



Press Release

Ragnar Axelsson: Where the World Is Melting

From 23rd January to 29th May 2026, the Ernst Leitz Museum is presenting an impressive display of works by the Icelandic Leica photographer, Ragnar Axelsson

Wetzlar, 22 January 2026 The power of the elements, the raw beauty of ice landscapes, but also the threat of their disappearance: Icelandic photographer Ragnar Axelsson (born 1958) has been documenting the Arctic regions of Iceland, Greenland, Siberia and the Faroe Islands, for over four decades. His breathtakingly-beautiful, black and white motifs show glaciers and ice formations, but, above all, the unique everyday existence and extreme conditions for the people and animals living there. The photographer offers intimate insights into the elemental, human experience in nature at the edge of the inhabitable world. The Arctic, however, is threatened by unprecedented climate change and is undergoing a rapid and profound process of transformation. This is causing the disappearance of traditional ways of life, centuries-old cultures, and fascinating ice landscapes. The exhibition offers a moving glimpse into Axelsson's life's work and underscores the possibilities that photography offers in the – almost hopeless – fight against climate change.

Hunters and their sled dogs in Iceland, fishermen and farmers' wives, the Inuit of Greenland, reindeer herders in the Siberian tundra: Axelsson's portraits have such an immediate impact because his information comes first-hand, from the often extraordinary personalities on location, as well as from his own intense experiences. He avoids no risk and spares no effort to visit a wide variety of people in the most remote places and spend extended periods of time with them. He takes part in their arduous activities and enjoys their trust. They allow him to take snapshots of their lives and to write down their tales, making him an ambassador for their existence and their changing living conditions. In his pictures, Axelsson is telling the stories of people who are experiencing the global climate crisis first-hand. This constancy over decades, combined with a deep respect for his fellow human beings, has made Axelsson one of the most important witnesses and chroniclers of the growing change to the planet's climate that is now hitting the Arctic with great force.

The second major subject of Axelsson's work is the power of the elements and the experience of nature's majesty in the northern reaches. His impressive photographic portraits of landscapes are a testimony to this. With the eye of a researcher and an artist, he analyses the smallest of natural structures, which are reminiscent of drawings or abstract compositions.



Axelsson's childhood delight and fascination when flying over glaciers has never lost its hold on him: for over forty years, he has been consistently capturing his homeland and the far north in powerful and moving motifs. The photographer himself has an airplane pilot's licence and has accompanied scientists and other artists on their travels. He still has vivid memories of his first experiences with photography at the age of ten, using his father's Leica: "I was sitting with a Leica camera in my arms that my dad had lent me. I was tirelessly interested in taking pictures. It took a lot of trust to lend a child a camera that was as expensive as a car. I wasn't allowed to disappoint him. I had promised him to take good care of the camera. He had given me art books about famous painters and foreign magazines, such as Life and Stern. They contained the coolest pictures I'd ever seen. 'You have to take pictures and apply yourself' was the message I got from Dad. Those photographs were etched in my mind, no less than the paintings. But I couldn't paint, so I had to take pictures."

The exhibition is made up of a personal selection of groups of works Axelsson has photographed over four decades. It was set up in collaboration with Isabel Siben, Director and Curator of the Art Foyer of the Insurance Chamber Cultural Foundation in Munich, where the exhibition was originally on display in 2021.

Biography:

Ragnar Axelsson (RAX for short) was born in Iceland in 1958. He was given his first Leica camera by his father, who also explained the basics of the medium to him. After completing his training as a photographer, he worked as a photojournalist for the Icelandic daily newspaper, Morgunblaðið. In addition, he took on freelance assignments in Latvia, Lithuania, Mozambique, South Africa, China and Ukraine. His pictures have been published in magazines such as Life, Newsweek, Stern, Geo, National Geographic, Time Magazine and Polka, and have been exhibited around the world. From the long list of his photo books, it is worth mentioning in particular: "Faces of the North" (2004, new edition 2015), "Last Days of the Arctic" (2010) and "Behind Mountains" (2013), "Glacier" (2018) and the volume accompanying the current exhibition, "Where the World Is Melting" (2021). In 2001, Axelsson received an honourable mention at the Leica Oskar Barnack Award (LOBA), and in 2020 was shortlisted for the LOBA with his series "Arctic Heroes". He has photographed with various Leica M cameras; more recently with the Leica SL and Leica SL2, as well as the Leica M Monochrom 246.

Quotes:

"One of my greatest memories as a seven-year-old boy was seeing a glacier for the first time. I was on my way to the countryside under the Öraefajökull volcano and saw the glacier out the window of a Douglas DC3 airliner. The plane flew low, the glaciers glowed in the spring sun and the cracks were



staggering. I couldn't take my eyes off them."

"When I passed his house in Thule, some thirty years ago, an old hunter said to me: 'There's something wrong, it shouldn't be like this, the big ice is sick'. I started to look at things in a different way back then."

"It has never been more important than it is now to document in words and images the lives of the people who are experiencing great changes in the Arctic, so that the whole world can see what is happening. A photograph is only a small piece of the jigsaw that makes up the big picture, but sometimes it's these small pieces that open our eyes to the broader reality."

"For me, the strength of photography is black and white – it leaves room for the imagination. In my darkroom, I can use exposure techniques to influence the atmosphere of the images. I grew up in a darkroom and have spent thousands of hours there. The moment when the photo slowly comes to life is like magic. And maybe my heart is black and white too."

About Leica Camera

Leica Camera AG is an international, premium manufacturer of cameras, lenses and sports optics. As part of its growth strategy, the company has expanded its portfolio to include mobile imaging (smartphones) and the manufacture of high-quality spectacle lenses and watches, and is also represented in the home cinema segment with its own projectors.

Leica Camera AG, having its headquarters in Wetzlar, Germany, and a second production site in Vila Nova de Famalicão, Portugal, operates a global network of its own distribution companies with around 120 Leica Stores worldwide.

The Leica brand stands for excellence in quality, German craftsmanship and industrial design, combined with innovative technologies. An integral aspect of the brand culture is the promotion of the culture of photography, with around 30 Leica Galleries worldwide, the Leica Akademie and international awards such as the Leica Hall of Fame Award and the Leica Oskar Barnack Award (LOBA).

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