

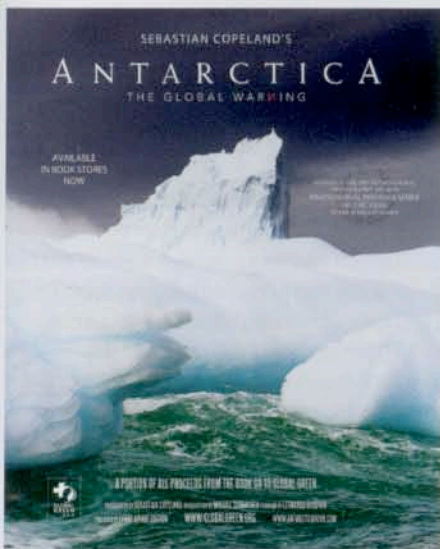
STYLOGRAPH | INTERVIEW

The Arctic Ambassador

CELEBRATED PHOTOGRAPHER SEBASTIAN COPELAND
DITCHES THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF HOLLYWOOD FOR THE
COOLER CLIMES OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE – ALL FOR A GOOD
CAUSE

Words Jeremy Gopalan





OPPOSITE PAGE: Warming of the Antarctic Peninsula has resulted in the Adelie Penguin population shrinking by 33 per cent in the past 25 years

Sebastian Copeland, 45, is many things: an accomplished fine artist, an award winning photographer, an intrepid explorer, and now a passionate spokesperson for climate change issues.

A summa cum laude graduate of UCLA, he was raised in France and Britain in a family of successful artists. After relocating to New York in 1980, he embarked on a career directing music videos and television commercials for clients that have included Fila and Pantene. He also delved into photographing celebrity portraits – Orlando Bloom, his cousin, was one of his most regular subjects – and his work has appeared in publications such as *GQ* and *Cosmopolitan*.

But throughout his star-studded career, he maintained a keen interest in the environment and it wasn't long before he segued from shooting starlets to shooting a different subject altogether – icebergs. In 2007, he published his first book *Antarctica: The Global Warning*, which documents the Antarctica environment as a microcosm of the world's future environment.

In it, Copeland's engaging and thought-provoking photographs succinctly capture both the incredible beauty of the continent and the devastation that climate changes have wreaked on it. In addition to his photography, notable contributions from high profile personalities

such as Mikhail Gorbachev and Leonardo DiCaprio add much-needed weight to the urgency of his story.

Through the book, his message is resoundingly clear – that the world needs attention, immediately. As *Publishers Weekly* put it, "Sebastian Copeland's eloquent photographs tell an urgent tale that begs our activism."

That book received wide support with translations in five international markets. Among other accolades, Copeland was named Professional Photographer of the Year in the book category from the International Photography Awards that same year. His fine quality prints have appeared in numerous galleries around the world, as well as at the United Nations. Several of his works are now part of the permanent collection of The Natural World Museum in San Francisco.

Currently holding a seat on the Board of Directors of Global Green USA, Copeland's relentless pursuit of a sustainable future has led to him being an international speaker on climate for over a decade. He was recently in Singapore to headline the Quest for Sustainability Conference, and shared with *August Man* how photographing lions at a safari in South Africa sparked his passion for photography.



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AM: What led to your interest in environmental causes?

SC: At the most basic level it would have to be an extension of this process of taking photographs. If you're drawn into taking photographs and you're inspired by what you see, then it's a natural progression that you want to preserve it, or treat it as a way to inspire other people to conserve it too. And so conservation and preservation is a natural extension of the process of photography – we've seen it with Ansel Adams and the genesis of land conservation he was involved in.

I think any artist who walks the land will tend to feel that they've become a warrior in defence of it in some respect.

AM: You are an artist, an explorer and a spokesperson. Which role do you identify with most?

SC: I really think that they work very much in tandem. I was a natural adventurer; I've always

been an adrenaline junkie but specifically to nature, not necessarily technology. For instance, I've ridden fast motorbikes and fast cars but I lost my taste for that. My predilection was always for mountains or deserts; rock climbing, mountaineering, or any type of expedition in the desert. I was drawn to anything that was an adventure from a very early age, and that became my hobby if you will, or my interest outside of my job.

I mentioned that being an explorer was an extension of being a landscape photographer, and in a sense photography was a way to me to marry all three.

And actually travelling to the poles in many ways was the cinch that brought it all together; being able to go to this really distant environment and explore that and be able to bring back a unique perspective was a privilege that I had, and I wanted to share that.

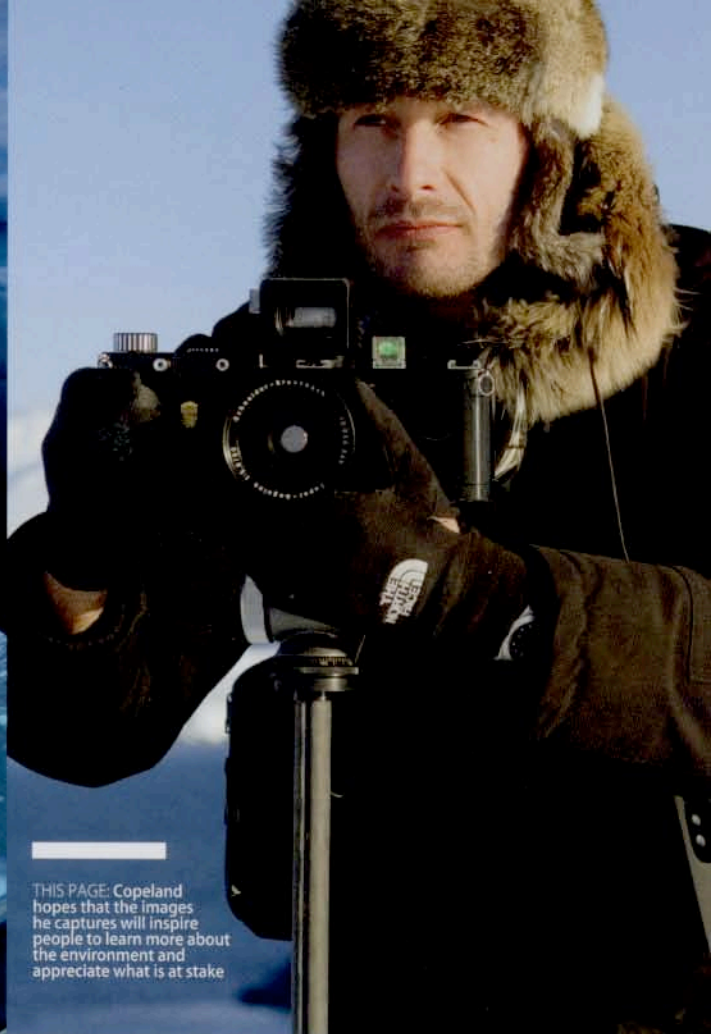
Especially since when I go out there, I commit multiple weeks or months to some of

the trips in order to come back and not just talk about it but also bring back footage from those experiences and bring with it that sensibility that I have as an artist. So I feel incredibly fortunate and very privileged to have this tool to work with and I can't say that one is more important than the other. They all work together in defining who I am as a human being and artist.

AM: When did you first take an interest in photography?

SC: I took my first photographs in Africa when I was 12 years old. My grandparents used to live in South Africa in Swaziland and my first images were taken when I went to visit them. I remember learning about framing and composition, and I followed up on that as a teenager with quite a lot of passion.

AM: You have worked with many genres of photography, like portraiture and landscape.



THIS PAGE: Copeland hopes that the images he captures will inspire people to learn more about the environment and appreciate what is at stake

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Which of them appeals to you most?

SC: To me, photography is like any form of art, such as music. I will say this about music – I’m a great lover of it and for me there are only two kinds of music and that’s good and bad. And it is the same thing with photography. Whatever inspires you is ultimately what’s going to drive you.

Over the course of my career I have been inspired by a variety of different things and I intend to keep it that way. I’ve enjoyed shooting celebrities immensely, though I haven’t done that in quite a long time because I’ve been too busy. I’ve shot a lot of nudes over my career as well and I also really enjoyed that. And while I’ve got a passion for landscape I’ve shot street photography as well as simple snapshots. I’ve done a lot of advertising and I’ve even done some music videos as well, and I’ve enjoyed every process every step of the way.

If you’re stimulated, motivated, inspired by a subject matter, then at the end of the day it’s just a continuation or an expression of your sensibility – and I can tell you, even

flowers are amazing to shoot. I’ve shot flowers as many famous photographers have, such as Irving Penn and Richard Avedon.

AM: Do you approach different subjects differently or do you have a signature style?

SC: That’s a really interesting question. I think in that respect, most photographers tend to be driven by a certain technique, which ultimately has a lot to do with your style. It’s a very intuitive process; in my case I spent years working with one lens only and it was a self-imposed discipline in order to develop a sensibility relative to that lens. And while I started with a 24mm lens, that translated later into a 43mm and eventually to a wide-angle lens.

I’ve really enjoyed working with wider focal lens and organising frames according to what that lens dictated. It didn’t really matter what the subject matter was. Of course, if I’m shooting a flower I wouldn’t do it like that but for people and for a lot of landscape, I would tend to shoot it with a wider focal lens. You

could say that was my style, but essentially that was derived from perceiving shots from a fashion perspective. Fashion was inclusive of space and involved positioning the character or the subject within that space and what the depth of field was that played into it; and the inter-connection, the relationship, the foreground and background.

AM: Would you say that shooting landscapes has its unique appeal? Would you tell us what you like about it?

SC: There’s a good reason for that. It’s a solitary activity. It’s as much an examination of the landscape as it is an examination of the self in relation to that landscape, so a photograph of landscape to me has always been part celebration, and part meditation. You want to have a communion with the land and through that exercise you want to have a communion with yourself. I think that’s a lesson I learnt very early on, that landscape doesn’t speak back at you; landscape is patient with you, but you have to be patient with it as well.