





Le 28 août 1989 la montagne Sainte-Victoire s'embrasait. Le feu dura 3 jours et 3 nuits et dévasta plus de 5000 hectares de forêt, l'un des plus gros désastres écologiques dans le sud de la France au siècle dernier. Dès le lendemain, et les premières diffusions d'images montrant un massif calciné et méconnaissable, une véritable prise de conscience des pouvoirs publics et des collectivités va être à l'origine de la mise en place d'une profonde organisation pour prévenir, entretenir, équiper et aménager les massifs forestiers. Avec 1,5 million d'hectares de forêt et un taux de boisement atteignant près de 48%, la région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur représente à elle seule 10% de la surface forestière de toute la France. Ce territoire est l'un des plus exposés aux incendies de toute l'Europe et avec une sécheresse accrue entre 2016 et 2017, on recense plus de 1300 départs de feu durant cette période.

On August 28th 1989 the Montagne Sainte-Victoire was consumed by flames. The fire lasting 3 days and 3 nights ravaged over 12.3 thousand acres and became one of the worst ecological disasters in southern France during the previous century. The next day, as the first blackened and distorted images of the mountain were shown, national and local authorities would become sharply aware and usher in a deep restructuring of fire prevention methods for the protection, equipping and organising of forest massifs. With more than 3,7 million acres of forest and a afforestation rate close to 48%, the French region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur itself represents 10% of the forest area of France. This territory is one of the most exposed to fires all over Europe and with more drought between 2016 and 2017, more than 1,300 fires starts have been recorded during this period.















*Wildfire* | Arnaud Teicher

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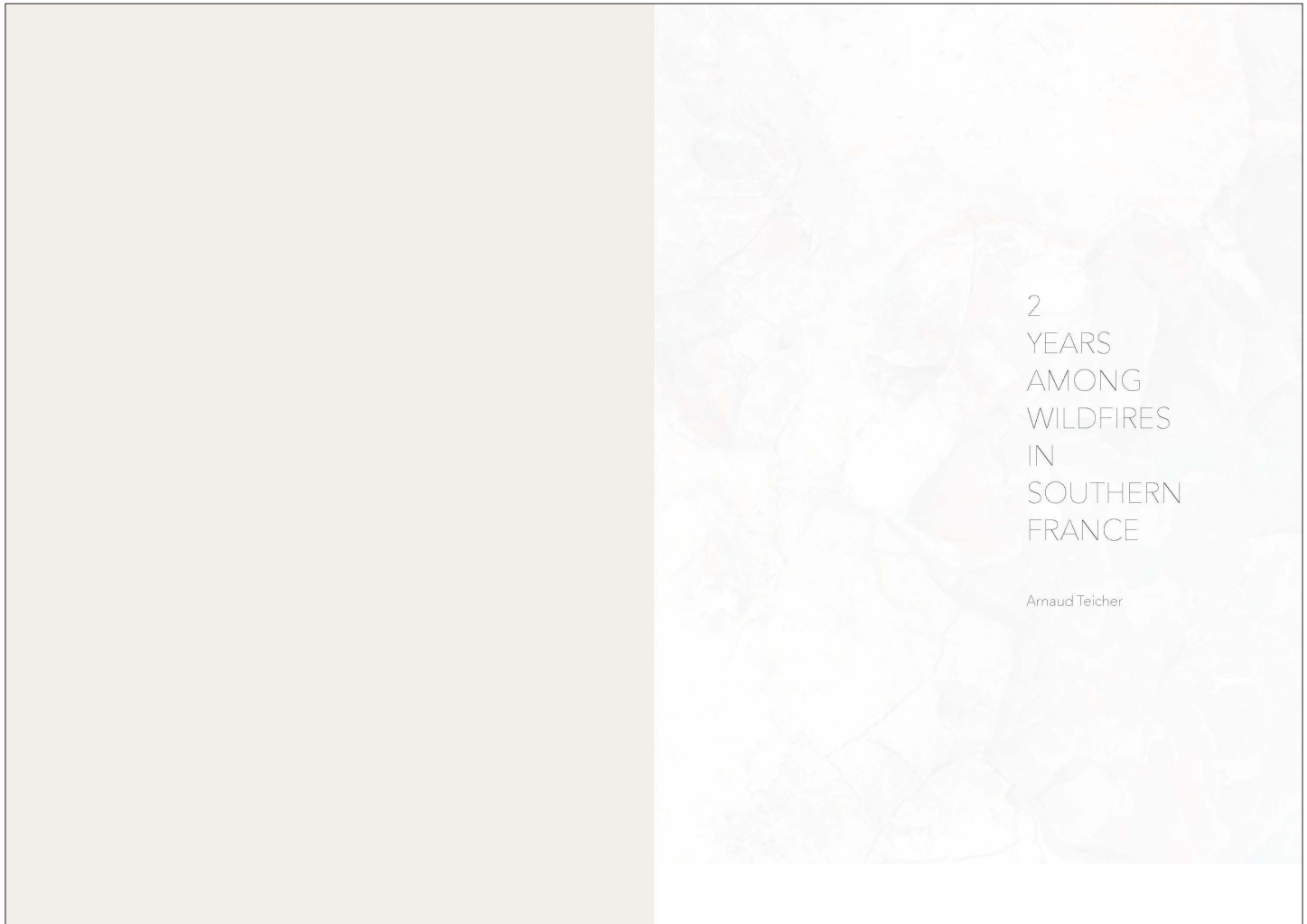
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I grew up in the south of France, in a little town near Toulon. It was a very calm area with a strong agricultural presence. My grandparents were peasants from Italy, they left the region of Piedmont in the early 20th century. I do not have many memories from my childhood in this region. My family and I often spent our vacations and weekends in the French southern Alps, where my grandfather had bought a little cottage. The cottage bordered Mercantour National Park and it was there where I first encountered mountains, fishing, hiking. I think all this sparked my interest in the environment and landscape. Around 2001 or 2002 my aunt gave me the old

camera of my uncle. It was a Konika Autoreflex T4, that I still use to this day. I started taking photos for pleasure, and spending a lot of time skateboarding. So it was a photogenic stuff. Afterward, I discovered the work of the black and white lab, which was magical. I was completely captured by watching the image appearing on the paper, and also by the smell of the chemicals which is difficult to forget. There was also a Polaroid, an SX-70, that I took everywhere, we have probably over 1000 polaroid prints from this time in our house. I have always loved conserving photos, when I was a child my parents would often show us old photo slides during winter. This could

be what I retain of my childhood. Later I studied graphic design in Paris. It was during this period that I discovered art. Every week we went to an exhibition about painting, sculpture, or photography. What a great time, everything was new to me. I was able to follow Guillaume Lebrun's photography course, a revelation to me. Before, I did not worry about "meaning" when I took photographs. In this period I was introduced to the concept of project, to the importance of reflecting about an idea and translating it into a form.

Today we are exposed to an over-consumption of images through social media, leading to a vicious

cycle where we need create "exotic" images to please an audience, a so called community. This can take us away from what we want to say. On the other hand, I am very conscious that social media allows us to share our work, which facilitates encounters and exchanges for photographers. At the end of the day, social media mirrors a direction taken by societies. It's not easy to turn away from it, but we can be more conscious of its mechanism and impacts.

The speed of communications today may reduce our freedom of creation; one would look to fulfill an expectation from the outside instead of answering one's own questions and thematic. I try instead to focus on topics with respect to which I feel legitimized to put forth my own approach.

Photography works like a "eye-opener", it's a way of understanding the life in a more complex way, each angle allows to see a thing in a specific direction, it makes the daily more exciting. It's as if the world is becoming a huge field of experimentation, each project is the opportunity for a new adventure that can allow us to learn more about something. I think it brings answers that raise our consciousness about who we are and so on.

Wildfire is the production of two years working on wildfires in the south of France. As a natural and fundamental element in the balance of a forest's ecosystems, fire nevertheless remains unexpected and hard to control. It can quickly become a danger for people as well. Wildfires are important subject in Provence, and more particularly all around the Mediterranean border. I went through these burned areas trying to understand what was hap-

pening under my feet, many of the answers are in nature, and its random behaviour should give us some answers.

As a photographer I have long wanted to work on a project that concerns the land where I live. I am passionate about mountain and I will usually photograph this territory almost every month. I wanted something about the Mediterranean environment, just after the house, where I could work every day, spend time here and see the project moving day by day. Every summer, I see a lot of water-bombers passing over the house. One day, driven by curiosity I walked into a burned area just right next to the house.

*"Does the fascination for these burned territories has to do with it being an example of nature's perseverance, courage, and capacity to calamitous events?"*



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*"On August 26th 1969 the montagne Sainte-Victoire (southern France), so dear to painter Paul Cézanne, was consumed by flames; the fire lasting 3 days and 3 nights ravaged over 5000 hectares (12.3 thousand acres) and became one of the worst ecological disasters in southern France."*



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I stayed for several hours and I was completely stunned by what I saw, from the inside, it seemed even more impressive. The initial feeling of wonder baffled me. As soon as I got home, I started looking for informations on the web about the different wildfires, and pretty quickly, I've listed all the wildfires specifications, beginning date, type of origin, burnt surface, type of vegetation... With more than 3,7 million acres of forest, the southeast of France itself represents 10% of the entire forest surface. Its afforestation rate is close to 46%, as this territory is by definition one of the most exposed to fires all over Europe. With more drought in the past two years, more than 1,300 fires starts have been recorded between 2016 and 2017. All of this challenges our relationship to nature, our position and the way we use our land.

Fires are a recurring topic in my region and especially all around the Mediterranean. The massive urbanisation that is linked to economic development and growing tourism has pushed construction closer and closer to forested areas, usually without regulation. All of this has favoured the establishment of conflict situations. The trade off between the needs of economical growth and the safeguard of nature is a well known yet unsolved problem. We must reflect on the way we are using the land and moreover on the meanings of our actions. We can no longer remain indifferent to global climate and environmental changes. How we can find solutions to save the planet if we do not first become aware of our mistakes? Don't we simply need to change our way of life?

I try to engage with all of this

through my photographs. Working in the "landscape" with a 4x5 inch view camera poses a challenge, with its weight and its volume. It is often troublesome to practice this discipline. However I wanted to truly experiment it. I wanted to document the different stages of reforestation, so, I methodically classified the wildfires over the last few years. This allowed me to know where and when I had to go for a shooting. Concretely, I observed areas that had been burned in a range from 2 years to 2 weeks. I am interested in showing the surface, the scale of the burned areas but also catching details like. Such as the bark that resists or the face of the exploding stone.

All this fits very well with the use of this medium, working with a large format camera requires a lengthy set up and allows me to deeply focus on each image. In a process of contemplation, it was important for me to indulge myself in nature, to take time to observe and provide a project that is the closest to reality.

#### AUTHOR'S BOOKS SUGGESTIONS

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Sud*, 2017  
Xavier Barral

Paolo Cognigni, *Le Garçon sauvage*, 2016 Editions Zoé

*Images de l'Himalaya*, 1935 Paris  
Encyclopédie Alpine illustrée  
(Illustrated with 38 plates of black and white photos by Italian photographer and mountaineer Vittorio Sella)

ARNAUD TEICHER  
FRANCE, 1975

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<sup>1</sup> Every year, an average of 500,000 hectares of forest are destroyed by forest fires in European Mediterranean regions. 90% of wildfires start originate from human activities and half of them are due to imprudence. The South-West regions with the Aquitaine massif (New Aquitaine) and the South-East with its Mediterranean forests (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur) are the most exposed regions at this risk. The Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Agriculture, launched in July 2018 a national awareness campaign and fire risk prevention. The purpose of this campaign is to disseminate advice on forest fire risk, both to ensure that it does not cause fire, but to protect it.  
(Source: French Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition)



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