

## REVIEW



Schwartz's images of the Rhone Glacier, Switzerland.

# How to capture a retreating glacier

## Jendreyko's film on photographer Daniel Schwartz showing at BAFF

By Jim Quilty  
The Daily Star

**B**EIRUT: Daniel Schwartz recalls how, early in his career, he met an eccentric fellow with a Contax camera and six expensive lenses. The stranger had noticed the younger man was carrying a Hasselblad and the two fell into a conversation about photography.

At one point the fellow asked Schwartz if he wanted his camera.

"Take it," he said, "and do something with it."

"It was a pivotal encounter," Schwartz tells filmmaker Vadim Jendreyko, musing that he's been trying to do something with his camera ever since. He's been carrying the Contax for 40 years.

Jendreyko's 2018 documentary "Beyond the Obvious" is a profile of Schwartz. It probes his biogra-

phy and oeuvre in search of the roots of his most recent project, documenting the retreat of glaciers in mountain ranges around the world – a project Schwartz published in 2017 as "While the Fires Burn. A Glacier Odyssey."

Jendreyko's film will be screened this week at the Beirut Art Film Festival. Schwartz himself will hold a talk at the Sursock Museum Monday (today), during which he'll discuss the photo series at the core of his book.

Documentary films about noted photographers – Christian Frei's 2001 film "War Photographer," on the work of James Nachtwey, say – tend to follow in a similar pattern.

Naturally they devote screen time to examining the photos themselves and quizzing the photographer. Insights from the subject's colleagues and collaborators can be interspersed among these segments and filmmakers frequently follow their photographers into the field.

Jendreyko follows this approach, interviewing Gary Knight (a colleague of Schwartz at VII photo agency) and Wolfgang Horner (the photographer's publisher), who share anecdotes about his approach to his work. He also follows

Schwartz to the Karakoram region of Pakistan, where he and his Hasselblad are shooting the Batura and Passu glaciers.

"Beyond the Obvious" is more interested in capturing these stunning locations for big-screen projection than in formal experimentation. That suits the engaged agenda of its subject and it doesn't make the film particularly predictable.

While discreet, the filmmaker gets close enough to his subject's private life to capture some of the personal quirks of discipline that accompany the talent behind his varied body of work.

As the filmmaker notes in voice-over, Schwartz was introduced to both mountain glaciers and photography as a young man. His father was an avid amateur photographer and filmmaker fond of family hikes among Switzerland's glaciers. Jendreyko samples some of his footage from the 1950s as an archival point of reference for Schwartz's concerns as an adult.

Over his nearly four decades in the field, the photojournalist has reported from Africa, the Middle East, Central, South and South East Asia. The work he's produced,

shown in photo essays, exhibitions and book projects, has emerged from extensive traveling about his regions of interest, all prefaced by intensive research.

Thanks to his thoroughgoing approach, his career is littered with monumental projects. Beginning in the 1980s, he embarked on a series of field trips, culminating in the publication of "The Great Wall of China" in 2001, that saw him become the first Westerner to document the full length of the world's longest man-made barrier.

Published in 2009, "Travelling through the Eye of History" and its companion volume "Schnee in Samarkand," document another sprawling undertaking – Schwartz's effort to synthesize two decades of photography in the five former-Soviet central Asian republics and the adjoining regions of the Caspian Sea, Iran, Pakistan, Indian Kashmir, Xinjiang (China) and Mongolia.

Over the years, Jendreyko notes, Schwartz's work has returned to the people living in crisis regions and the difficult living conditions they face.

The humanist concerns underlying the photographer's practice have expressed themselves in his

concern with climate change.

The photos in his 1997 book "Delta: The Perils, Profits and Politics of Water in South and Southeast Asia" record how rising sea levels have destroyed fertile river delta regions in Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Bangladesh.

After describing the work behind "The Great Wall of China," Jendreyko remarks upon Schwartz's fondness for shooting his subjects from behind.

The photographer turns to a picture of a youngster forced to flee home wearing one oversized shoe, belonging to his mother.

It's only possible to see this, he observes, because he's already passed you.

It's tempting to apply this observation to Schwartz's current subject as well. It's only now that they're in danger of vanishing, thanks to climate change, that it's possible to photograph glaciers meaningfully.

Vadim Jendreyko's "Beyond the Obvious. Daniel Schwartz. Photographer" will be projected at Metropolis Cinema-Sofil Wednesday, Nov. 21, at 9:15 p.m. as part of the Beirut Art Film Festival. See [www.metropoliscinema.net/page/home/](http://www.metropoliscinema.net/page/home/).