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Declaration of love for the threatened Alpine glaciers



NICOLE HERZOG-VERREY:
“Gletscherliebe.
Glacier, mon amour”
Book of photographs with texts in
German and French. Weber Verlag,
Thun 2023. 255 pages, CHF 69

This special love story stems from a seminal experience: in 2007, Swiss Abroad Nicole Herzog-Verrey, who spends every summer in the Valais Alps, visited Trient Glacier with some Spanish friends. However, where just a few years before an imposing glacier snout had stood, there was nothing left. That made her very sad, writes the author in the introduction to her work “Gletscherliebe. Glacier, mon amour” (which translates as “My love for glaciers”). Following her thought-provoking experience, she wondered how, as a visual artist, she could draw attention to the consequences of climate change.

For the next 14 years, Herzog-Verrey visited Alpine glaciers in Switzerland and France every summer – totalling 40 glaciers by 2022. She compiled an illustrated book of these visits, showing the past beauty of this threatened world in all its glory: imposing glacier crevasses, turquoise blue colours and lighthearted close-ups of pieces of ice and stone resembling forbidding statues surveying the landscape from their thrones.

The author did not make any scientific statement through her work; she let her feelings guide her instead: “I was looking out for ‘my’ glaciers as if they were suffering beings.” She recorded her impressions of her visits to the vanishing ice in brief texts, which she uses as introductions to the chapters on the different glaciers. Nicole Herzog-Verrey visited some sites more than once over those years. She was especially interested in glacier snouts, where the disparity is clearest. The foot of the Rhone glacier at the Furka pass is one such example; here, protective covers are placed on the ice in the summer to preserve the ice grottos for the tourists.

Valais mountain guide Herbert Volken wrote the preface to the book. He accompanied the photographer on a two-day tour of the Aletsch Glacier. Volken wrote that he had rarely met someone who saw and appreciated the innumerable aesthetic features and wonders of nature with such a keen eye and refined sensitivity.

The author was born in Zurich in 1947, has roots in French-speaking Switzerland and lives in Madrid. She spent 25 years working as a photographer for many magazines and has been a freelance visual artist since 2005.

THEODORA PETER

A possible dignified farewell



ZÜRI WEST:
“Loch dür Zyt”
(Sound Service, 2023)

A new Züri West album. This is great news in itself – and more than we might have expected. After frontman Kuno Lauener, 62, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis six years ago, it looked like the Züri West story had come to an end that was as abrupt as it was sad.

What we can be sure of is that the band will never perform live again. Nevertheless, the Bern combo have made another record. “Loch dür Zyt” (Hole Through Time) is their first since “Love” in 2017. And some things have changed. Gere Stäuble and Wolfgang Zwiwauer have left the band, while Florian Senn (former Lovebugs) on bass and Kevin Chesham on drums have joined.

There are 13 new songs, mainly written by Kuno Lauener, including a couple of covers. It is a relaxed, accomplished, compact series of tracks that recount the passing of time, look to the past and question the meaning of life. The lyrics tell of resignation, bewilderment, acceptance, fatalism, melancholy – and defiance. They reflect Lauener’s personal journey with his illness and are both relevant and real. A form of poetry that cuts to the bone.

It is a moving album. Lauener is clinging on as best he can. He will never give up. “I louffe und i louffe u d’Chäuti stieucht mr schier dr Schnuuf / Aber chum du nume du Jahr du Nöis / No grad gieben i nid uf,” he sings on “Winterhale” (I walk on and on, and the cold almost takes my breath away / But come on, new year / I’m not giving up yet). “Blätter gheie”, an adaptation of a poem by Franz Hohler, is another standout track: “Blätter fallen, sie werden vom Wind zu einem letzten Tanz gebeten, sie sterben. Und dann wird es still,” the poem reads. (Leaves fall. They dance a final dance in the wind before they die. Then quiet descends.)

But the title song steals the show. Most of its lyrics originate or – to be precise – are derived from an old song called “Z.W.”, which dates back 35 years to the band’s debut album “Sport und Musik”. The new, updated version is a nod to the past. Life has come full circle. And we are here to witness it. “U mis einsame Härz schmärzt so fescht” (Oh, my lonely heart hurts so bad) in “Z.W.” has morphed into “U mis einsame Härz wo chlopfet u chlopfet” (Oh, my lonely heart keeps on beating) in the new album. A subtle but telling difference.

Does this LP finally mark the end of the road for Züri West? If so, it is a dignified, poignant farewell.

MARKO LEHTINEN