possibility for these three dimensions to converge in your work in a meaningful way?

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

In the realm of art, one is essentially confronted with two fundamentally different approaches. At times, the emphasis lies on aesthetics. For example, the chosen subject may be a tree leaf or a fish underwater, and the aim is simply to capture and reveal the beauty inherent in that subject. At other times, the transmission of a message becomes the foundation of the artistic work—a message that may carry human, social, economic, or even political dimensions. In such cases, access to the relevant subjects is essential.

If, for instance, I had the opportunity to photograph the water crisis and the consequences of drought in Iran, the phenomenon of soil hardening in Sistan and Baluchestan could serve as a powerful subject. This condition—caused by the depletion of groundwater—is irreversible, and as a result we are witnessing the advance of sand and dunes toward cities and villages. In such situations, attention must be directed toward solutions, even if, as you mentioned earlier, forced migration may also become unavoidable.

From a global perspective, one might also consider phenomena such as the melting of polar ice caps in the Arctic and their far-reaching consequences. In these cases, the message conveyed through photography extends well beyond the purely aesthetic dimension of the image. Ultimately, all of this depends on whether the necessary conditions are present.

At one point in time, the photographs that moved me most deeply were those taken during the Vietnam War—works commonly described as war reportage. Among them, you have undoubtedly seen the iconic image of the Vietnamese girl fleeing naked down the street after a napalm attack. Such photographs carried an extraordinarily powerful message: they not only reported on the war itself, but also exposed the crimes and human catastrophes it produced.

I have not pursued such subjects in my own photographic practice, simply because the conditions required to do so have not been available to me. Even today, for example, the war between Israel and Hamas is ongoing, and to document its consequences photographically, one would first need to travel to the region and be physically present within the event itself. Perhaps if such circumstances had arisen for me, I might have been

able to use photography to convey a message related to a crisis, a concern, or even a possible solution. In practice, however, this kind of work demands very specific—and often extraordinary—conditions.

“Marine biology or filmmaking could have been my chosen professions, had I been given another life.”



Ansel Magazine: You once mentioned that, if given another life, you might have become a film director. Throughout the history of art, the boundary between photography and cinema has repeatedly shifted—from Stanley Kubrick, who began his career in photography, to Abbas Kiarostami, who at one point in his life turned to photography, and even Steve McCurry, who initially aspired to make documentary films.

Given your deep engagement with photography, if it were possible to begin your life's path anew, what role do you think photography would assume? Would it become your point of departure, or would cinema remain your primary preoccupation?

Prince Reza Pahlavi: It is an interesting question, and precisely because it is grounded entirely in a hypothetical premise, it becomes more difficult to answer. In reality, one approaches such matters from a very different perspective. At present, I pursue photography as an amateur and as a personal passion, and perhaps if I were a professional photographer, I might view this question differently.

The photographs I take are not of the kind typically exhibited in art galleries; they are closer in spirit to environmental work—images more commonly associated with publications such as National Geographic. It seems to me that works centered on human subjects tend to be more appealing to gallerists than photographs devoted solely to nature or wildlife.

Cinema, however, is an entirely different matter. In filmmaking, one can employ many of the same techniques used in photography—composition, framing, and visual structure—but in the service of conveying something far beyond a single image. Film allows for expression that extends well beyond the fraction of a second captured in a photograph.

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

When I follow the cinematic styles of filmmakers such as Stanley Kubrick, or Alan Parker, whose films often emphasize the movement of crowds, or Brian De Palma, and Steven Spielberg—whose body of work includes *Jaws* (1975), a film centered on the threat of a great white shark along a coastal area—it becomes clear that each of these directors possesses a distinct technique and a highly personal approach to framing and filmmaking. A solid grounding in the art of photography can certainly serve as a foundation for cinema; however, much depends on whether a filmmaker prioritizes narrative storytelling or places equal—or greater—emphasis on aesthetic principles.

Some directors are, above all, accomplished storytellers rather than filmmakers driven primarily by visual aesthetics. That said, the role of the cinematographer is equally crucial. If the director's chosen cinematographer lacks sufficient skill or sensitivity, the film can turn into something entirely different from what was intended.

One film that I have found particularly striking from the standpoint of cinematography—and especially editing—is *Saving Private Ryan* by Steven Spielberg. The opening ten to fifteen seconds of the film are, in their own way, extraordinary. A more recent example is *1917*, directed by Sam Mendes, another war film, this time set during the First World War. Here, too, a highly distinctive visual approach is employed: the opening sequence unfolds in a continuous, unbroken take lasting several minutes. One can only imagine the complexity of the planning, direction, and performance required to execute such a scene. Clearly, this demands a level of precision and coordination that goes far beyond photography alone.

That said, photography—with its inherent principles of framing and composition—can nonetheless play a vital role in the making of cinema.

In any case, I have always been interested in cinema as well. From my school years onward, I owned a Super 8 film camera, with which I made short films together with my classmates. Because of my enthusiasm, I even handled the editing myself. I remember that at the time, one of the television series broadcast on Iranian television was *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and one of the films I made was a humorous take inspired by that series. In truth, my interest in photography and filmmaking developed simultaneously from those early years.

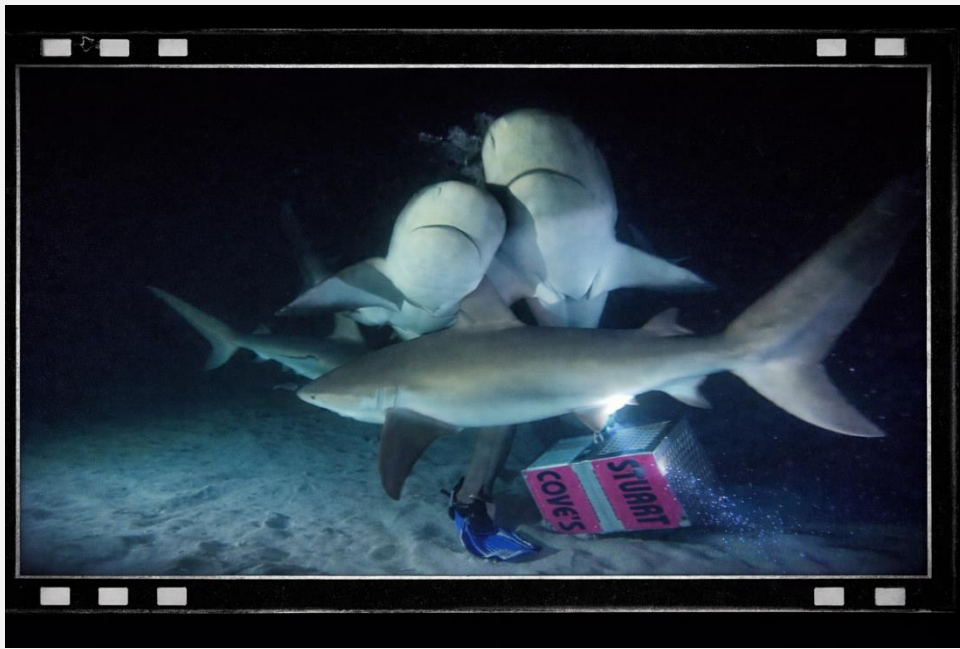
So, in response to your question, I would say that if I were given another life, I would most likely gravitate more decisively toward film directing and filmmaking. Alternatively, another path I might have chosen would have been marine biology.

As you know, I have a strong interest in diving as well. This dates back to the early 1970s, when Iran's second television channel had just begun broadcasting. Unlike Channel One, its programs were aired in color, and among them were documentaries by the French filmmaker and researcher Jacques Cousteau, all focused on the underwater world and his explorations of it. Watching these films, I became deeply captivated by Cousteau's work and by life beneath the sea.

This fascination soon led me to diving. During that same period, in Iran, I began diving on Kish Island, alongside members of the naval forces. Later on, I acquired specialized equipment for underwater photography, including a dedicated camera housing, which I continue to use for the underwater images I share today. In this way, my interests in environmental issues, the underwater world, diving, and photography have all become closely intertwined.



Prince Reza Pahlavi following a diving expedition on Kish Island, Iran, 1970s



"At the Sharks' Table," New Providence Island, Bahamas, January 2015

Ansel Magazine:

If you were to direct a film today, would your approach lean more toward narrative cinema or documentary? And within each of these forms, which subjects do you believe hold the greatest potential for cinematic exploration?

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

As I mentioned in one of my earlier responses, the first question to consider is whether the transmission of a message is more important to you than the aesthetic dimension of a film. In my view, documentary and narrative cinema are fundamentally distinct forms. Documentary filmmaking is better suited to addressing issues such as environmental challenges and to articulating phenomena like drought or rising sea levels resulting from climate change—subjects that, at present and perhaps always, have been central to my concerns.

This is because neglecting nature and the environment has a direct impact on our lives, and even on our livelihoods. These are issues of profound importance, yet unfortunately they receive relatively little attention and rarely appear as headline stories in the media. I believe that awareness-raising and education can play a significant role in mitigating such crises. A documentary film has the capacity to engage in public education and raise awareness in a far deeper way than a purely narrative film, which may touch on these issues only superficially, without the ability to truly examine or unpack them. For these reasons, documentary cinema holds a particular significance and importance for me.

That said, if I were to direct a narrative film, I would gravitate toward genres such as crime, detective, or legal drama rather than romantic or comedic films. Comedy, in particular, is one of the most difficult genres in cinema: either the film succeeds and resonates with audiences, or it fails entirely. In other words, the risks involved in making a comedy are exceptionally high. Ultimately, if I were to make a narrative film, I would aim to construct a story with carefully calibrated tensions and plot developments—one that compels the viewer to think, to follow the narrative closely, and to remain engaged and curious until the final moment of resolution.



As you noted, nature photography is one of the central genres—and a longstanding interest—in your work. I would like to know where the roots of this interest were first formed, and which experiences or influences over time have helped solidify it in your perspective and practice.

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

Nature has always been a significant presence in my life, particularly given the extraordinary diversity of landscapes found in Iran. In many ways, the country encompasses almost every type of natural scenery one encounters across the world—perhaps with the exception of polar environments or the dense rainforests of the Amazon. Otherwise, most global landscapes can be found, in one form or another, within Iran's borders.

For instance, traveling to northern Iran, one encounters scenery marked by rice and tea fields, high humidity, and frequent rainfall—conditions reminiscent of places such as Thailand or Panama. Yet, after traveling barely one hundred kilometers and crossing a few mountain ranges, the landscape and climate shift dramatically. The lush vegetation and dense forests give way to elevated terrain dominated by rock and earth, which in winter becomes uniformly blanketed in snow.

From there, moving east toward cities such as Mashhad and Neyshabur reveals a different natural character altogether, while heading west brings one into the distinctive landscapes of Azerbaijan. In central Iran, the Zagros mountain range presents its own unique climate and geography. Despite my deep interest in Iran's natural environments, I regret that I have not yet traveled to regions such as Lorestan and Kurdistan—both part of the Zagros range—and therefore have not experienced their landscapes firsthand.

In the south, the Persian Gulf offers a natural environment with its own particular qualities. Iran is also home to its two great central deserts, Dasht-e Kavir and the Lut Desert, whose landscapes resemble those of Utah, Arizona, or Nevada in the United States. It is precisely this vast range and richness of natural environments that has always made Iran's nature profoundly compelling to me.

For this very reason, Iran offers an exceptional range of natural landscapes and photographic subjects. When I was living in Tehran, I often photographed the foothills, rivers, and trees in and around the city across different seasons. Autumn, in particular, was especially compelling, as nature became infused with rich and striking colors. The ability to work in color photography allowed me to record these hues and the beauty I was witnessing. This experience was perhaps one of the important factors that drew me toward nature photography in the first place.



Yellowstone National Park, United States — Summer 1995

Ansel Magazine

In light of what you've described, would it be fair to say that your interest in nature photography is rooted in an emotional connection to Iran?

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

That is indeed the case.

I lived in Morocco for three years, and even after that period, I returned there frequently. Morocco is a beautiful country, with flavorful cuisine, remarkably warm people, and a compelling natural landscape. What is perhaps even more interesting is the extent to which it shares similarities with Iran.

Very often, when people see my photographs from Morocco, they spontaneously remark on how closely these scenes resemble particular regions in Iran. This sense of resemblance—between the Moroccan landscapes and the memories of Iran that reside in the back of my mind—has made photographing these places even more meaningful and engaging for me.



Drying Dates, Ouarzazate Region, Morocco — 1983

Ansel Magazine :

In addition to your interest in nature photography, your work also includes a substantial body of documentary images, many of which were produced in Morocco—particularly in the city of Fez. What qualities of this country have made it especially compelling for you as a subject for documentary photography?

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

Yes, as I noted earlier, I lived in Morocco for three years. The documentary photographs presented here were largely produced during that period of residence, using analog cameras and Kodak and Fujifilm film stocks. It was only after 2000 that I transitioned to digital photography.

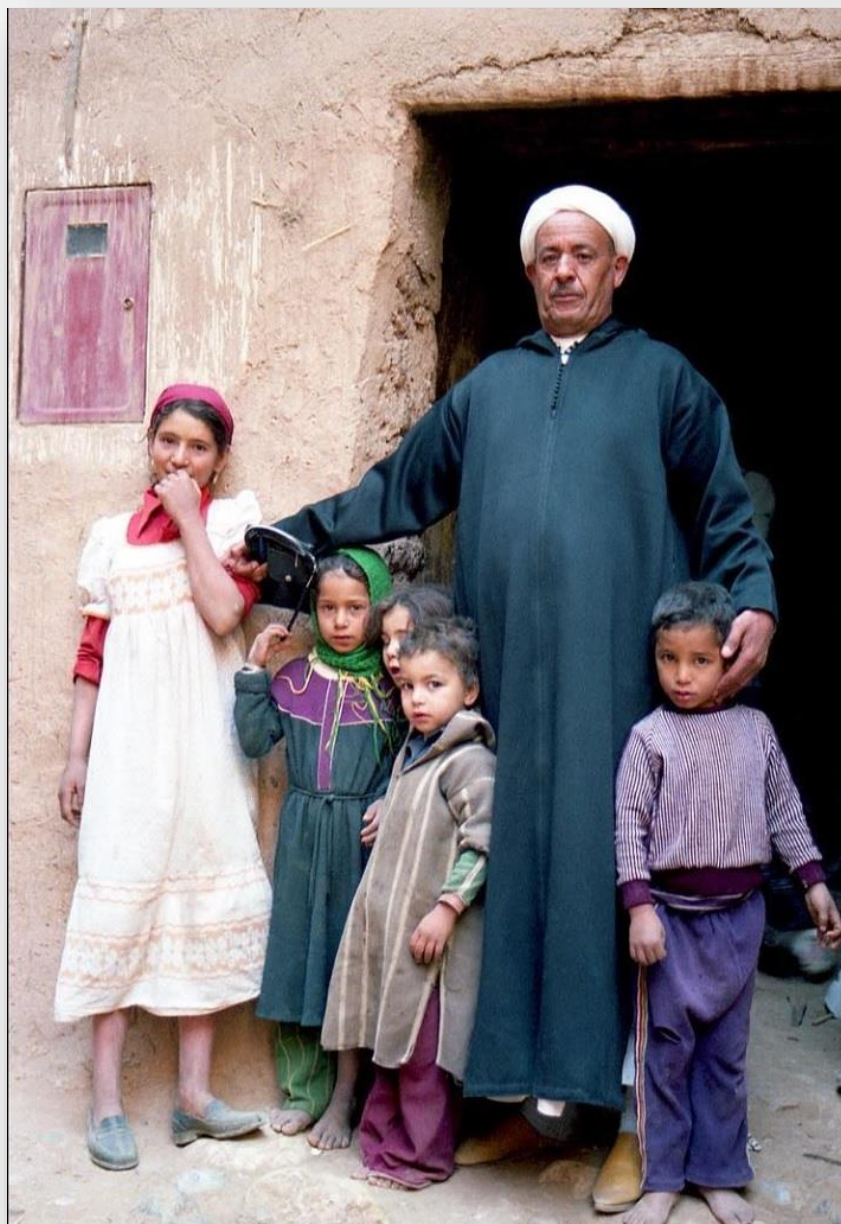
One of the most significant advantages of digital technology is the immediacy with which the photographer can evaluate the image. This allows unsuccessful frames to be discarded instantly and replaced, and enables exposure inaccuracies to be identified and corrected in real time through on-camera review.

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

On the other hand, one of the limitations of digital cameras is that certain images do not always turn out in the way a photographer intends. Sunset photography is a clear example. The colors recorded by film and analog cameras in sunset scenes often appear significantly deeper and more vibrant than those produced by digital cameras. While it is true that, through software, post-processing, and adjustments to color and contrast, one can approximate this quality in digital images to some extent, the results are rarely quite the same. In any case, the photographs you see here were made with analog cameras, and in response to your question, I should add that one of the main reasons is the abundance of such subjects there—both in terms of diverse landscapes and people.

Regarding the city of Fez, it is its spiritual and mystical dimension that distinguishes it from other Moroccan cities. That said, Fez is by no means the only compelling location for photography in Morocco. If we consider the Atlas Mountains, to the north lie the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar, extending toward Tangier, and further along, the North Atlantic Ocean, with cities such as Rabat and Casablanca situated on its coast. These regions are characterized by a gentle, distinctly Mediterranean landscape. In contrast, south of the Atlas Mountains one encounters desert, arid plains, and dry, barren environments. This geographical contrast has endowed Morocco with remarkable natural diversity.

My more recent photographic work in Morocco has focused largely on the southern regions, whereas my earlier photographs were made in the north, as the city in which I lived—Rabat—is located in northern Morocco. As a result, my work from Morocco can be broadly divided into two periods: images made before 2000 in the northern regions, and those made after 2000 in the south, with the climatic and environmental differences between these areas clearly reflected in the photographs. It is precisely this diversity of nature that has made Morocco feel, to me, akin to Iran.



The Village Headman and His Children, Ouarzazate Region,
Morocco — 1982





Dik-Dik, Ol Jogi Area, Kenya — 2013



Gerenuk (a Species of Antelope)

Ansel Magazine :

What role do lens choice and technical equipment play in your photographic process, particularly in nature and underwater photography? And when working under the lighting constraints of underwater environments, how do you decide when to rely on artificial lighting?

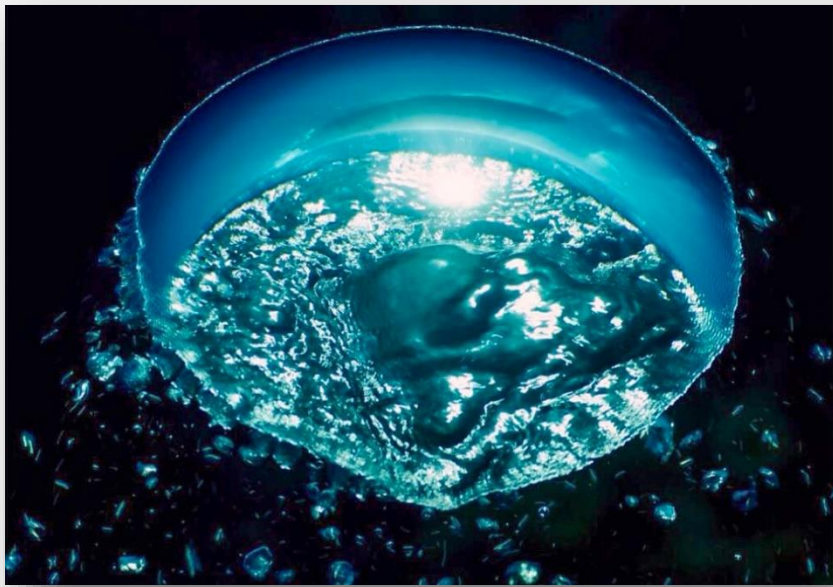
Prince Reza Pahlavi:

Some of the photographs I have shared on my Instagram page were taken during my travels to places such as Kenya. In these images, my primary subjects are wildlife species native to those regions, which naturally requires the use of telephoto lenses. Approaching these animals beyond a certain distance often causes them to flee, taking them out of reach.

I typically work with a 300 mm lens, and by adding teleconverters, I can effectively reach a focal length of approximately 600 mm. Most of my photographs from regions such as Kenya were taken using this setup or with other lenses that are predominantly zoom lenses. For my landscape-oriented nature photographs in other locations, I tend to use relatively wide lenses—around 28 mm, but not wider—to ensure a broad field of view while avoiding distortion at the edges of the frame. Alternatively, I employ zoom and telephoto lenses, generally 100 mm and above, for nature photography.

My preference for these lenses stems from the ability to achieve a more distinctive depth of field—one that does not feel overly conventional. By creating a clear separation between in-focus and out-of-focus areas, particularly between the foreground and background, the viewer's attention is drawn more strongly toward the main subject. That said, when a more documentary approach is required, with a more uniform plane of focus, I turn to standard lenses such as 50 mm or 35 mm. ultimately, and all of these choices depend on the subject and the specific conditions of the scene.

Everything I have described so far relates to photography on land. Underwater photography, however, requires its own specialized equipment. For this purpose, I most often use a macro lens mounted on a Canon 7D. I have equipped this camera with a dedicated underwater housing, which protects it from water ingress and allows it to function safely beneath the surface.



Ansel Magazine : In your underwater macro photography projects, which lenses do you typically use, and how do you adapt your exposure settings to varying lighting conditions and water depth?

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

I work with the **Canon EF-S 60mm f/2.8 Macro** lens. The use of flash lighting is essential, because underwater—beyond roughly one meter of depth—colors begin to disappear. Reds, oranges, and yellows are lost within the first one to two meters, leaving predominantly green, blue, and violet tones. Without artificial light or flash, it is therefore impossible to see and record colors as they truly are.

Given that my approach to underwater photography is largely macro-based, the need for artificial lighting becomes even more critical. For this reason, I also rely on strobe lights to restore color, contrast, and clarity in my images.

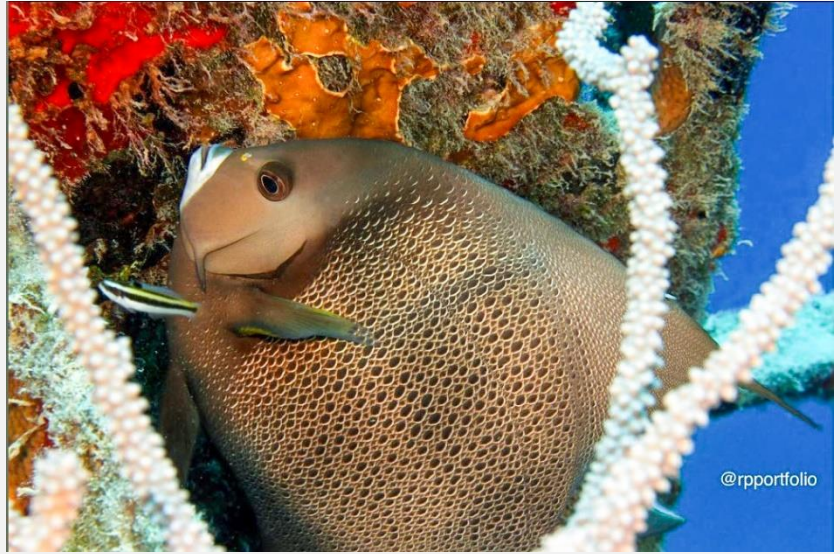
In terms of camera settings, unlike my work on land—where I usually operate in full manual mode—underwater I sometimes use semi-automatic settings. The subjects are often in motion, and the specific conditions underwater do not always allow sufficient time for constant manual adjustments. That said, I still predefine several key parameters. For example, I typically set the ISO to 250 or higher, and because of subject movement underwater, I fix the shutter speed at around 1/180 second. Higher shutter speeds, such as 1/300 or above, do not synchronize effectively with the flash exposure I require.

With these baseline settings—an ISO of around 250 and a shutter speed of 1/180—the camera usually selects an aperture between f/4 and f/5.6. Thanks to the external controls built into the underwater housing, I can still adjust settings during the dive if needed. If, after reviewing an image, I find that a parameter needs correction, those changes can be made directly. Adjusting the output power of the strobes is another crucial option, allowing for finer control over exposure and lighting quality underwater.

In this way, full manual control remains entirely possible underwater, and I often work that way. Even white balance is best set manually, as the appropriate balance at a depth of 20 meters differs significantly from what is required at, say, 10 meters.

Ansel Magazine :

In documentary street photography, lighting can sometimes play a decisive role in distinguishing an image. With this in mind, and considering that underwater photography typically relies on strobes aligned with the camera axis, do you believe that using independent light sources with varied angles of illumination could lead to a more creative and distinctive visual expression in underwater documentary photography?



Grey Angelfish (*Pomacanthus arcuatus*), Nassau, The Bahamas — 2017

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

I have not experimented with this type of lighting approach in underwater photography. In general, a carefully designed image can certainly yield strong results, but it inevitably sacrifices a sense of spontaneity. To draw a parallel with street photography, such constructed lighting setups tend to make every subject or passerby aware of the photographer and the camera, whereas one of the defining characteristics of documentary photography is that subjects remain in a completely natural, unselfconscious state.

In any case, since I have not tested this approach in my own photographic practice, I cannot offer a definitive judgment on whether it would improve or diminish the outcome. However, if your question refers to lighting in underwater cinematography, that is something I have experienced. Prior to the COVID pandemic, I was involved in the production of a film about the life of sharks. The filming took place at night, where the use of artificial light sources was essential.

Ansel Magazine : You mentioned a film you made about sharks. What is the title of this film?

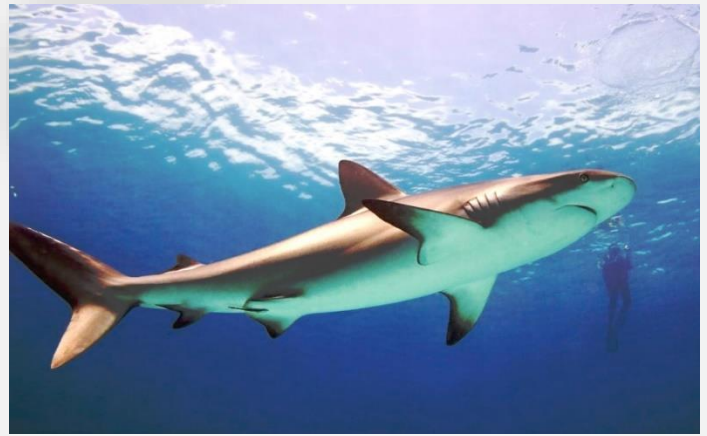
Prince Reza Pahlavi:

The film is titled AT THE SHARKS' TABLE (*At the Sharks' Table*), and it is available to watch on the YouTube channel I created specifically for this project.

I filmed it using a GoPro camera, whose automatic settings perform remarkably well in such environments. I did not bring dedicated lighting equipment with me; instead, I worked with existing light sources present at the location. Ultimately, there are situations in both photography and filmmaking where a usable light source is available, even if its direction and quality are not fully under our control. In those cases, it is essential to be able to make the most effective use of the light at hand.

The choice of camera—and its ability to meter light accurately in a given environment—can significantly influence how much one needs to rely on additional lighting, particularly in situations where technical or logistical constraints limit access to artificial light sources.

Given your strong commitment to underwater photography, and the fact that a significant portion of your work has been produced within this genre, the question arises as to how you confront the technical and practical challenges inherent in this form of photography. Additionally, did you undertake any specific training or specialized courses to enter and pursue this field professionally?



Caribbean Reef Shark, Nassau, The Bahamas — 2014

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

No, I learned photography largely through a self-taught and experience-based approach. At the beginning of my work in underwater photography, whenever questions or uncertainties arose, I would ask photographers who were typically present on diving tours to photograph tourists. These were mostly basic, practical questions—for example, which camera settings might be more suitable for underwater photography, such as ISO levels or shutter speeds. Over time, however, and through continued practice, I learned many additional aspects of underwater photography through direct experience. For instance, I gradually came to understand when increasing the camera's sensitivity would result in a stronger image. Of course, as you know, raising ISO inevitably introduces more noise into a photograph. I am not particularly inclined toward heavy post-production, and my use of software such as Photoshop is limited to modest adjustments—mainly contrast or color saturation—rather than extensive manipulation.

Ultimately, these kinds of insights are acquired gradually, through time and experience, and they form part of the learning process that every photographer goes through.



Sea Turtle, Nassau, The Bahamas — Summer 2017

Ansel Magazine :In underwater photography, do you usually have a clear image or concept in mind before beginning a dive, or does the process of finding the subject and making decisions unfold primarily after entering the underwater environment, in direct response to the space and prevailing conditions?

Prince Reza Pahlavi: I would say it is a fifty-fifty balance. In underwater photography, it is very difficult to predict exactly which animal you might encounter at any given moment. That said, there are situations in which you enter a particular area of the ocean or sea where the likelihood of encountering certain species—such

as sharks, turtles, or octopuses—is higher. Similarly, one can reasonably anticipate the presence of specific types of fish or coral in certain marine zones.

For this reason, an initial idea often forms in advance: if I enter this particular area of water, I am more likely to encounter certain species. However, the final decisions and the direction of the work are ultimately shaped by what unfolds once I am underwater and directly confronted with the environment and its conditions.



Brown Coral, Nassau, The Bahamas — 2017

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

A single dive typically lasts between 40 and 45 minutes, during which one can descend to a maximum depth of about 30 to 35 meters and return safely. If you go deeper than that, the total available dive time becomes even shorter. Out of those 45 minutes, roughly 15 minutes are spent descending and ascending to and from the surface, during which there is effectively no opportunity for photography.

This leaves approximately 30 minutes of effective shooting time. If locating and photographing each intended subject takes between five and ten minutes, the practical outcome is that one can realistically focus on no more than three subjects during a single dive. For this reason, unlike photography on land—where one can afford to spend time searching for subjects—time underwater is extremely limited, and finding the desired subject can be quite challenging.

It therefore makes complete sense to dedicate the entire duration of a dive to locating and working with a specific subject. There have been instances in which I spent the entire dive moving within a ten-meter area, patiently waiting to encounter a particular marine species. In other situations, I entered the water and photographed whatever subjects presented themselves, moving from one to the next as opportunities arose.

Naturally, if the subject consists of non-mobile marine life, such as corals, the process becomes considerably easier. Ultimately, depending on the type of subject you intend to photograph, it is possible—and often advisable—to plan the dive accordingly in advance.

Ansel Magazine : To what extent does having a predefined idea or photographic objective influence your choice of lens and the initial camera settings before you begin shooting?

Prince Reza Pahlavi: Naturally, underwater it is not possible to change lenses, as doing so would require returning to the surface. For this reason, the intended lens must be mounted on the camera in advance. However, thanks to the controls integrated into the underwater housing, it remains possible to adjust camera settings while underwater.

Ansel Magazine : Which sources do you usually follow to keep up with developments and discourse related to the art of photography?

Prince Reza Pahlavi: From time to time, I follow magazines such as National Geographic, as well as articles and materials that reach me online. I also keep track of the work and writings of photographers and artists whose practices I find engaging. Overall, I draw on a range of different sources to stay connected with developments in the field of photography.

Ansel Magazine : Do you also make time to visit photography exhibitions?

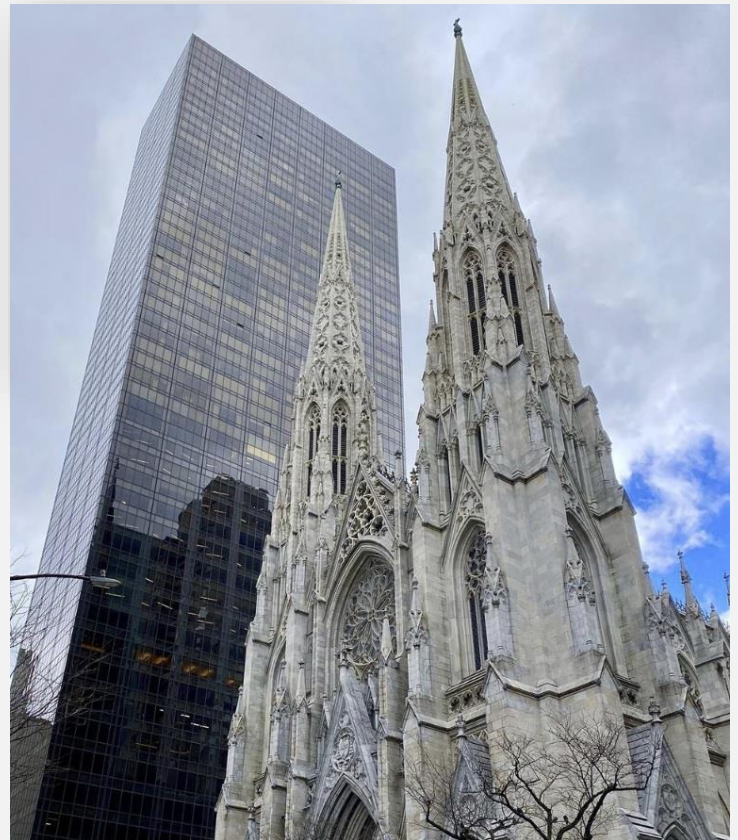
Prince Reza Pahlavi:

Very rarely. Aside from the fact that I do not often find the time for such visits, I also seldom come across photography exhibitions that present work aligned with my personal interests. To be honest, in the region where I live, there are not many art galleries whose programs are compelling enough to draw my attention and motivate me to visit. That said, whenever I do have the opportunity—and when the subject matter of an exhibition genuinely interests me—I certainly make a point of including it in my schedule.

Ansel Magazine : For many enthusiasts of photography and the arts, New York City is a city that entered the artistic stage in the late nineteenth century and, over the course of the twentieth century, emerged as one of the principal centers for the formation and expansion of modern and contemporary art—a city that continues today to host a large number of major exhibitions and significant art events each year.

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

Yes, in certain cities—such as Paris, London, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City, which you mentioned—such events are far more visible. This is likely due to the demographic composition of these cities and the wide range of interests they encompass, particularly a strong inclination toward the arts among their residents. Consequently, an environment of this kind is much more apparent in a city like New York than in places such as Washington, D.C. and its surrounding areas, where I currently live.



Old–New Contrast, **Manhattan, New York City** — Mobile Photography, 2022

As a final question, I would like to ask whether you could share a particularly meaningful and memorable moment from your personal photographic experiences—one that holds a deep connection to a photograph or to a decisive photographic moment—with our readers.

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

One memorable experience that comes to mind—one closely connected to photography—dates back to the period when I was living in Morocco. On one occasion, an editor from a news agency, who was covering aspects of our lives at the time and was aware of my interest in photography, shared an idea with me. He was someone who often assisted me with the process of printing my photographic negatives, since in those days the negatives had to be sent to Paris, where the development and printing were carried out.



Point Barrow, Alaska — Summer 1983

His suggestion was that I publish a selection of my photographs in a magazine that was being published in France at the time, titled Double Page. The magazine's format was such that each issue was devoted to a review of a single photographer's work. It was agreed that one issue would feature a series of my photographs centered on the theme of sunsets. Given my long-standing interest in sunset photography, I already had a substantial archive of images related to this subject.

These included sunsets photographed in Switzerland, Morocco, Mexico, and many other locations. However, after reviewing the material, the magazine's editor noted that for the series to feel complete—and to acquire a more global dimension—something was missing: a sunset photographed in a polar region. He suggested that if such an image could be added, the series would be far more cohesive and compelling.

This observation led me to decide to travel to a polar region specifically for this purpose. After some initial research, I realized that the most straightforward option was to fly on a commercial airline to Alaska and then continue on to a place called Point Barrow, located at the northernmost edge of the region. Point Barrow was, in effect, one of the closest inhabited locations to the North Pole—a small town with a limited population, most of whom were employed in the oil extraction industry.

I planned this trip for the summer season, in late July or August of 1983. Upon arrival, I stayed at a small hotel that accommodated no more than five or six other guests besides myself. During my stay, I was exceptionally fortunate to encounter unusually favorable weather conditions, which allowed me to photograph the landscape and its sunsets under remarkably good circumstances.

Prince Reza Pahlavi:

One of the distinctive aspects of photographing in such a region was that, due to the presence of multiple atmospheric layers, particular forms of distortion appeared in the images—effects that seemed to compress the photograph visually. For instance, the sun often appeared more elliptical than circular, and the diffusion of light around it resembled the visual impression of a large atomic explosion.

What makes this memory especially striking is how fortunate my timing was. I happened to arrive precisely during a period when the atmospheric conditions were suitable for photography. Prior to my arrival, a Japanese documentary crew had been there for weeks, attempting to produce a film about whale migration to Polar Regions. They were carrying equipment weighing nearly three tons and had been waiting for an extended period for improved weather conditions, yet had still been unable to begin filming.

Even so, despite the favorable conditions during which I managed to photograph, adverse weather later delayed my departure, and I was stranded there for three days before I could return. Ultimately, the photographs I captured were added to my sunset series, and Double Page went on to publish them in a dedicated issue. I still keep a copy of that issue as a personal memento.

We sincerely thank you for the time you generously devoted to this conversation with Ansel Monthly.

Reza Tajvidi | Ansel Monthly

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