

## PROFILE: *Art Wolfe*

**FAR RIGHT** Shooting an Australian bushfire. Art Wolfe on location in Arnhem Land. This image typifies two of his commonly used techniques - positioning himself as close as possible to the subject, and using a tripod for the majority of his shoots. Canon 5D, 16-35mm lens @ 26mm, 20s @ f/8, ISO 200, Gitzo tripod and post processed in Photoshop.

**BELOW** Icebergs on the Antarctic Peninsula. During his most recent trip Art Wolfe focused on capturing ice and icebergs in the most dramatic way. In this shot he is framing one iceberg with the arch of another. It's a creative way of developing depth and drama in this otherwise white world. Canon 5D Mk II, 16-35mm lens @ 35mm, 1/320s, f/13, ISO 400, taken from Zodiac and post processed in Photoshop.





# Wolfe

## *In The Wilderness*

Legendary veteran US outdoor and wildlife photographer **Art Wolfe** is coming to Australia to explain the techniques he uses in capturing nature at its most pristine. He talked to Denis Glennon about his career and his inspiration.



**A**rt Wolfe is a photographer and anthropologist, but he has an artist's eye. Another anthropologist and ethnobiologist, Dr Wade Davis, is one of the world's great story tellers, with personal adventures to match. As an "Explorer-in-Residence at National Geographic", he has specialised in spending time (over the last 30 years) with indigenous communities worldwide, exploring their cultural practices. He lectures all over the world on what it means to be human and alive – living within nature and using and respecting its biodiversity. He sees us as a "wildly imaginative and creative species." He follows the human diaspora and shows how our ancient past can help us to protect our future – he's an anthropologist who stands out from his fellow professionals.

Art Wolfe works like Davis, only with images. Over the last 30 years, Art Wolfe has photographed on every continent and in hundreds of locations. He has authored over 65 books, each full of outstanding images which interpret and document the planet's disappearing wildlife, ecosystems and native cultures. Like Davis in his books, Wolfe's pictorial stories are an inspiration to those who seek to understand and preserve the fragile parts of our planet. His photographs are instantly recognised for their mastery of composition, perspective and artistic expression. Wolfe is one of the world's

greatest pictorial story tellers. Using a intermingling of artistic and journalistic styles to create his signature eye-catching images, Wolfe's photography documents his subjects and captivates observers. Over a lifetime of creating images he has transformed nature and wildlife photography into an art form. His close ups of animals, frequently taken with wide-angle lenses, are astonishing; he seems to captivate them, and his mind, eyes and lens seem to seek their soul. Looking at his photographs you can feel the connection he makes with his subjects when he presses the shutter button. I've used the comparison with Davis simply to show their individual, yet analogous emphasis on storytelling, and to illustrate how good Wolfe really is. He stands alone in terms of sustained brilliance in photographing the natural world over the past 30 or so years.

### Early Interest

Art Wolfe's childhood home was full of artists' things he could touch, hold and feel – brushes, tubes of paint, paper, canvases, wet paint, wet ink, and the like. Photography was not his first medium of expression – as the son of commercial artists, painting and drawing were his first choices. It was the same in art school at Washington University. But a couple of years into college his allegiance shifted from painting to photography because it was easier to create original compositions

## PROFILE: *Art Wolfe*

**RIGHT** Art Wolfe and a southern elephant seal  
This image, taken on South Georgia Island, shows how close the animals of Antarctica will come to you (if you have the courage to let them). Clearly Art Wolfe is at home with them! Canon 5D, 70-200mm lens @ 105mm, 1/250s @ f/4.5, ISO 640 and post processed in Photoshop.

**BELOW** An inquisitive monk looks to the side, while his fellow monks remain deep in prayer during the celebration of Losar, the Tibetan New Year, at Norbutse Bon Monastery near Kathmandu. Canon 1Ds Mk II, 70-200mm lens @ 153mm, 1/40s @ f/4, ISO 200 and post processed in Photoshop



with a camera and there was less “gear” to carry when mountaineering. His start in photography was documenting the climbs and trekking he was undertaking – to show what it was like on the top of glaciers. That photography rapidly went from documentation to becoming art, as he drew more from his art studies to aid his image-making. He was always clear on what he wanted to capture – landscapes, wildlife and nature. When he was in his teens he started selling paintings to friends of his parents.

That early success built self-esteem and confidence in getting his work into retail outdoor clothing stores around the northwestern US city of Seattle. Soon there

was an Art Wolfe photo behind every rack of polar fleece jackets! His climbing friends in the local Boeing camera club were photographers, too, and they drove each other into new and higher realms of work - all just avid enthusiasts, shooting with film. On a trip to Antarctica in 2004 he took his first shot with a digital camera - water droplets on the rail of the ship crossing the Drake Passage. Within minutes the image appeared on his computer screen. He was blown away by the quality of the first digital picture he ever took. That was the end of film for Wolfe and he has never been locked into a single ISO since! Around 500 rolls of unexposed film came back from that trip and he has not taken another transparency since then.

In the last decade digital cameras and image-processing software have created new trends, but Wolfe and others of his generation are still leading the field. Yet, none of them have stayed in the genre they started in 30 years ago. Wolfe has moved into videography and television productions. His desire is to leave the world a better place than when he entered it. He likes to contribute to a greater society and he sees teaching as a noble profession. If he can pass on a bit of the wisdom and knowledge he has accrued over the years, pass on that love of the environment, it makes him feel good. He doesn't have children, so his legacy will be the work that he has created.



### VISITING AUSTRALIA - ART WOLFE'S TOUR DATES



Art Wolfe will be presenting a series of public lectures and workshops in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth in March 2012. Who should attend? The quick answer is, anyone who likes evocative and haunting images, whether they're a serious photographer or not. In fact, even if they've never taken a photo in their life and never intend to, it's still worthwhile just to enjoy Wolfe's images and his expert and experienced comments. But don't expect technical lectures! Wolfe is a very good speaker and his presentations are very professional and beautifully put together. He is very inspirational. Even if

in the past, you couldn't stay focused for a 20-minute talk, you'll spend the entire day riveted to the screen when you view Wolfe's stunning imagery. I've seen and listened to a lot of speakers, and Wolfe is certainly one of the best in the business .

Wolfe's tour dates and venues are as follows:

**Sydney: Australian National Maritime Museum Theatre, 2 Murray St, Darling Harbour**

- Lecture – Friday, March 16, 7-9.30pm
- Workshop – Saturday, March 17, 9am - 4.30pm.

**Melbourne: The Spring Street Conference Centre Theatrette, 1 Spring St, Melbourne**

- Lecture – Friday, March 23, 7-9.30pm
- Workshop – Saturday, March 24, 9am - 4.30pm.

**Perth: State Library of WA Theatre, 25 Francis St, Perth**

- Lecture – Friday, March 30, 7-9.30pm
- Workshop – Saturday, March 31, 9am – 4.30pm.



## Working in TV

As a member of Canon's elite "Explorers of Light" group, Wolfe's photographs and stories are published by magazines throughout the western world. His video *The Living Wild*, documents his work in several locations. He is at ease in the world of television production, with programs like *On Location with Art Wolfe*, *Techniques of the Masters*, *American Photo's Safari* and his 13-episode series *Travels to the Edge with Art Wolfe*, which is a stunning production. Anyone watching Art Wolfe's evocative pictorial stories will have their mind captured. They quickly recognise they're in the presence of a free-spirited wanderer who's a most articulate and influential advocate for the preservation of the planet's nature, wildlife and remote cultures. Wolfe is recording these areas before they're lost to modernity and our ever-shrinking world.

Having recently spent time with this iconic photographer on workshops in Antarctica and China, I discovered he is more than a great shooter, he is a master teacher at the pinnacle of his craft. When photographing alongside Wolfe it's evident there is a rare synthesis between his livelihood, his passion for photography and his willingness to educate. The significance of this synthesis comes through from the very

first shoot with him. His passion generates its own energy. His teaching is infectious. People are eager to learn from him.

## Artistic Influence

Wolfe's distinctive approach to photography is influenced by his initial education (bachelor degrees in fine arts and art training at the University of Washington, and his love of the outdoors and the environment. His art education plays a noticeable role in his ability to convey information successfully in both his photographs and his outstanding workshops.

Wolfe's own imagery is constantly evolving and his accomplishments have come because he is always trying to improve his work artistically and he works really hard at it. He says he doesn't have one style and that he keeps evolving. He always wants to push something innovative in his photography. Yet, even for Wolfe it isn't just a case of walking up to a subject, pressing the shutter button and coming away with an iconic image. Photographers in his company are encouraged and inspired by him because he freely reveals the truth about his own creative journey to a final image.

He gives of himself to help people look at art in new ways; to be more open to how other forms of art can improve everyone's

**ABOVE** A lava flow enters the ocean. This image of lava flow clearly shows the influence of Wolfe's early training as an artist. It could easily be mistaken for a painting, having dramatic foreground colours, flowing brush lines, and a moody sky, all combining to portray the destructive power of the molten lava and raging sea.

photography. As an artist/water-colourist he is very thoughtful about the essentials of design, and colour connections which allow him to see so much of what he humbly calls "unintended art", in the most unexpected places. He sees potential photographs in places most people can simply walk past. He has that special gift for seeing a photograph and he's able to create images that are archetypal, and which resonate over time. This comes through in his talks as well as in his many photographs.

When he deconstructs one of his images (a very powerful teaching tool) you are taken into the worlds of Monet (for long exposures to create impressionist photos), Van Gogh (to create movement in images), Dali and Joan Miro (for creating surrealism), Mark Tobey (to help find new visions of spiritual/mystical expression - ones capable of inspiring deep feelings in viewers), M.C. Escher (famous for his so-called "impossible structures", Wolfe draws on Escher's use of positive and negative

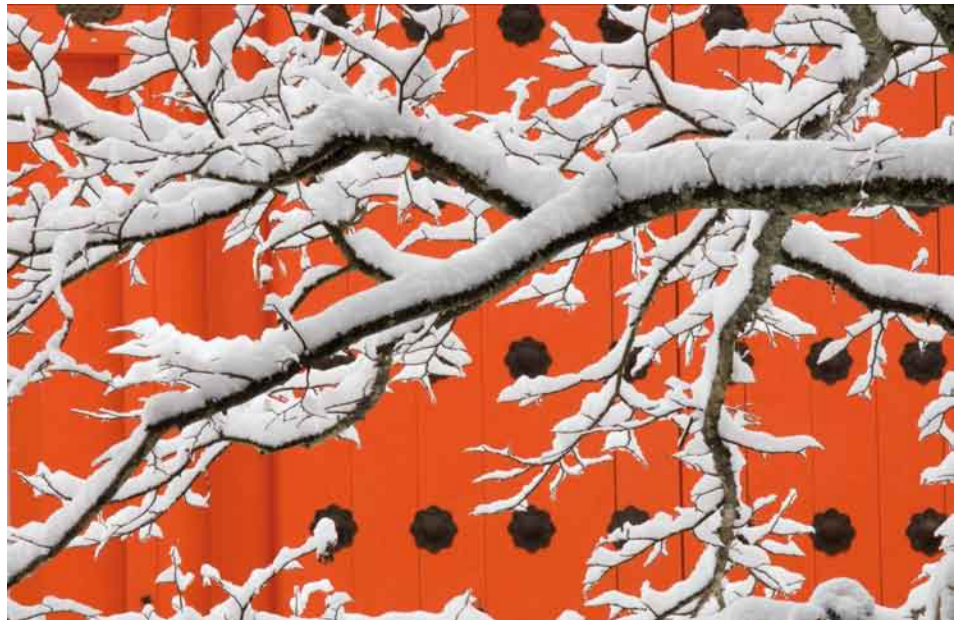
## ☀ Wolfe's Camera Kit



Because of his extensive itinerary Wolfe likes to travel as lightly as possible. Recently he has worked with a Canon pro digital SLR, the 1Ds Mk III; which he describes as “a 21-megapixel brick of technology”. The pro body is almost impervious to rain, snow, and dust, (conditions in which he works much of the time) which is why he prefers it to the same megapixel size 5D Mk II, despite the latter’s HD video and low-noise capabilities. He limits himself to a few Canon lenses most of the time. More than half of his images are shot with either a 16-35mm f/2.8 Mk II or a 70-200mm f/4, which he says is just as sharp as the heavier and more expensive f/2.8 version. When he needs a longer telephoto, he’ll use a Canon 400mm DO lens, because of its light weight and high performance. For his stunning wildlife images he will shoot with a Canon 500mm f/4.

A discussion with him on equipment choices will likely have you gently informed that (i) cameras are just tools, (ii) the legendary French shooter Henri Cartier-Bresson only used a Leica rangefinder and a 50mm lens, (iii) it’s the mind and the eye that matter most, and (iv) the will to get off your couch and shoot is more important than the “tool” in your hand!

He travels with a carbon-fibre Gitzo tripod (which he uses all the time, except when he’s shooting in markets, in crowds or he wishes to be less conspicuous), Singh-Ray graduated ND filters, a Canon TC-80N3 (he calls it “a standard cable release on steroids”), a circular polariser or two, an Apple Mac 17in laptop with a matte screen and Adobe’s Lightroom 3, and a few rugged external hard drives. A few flashes and reflectors are in his bag as well. But that’s it for 90% of his work.



**ABOVE LEFT** Samadhi practice, Varanasi, India. This image typifies the pre-planning and attention Art Wolfe gives to the composition of many of his memorable images.

**ABOVE** Snow-covered branches. These snow-covered branches in front of a brightly coloured wall created a peaceful scene at the Koyasan Shingon Temples, Japan. Wolfe sees art in the most surprising places. Canon 1Ds Mk III, 70-200mm lens @ 200mm, 1/10s @ f/16, ISO 125 and post processed in Photoshop.

**RIGHT** Torres del Paines, Chile. The landscape of the park is dominated by the Paine massif, which is an eastern spur of the Andes, located on the east side of the Grey Glacier, rising dramatically above the Patagonian steppe. Here, with typical Wolfe artistic flair, the massif is dominated by the extraordinary cloud formations. Taken with a Canon 5D, 16-35mm lens @ 17mm, 0.3s @ f/7.1, ISO 100.



spaces in his images) and Jackson Pollock (for unbridled abstract expressionism).

Pollock once said “On the floor I am more at ease, I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around in it, work from the four sides and be literally ‘in’ the painting”. Likewise, Wolfe spends a great deal of his time close to or on the “floor” photographing animals and birds, using a wide-angle or even a fish-eye lens! No wonder viewers feel drawn into Wolfe’s wildlife photographs. He also brings to his photography a strong knowledge of natural history, of mammal and bird behaviour. As a result, his images have become very intimate.

## Wolfe & Conservation

Wolfe works with environmental agencies and organisations around the world. Efforts that address habitat destruction get his attention quicker than anything else because of the rate he sees these regions being destroyed. He has a firm conviction that everything is connected on this planet and he makes the point that what’s happening, for example, with forest decimation in Borneo, affects people in other parts of the world. Wolfe’s wildlife advocacy is testimony of his dedication to his work. The Wildlife Conservation Society, the Natural Resources Defence Council, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy,



Rainforest Alliance and Earth Justice are representative of organisations he's worked with at one time or another. He is a Foundation Fellow of the US-based group of 102 photographers, the International League of Conservation Photographers (ILCP). Its Board of Directors includes some of the most outstanding scientists, conservation leaders, media editors and corporate leaders of our time – eminent people like Sir David Attenborough, Dr Jane Goodall, Chris Johns (Editor in Chief of *National Geographic*), Sir Iain Douglas Hamilton (from Save the Elephants Foundation), and Dr Cristián Samper (from the Smithsonian Institute). Wolfe sees conservation photography as not only photographing and documenting the natural world - he extends that definition to embrace traditional cultures. He's concentrated over the last 15 years on documenting many remote traditional peoples, in the knowledge those populations, their culture and their languages are rapidly disappearing. He freely declares he's on a self-imposed mission, whenever he can, to document these cultures, and show how they live, knowing that his images may be one of the few pictorial stories which document something that may soon no longer exist. His *Travels to the Edge with Art Wolfe* TV series was a response to the

September 11 terrorist attack aftermath, when for a few years people - especially Americans – only travelled to “safe” locations. He wanted to teach his fellow citizens (and other nationalities) about the multitudes of people and places on the planet, and convey the message that rather than demonising people we don't know, we should know what we have in common with them. For Wolfe, the series was (and still is) about educating viewers, and contributing what he could to a worldwide debate.

Wolfe gets particular enjoyment from the aspects of his photography which inspire and educate, and that is what he wanted *Travels to the Edge* to do. He constantly seeks ways to inspire people, educate them about the wonders of the planet, and to make them care about people they will most likely never meet. He demonstrates this caring characteristic in his interaction with local interpreters/ guides, which he always uses when visiting remote cultures. There is a deeper side to this extraordinary photographer.

### A Selection of Tips

Not surprisingly, Wolfe's advice doesn't focus on technical issues, equipment selection, camera features or Photoshop tricks. Art Wolfe actually gives the impression he's indifferent to equipment and computers! His advice to beginners who find they

**ABOVE** A Thorny Devil in the MacDonnell Ranges, Northern Territory, Australia. Wolfe always tries to shoot subjects the way he's never photographed them before. Here he includes a strong foreground subject as well as the quintessential Australian landscape and dramatic blue sky.

have a passion for photography is to focus on the artistic aspects of the craft. “Don't compromise on your art”, he says. His mantra is, always try to improve; to pursue your passion and not to “worry about making money”. He feels too many beginners (and some more experienced!) photographers really want to figure out how to make money from their passion and whether they can justify their interest in it by the amount of money they make from it. He thinks this is “wrong-headed”. He strongly advocates not concentrating on the monetary aspects, but instead simply following your passion, making whatever you can as you continue your adventure. Some day, if money is part of what you want, it will come. He adds, “Whether you sell your work or not isn't a measure of the quality or value of your images or the extent of the enjoyment you'll derive from your passion”. He believes most of the success in photography comes from just working really hard. Being a photographer is by no means an easy occupation, but Wolfe says that it can be “very rewarding on many personal levels”. ✨