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== THE LIVING MOUNTAIN BY AWOISKA VAN DER MOLEN, REVIEWED BY RODRIGO ORRANTIA ==



It's been six years since Awoiska van der Molen's first photobook *Sequester*; it was also the first time I wrote about her work (for this [same magazine](#)) and started following its progress. Her most recent book *The Living Mountain* – the third with designer Hans Gremmen – finds van der Molen delving deeper into her tireless search. It is now, looking back from *The Living Mountain*, that I can see *Sequester* as a departure point – a compass of sorts – in a journey perhaps best defined by what it's not: an objective representation of the natural landscape. At least not in the terms of traditional 'landscape photography'.

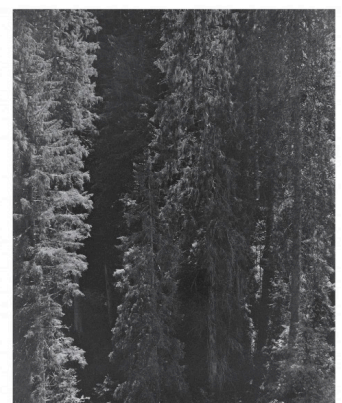
*The Living Mountain* shows the development, both in concept and execution, of ideas drafted in *Sequester* (2014) and the subsequent *Blanco* (2017). Van der Molen's solitary journeys into remote locations across the world underlie a search for an essential connection: a long-lost state of communion with the raw life force of the natural world. Her images manifest what she describes as the strings of a universal knowledge, an intuitive memory of our original connection to nature. The contrast between light and shadow renders not only the reality in front of her camera, but also intends to capture the invisible forces that shape it into existence.

There is another strand I have followed from *Sequester*: Van der Molen's interest in materiality. It is present in her painstaking practice, for instance, preferring analogue photography to digital: light is as much a physical entity as are the silver crystals and chemical processes that capture it. This interest also extends outwards, on this project to the essential elements of the mountain landscape as an enduring testament from the days of creation. Even the materiality of her photographic prints, and most certainly of this book, are of paramount importance to her work.

As a keen collector of photobooks, I share an appreciation of them as physical objects. In *The Living Mountain* one can see an evolution of the printing experiments in Van der Molen and Gremmen's previous collaborations: it is clear that the creative synergy between them only keeps getting better. Gremmen's unusual choice in paper stock, combined with a masterly use of inks and knowledge of the lithographic process, makes this book stand out. The images in *The Living Mountain* echo the deep metallic black of van der Molen's photographic prints, which has become a staple of her work. As with *Sequester* and *Blanco*, this photobook will definitely become a reference to the creative possibilities of commercial printing processes and materials.

*The Living Mountain* takes its title from the eponymous book by Nan Shepherd - finished in 1944 but only published until 1977 - relating her journeys into the Cairngorm Mountains on the eastern Highlands of Scotland. It has been praised by critics as one of the finest books on nature, a meeting of unusual sensibility with accomplished prose. This is also true for van der Molen's work: the result of confident intuition and sharpened photographic skills. Both Shepherd and van der Molen are in search of the essential nature of the mountain and seek to reveal it, one through writing and the other through photography.

The book also features a music score especially written by Austrian composer Thomas Larcher, in response to both Van der Molen's images shot in his native Tirol, and also to Shepherd's original writing. I can just about read music - clearly not enough to imagine how Larcher's annotated score might sound - but it is interesting to find his composition at the heart of the book. Designer Hans Gremmen manages to integrate it to the overarching visual language by the choice of paper, folds and binding.



I am impressed by the sense of openness and collaboration in this project. All the mountains, -Shepherd's, van der Molen's and Larcher's- stand to gain from the association: a joint quest through writing, photography and sound. The project reinforces the idea that van der Molen's work, although photography-based, transcends the merely photographic. The mountain is alive. It is the place for an urgent reconnection with a truth apparently forgotten: that we are not alone, but part of a much wider and interconnected universe.

The *Living Mountain* by Awoiska van der Molen can be purchased [here](#).

*Rodrigo Orrantia is an independent photography curator and photobook publisher.*