



NICK BRANDT

Nick Brandt's innovative wildlife imagery features in his new book *Inherit the Dust*, which highlights the plight of animals in East Africa that have been deprived of their original habitats. Here, he explains how he created it

NICK BRANDT doesn't really do small: it's all about big ideas, big projects and highlighting the big problems that face African ecosystems. After finishing an epic book trilogy, he spurned the idea of a break to start a new project entitled 'Inherit the Dust'. "I was just so disturbed by the escalation of devastation and I just felt that I still hadn't covered it," he explains. "This idea kind of came into my head and I just ploughed into it and didn't stop until I finished it two years later." The idea was, in



Underpass with elephants (lean back, your life is on track), 2015



theory, simple – putting life-size prints of East Africa’s animals in landscapes that were previously their domain, but have been taken over by man. But executing the reality was very different.

Initially, Brandt spent months sifting through his old contact sheets searching for images that might work and then building test panels of large prints (up to 10 x 7m) on the mountainside of his US home. Next, he started location scouts in February – and had them working until he went out to Africa in October.

The images were created in situ, with the crew often spending days constructing the large-scale photo panels. These would line up and fit in with the developed landscapes, and Nick would often take a small 12-inch test print to check exact alignments – which included a dump site, an underpass and several that were discovered whilst on location. He’d then spend days waiting for the right light and weather conditions to shoot in.

Nick shot the project using Mamiya RZ67 Pro II D 6 x 7cm format cameras and estimates he used about 1,000 rolls of film. Whilst on location, he had no way of seeing the results to his

satisfaction, so he regularly paid to fly a trusted colleague back to a black-and-white lab in London to have the films developed into contact sheets, which were scanned and sent back for checking.

After a four-month shoot, the process ensued of stitching together negs (on average around eight negs were used to make each image), carefully matching all aspects of the scene and producing the final prints. “I spent about 10 months working on these 30 photographs,” says Brandt. “Had it been digital, I could have done the post on this in half the time.”

The results can be seen in the book *Inherit the Dust* and a series of exhibitions, which also takes in the Photo London event in May, and Brandt is hoping the

images will help raise awareness. “I take photographs purely for myself, never for other people: I think that’s a road to artistic mediocrity,” he says. “However, I do want this work to be seen by those in a position to do something about it – politicians and industrialists – hoping that they might better understand the implications of their actions. Something then has to follow through with some kind of concrete action.

“Once upon a time, we in the West had animals such as these where we lived,” he continues. “We blew it; wiped them out. But we still have a chance to protect and preserve the places and those animals where they do still live in East Africa.

“Africa is sitting on a veritable gold (elephant) mine. As the continent-wide destruction of the natural world continues, the ecosystems that do remain will become even more precious and highly valued. There is enormous economic long-term benefit to protecting the environment. Protect the environment and the animals and the local communities win.”

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Steve Fairclough

Quarry with giraffe, 2014

Nick Brandt: *Inherit the Dust* is published by Edwynn Houk Editions for £45/\$65

***Inherit the Dust* will be exhibited by Atlas Gallery at Photo London, Somerset House, 19-22 May**