



## The fingerprints of man

*Once more shooting from the soul rather than a manual, Ted Leeming has embarked on a new project that documents whatever captures his imagination, whether good, bad or, in this case, ugly*

Photography is my refuge from the constant buzz of daily life; nature's haven where I lose myself and just occasionally, if magic aligns, glimpse the shadow of the sublime. Those exquisite moments that justify the cause may also be the reason I kept this sanctuary separate from other areas of my life for so long.

But in recent years, I have increasingly struggled to hear the voice that once so casually inspired and guided me. And as she became ever quieter, it slowly dawned on me that perhaps I needed to find new ways of listening. In search of answers, a project I was working on allowed me to question what motivates me emotionally rather than photographically, and whether incorporating my wider passions and interests into my practice might help me find answers. As a keen environmentalist with a somewhat dusty love for geography and cultures, I started to explore a more interdisciplinary approach.

I think one of the things holding me back had been a tendency towards delivering for others rather than feeding my own soul (the always-inspiring Paul Sanders alluded to something similar in a recent podcast). I had also perhaps become somewhat formulaic, focusing on the how rather than the why. I needed to challenge these assumptions, so having embraced the idea of personal criticism as proactive rather than a failing, I slowly began to analyse each element of my practice, including my vision, technique, equipment, outcomes and subject matter, to better understand what each brings to the table.

I am very slow so all this took several years to unpick, but the result is that several elements of my practice have been boxed into the loft, with the odd new item added to a bag which feels significantly lighter. With the clutter cleared, the clouds began to lift as I discovered a new path that more aptly reflects who I think I am today. I find myself revelling in wider reading and research around concepts, as these are now subjects that already fascinate me from multiple perspectives.

This in turn feeds into the image or series, which I also consider against my wider vision. In theory, the image might be the same, but how it arrived has fundamentally changed. I finally feel I am once more shooting from my soul rather than a well-thumbed manual. And best of all, the voice has returned, slightly mellowed but no less compelling.

This photo of Hambach open-cast coal mine, Germany's largest, was shot in the summer of 2022 as I 'commuted' on an e-bike from Scotland to Italy, responding to what inspired, horrified or intrigued me as I slowly wandered through today's landscapes and cultures. It forms part of an ongoing project exploring the fingerprints of man.