

SHAN SHUI MOUNTAIN | WATER

山水







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LANDSCAPES BY BASIL PAO

PRINTER TRENTO



A WORLD WITHOUT US

WHEN WE THINK OF EARTH we tend to be possessive. We talk about it as our home, which it undoubtedly is, but when we move on to talk of “our” world and “our” planet, we’re on much shakier ground. There are an awful lot of us, no doubt about that. Nearly seven billion, with nine thousand added every hour. But let’s not get things out of proportion. “Our” planet comprises seventy-one per cent ocean but only twenty-nine per cent land, of that only about three per cent is populated. So when we talk of destroying our planet or saving our planet we’re being grandly egotistical. What we mean is destroying ourselves or saving ourselves. The planet is a tough old bird and it will still be there long after us.

That’s what I think is so salutary about the images in this collection. These photographs show us what Earth was like before we came along and built our roads and cities, and it shows us what it will be like after we’ve gone.

Individually, these are images of great beauty, rich in gorgeous colours and vivid contrasts, capturing the complex patterns of water and ice, the spectacular natural sculpture of the mountains, the majesty of the ocean and the swirling golden ripples of the sand seas. Taken all together, Basil Pao’s photographs give a sense of the implacability of the earth, its resilience in the face of the enormous forces beating against it, forces which are also present in these pictures; pitiless heat and bitter cold, torrents of water and clouds of boiling steam. The earth as a dazzling laboratory.

Most of the work here comes from the many journeys I’ve shared with Basil over the years and they bring back some unforgettable memories. My first sight of the Himalayas from high on the Tibetan Plateau. The enchanting serenity of the Pongo de Mainique, a glistening black canyon in the headwaters of the



SHAN SHUI | CHILD OF THE WAY

THE OLD SAGE stood on the tip of a massive boulder that jugged out from the peak like the tongue of some primordial beast. A delicate mist arose from the swirling river of clouds below his feet, fracturing the last rays of the sun into myriad tiny rainbows. Across the great plain, a fast moving storm gathered around the soaring peaks as the last hint of colour faded from the mountain range and a yellow fingernail moon climbed in the eastern sky.

He remembers, as a young child, clambering up the small hill across the stream that ran behind the house to get a better view of the peak where colours perpetually changed, and wondering what lived beyond the clouds. He recalls the fear he felt in his heart the first time the peak disappeared for some days behind a thick black cloak - and the joy he felt when it reappeared one morning covered with snow, glistening white in the golden sunrise. And he still feels the tingle of icy water on his then tender skin when the little stream was transformed each spring into a raging torrent filled with the silver flashes of dancing fish.

He recalls the many mountain passes and rivers he'd crossed as a young man as he travelled from state to warring state, searching in the chaos and ruin for the patronage of a wise ruler who understood his ideas of submitting to the way of nature with compassion, restraint and humility - and finding only arrogant and greedy men who believed in force, power and self indulgence. And he remembers, with startling clarity, the day he decided to follow his own path and set off towards the setting sun in search of the Western Paradise, where he'd heard that enlightened and transcendent beings dwelled.

A faint smile appears on the old man's lips beneath his flowing white beard, at the memory of being stopped by the border guard who claimed to recognize him at the gate of the final frontier; what a perfect



PART ONE

PATHS | DISCOVERY

*“Mountains cannot be surmounted
except by winding paths.”*

GOETHE (1749-1832)









*"You can never step twice into the same river;
for new waters are always flowing on to you."*

HERACLITUS (535-475 BCE)







“No snowflake ever falls in the wrong place.”

ZEN PROVERB



*“Keep your eyes on the sun
and you will not see the shadows.”*

ABORIGINAL PROVERB



"Great things are done when men and mountains meet"

WILLIAM BLAKE (1757-1827)





"It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves."

EDMUND HILLARY (1919-2008)







*“It’s not just a question of conquering a summit previously unknown,
but of tracing, step by step, a new pathway to it.”*

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860-1911)





“The mind is like an iceberg; it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water.”

SIGMUND FREUD (1856-1939)





“Even castles made of sand, fall into the sea, eventually.”

JIMI HENDRIX (1942-1970)





*“There is nothing more musical than a sunset.
He who feels what he sees will find no more beautiful
example of development in all that book which, alas,
musicians read but too little - the book of Nature.”*

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)







*“Nothing in the world is more flexible
and yielding than water.
Yet when it attacks the firm and the strong,
none can withstand it,
because they have no way to change it.”*

LAO'ZI





THE ANNAPURNA MASSIF, NEPAL



VICTORIA FALLS, ZAMBIA



*“There is one spectacle grander than the sea, that is the sky;
there is one spectacle grander than the sky, that is the interior of the soul”*

VICTOR HUGO (1802-1885)



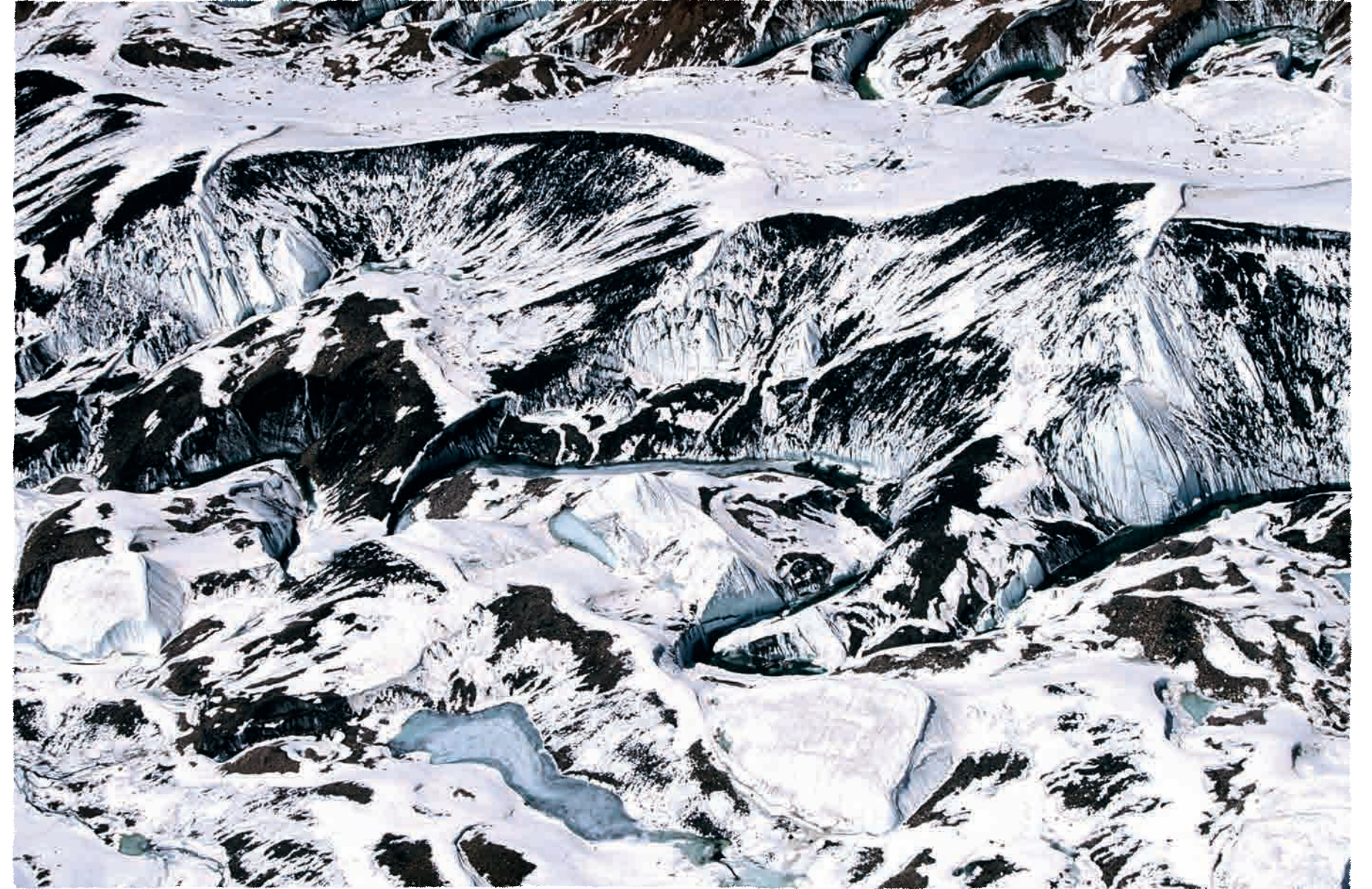


"My soul can find no Stairway to Heaven unless it be through Earth's loveliness."

MICHELANGELO (1474-1564)







BASIL PAO began his photographic career in 1980 on his return to Hong Kong after ten years in the United States, where he was art director for recording companies Atlantic and Polygram in New York and Warner Brothers Records in Los Angeles. His work during that time included the book for the Monty Python film *Life of Brian*, where he first worked with Michael Palin. They have since collaborated on ten illustrated books based on the BBC travel series *Pole to Pole*, *Full Circle*, *Hemingway Adventure*, *Sabara*, *Himalaya* and *New Europe*. He is the author of *Hands*, *China Revealed* and most recently, *Yi'Jing - Book of Changes*, which accompanied his *The Great Walls of China Series* exhibition. Basil has also created the limited editions *AMAN*, *Bhutan* and *AMAN²* for Amanresorts, and *OM - Ordinary Moments* and *CMYK | China* for Printer Trento. His travel essays and other assignments, including his photography for Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* and *Little Buddha*, have appeared in publications and exhibitions all around the world.

