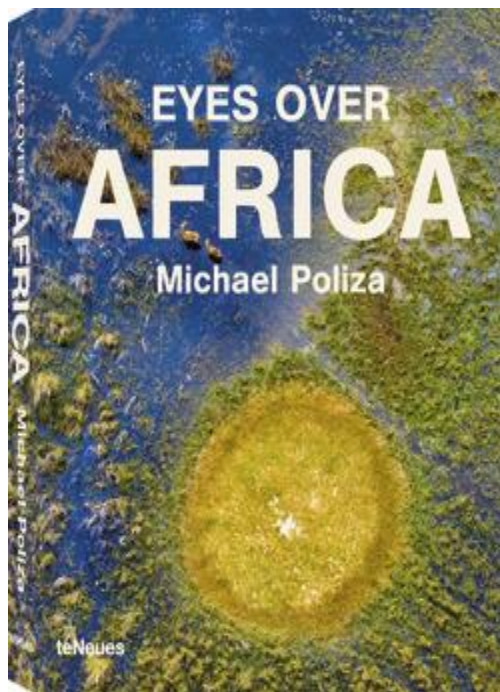


EYES OVER AFRICA By Michael Poliza

Seven weeks in a helicopter from Hamburg, Germany to Cape Town, South Africa and 25 000 photographs later, a book of almost 200 double-page aerial photographs of Africa was published. It started in 2003 when two “crazy” Germans met in the Seychelles and came up with the hare-brained idea of a helicopter trip to photograph Africa from the air.

Due to logistical problems and their respective time commitments, the scheme only came together in 2006. The two men, Frankfurt businessman Stefan Breuer (the one who had the dream of flying in a helicopter from Europe to Africa) and Hamburg photographer, Michael Poliza (who was mad enough to think this was a good idea) set off from Hamburg for Cape Town on 4 September in Breuer’s “fire-red” Agusta A109 with their pilots.



Eyes over Africa is housed in Special Collections in the Rare Book Library at the Doornfontein Campus of UJ.

It is a book worth looking at. Photographers will learn much and the rest of us can spend time immersed in the sheer beauty of these amazing photographs.



4 September 2006

Hamburg, Germany

From left to right: Franco Zanini, Michael Poliza, Stefan Breuer and Roberto Poroli ready for takeoff in the Agusta A109 Power from Hamburg

The helicopter pilots were Roberto Poroli, an experienced Swiss rescue pilot, and Franco Zanini from the Swiss mountain patrol. It was Poroli who had to manoeuvre the helicopter for Poliza to take the best shots. No mean feat when you have to consider the precision that photographers require to get that perfect shot and to top it all in a fully loaded helicopter. A Cessna Caravan was chartered from Namibia to carry supplies and extra fuel. A Namibian pilot, Pieter Ferreira, and Andrea Guerra from Milan, experienced in flying over Africa, piloted the plane.

Michael Poliza is a man of many talents. He started off as a teenage television and movie star in Germany, appearing in over 100 TV shows and films. He then went into the IT world, selling his first company at the age of 27, but continued in the IT business. Then in 1997, at the age of 38, he sold his companies, bought a 75 ft expedition yacht and embarked on a 1000 day journey around the world, sponsored by SONY, Microsoft, Deutsche Telekom, Olympus and the WWF. The idea was to travel around the world's remaining wildernesses at the speed of the ancient explorers, no faster than nine knots (16.67 km/h). Millions of people around the world logged on to the daily internet broadcast. The journey resulted in the book *Die Reise der 'Starship', 1000 tagen um die Welt* (*The Journey of the 'Starship', 1000 days around the world*), published as a CD-ROM in 2001 and as a book in 2004. Over 50 000 copies of this book were sold which was also important for the fact that it was the first coffee table book to print over 50% of its content from digital format.

Poliza then turned his attention to the continent which had caught his imagination. In July 2006, he published his book entitled *Africa*. In it he explored and contrasted close-up shots with broad shots. Despite costing over £70, the first print run of 10 000 copies was sold out in 3 months. *The Essential AFRICA*, a shortened, more portable version, where only the best of the photographs from *Africa* was selected, was published in March 2007, followed by *Eyes over Africa* in September 2007.

In *Eyes over Africa* Poliza exclusively used aerial photographs, most of them taken directly from above. He took photographs at heights from 100 (30m) to 2000 feet (610m) above the ground resulting in some of the most spectacular and unique photographs ever seen of the African continent. (It should be noted that he was careful not to allow the pilot to fly low enough to frighten any animals he was photographing.) He and the publisher, teNeues, do not skimp on the layout, using a double-page for each photograph. The quality of the photographs is outstanding, the colours are vivid and the detail is incredible. Viewers can figuratively lose themselves in the photographs. Strange shapes, patterns and perspectives emerge in these photographs. Scoop marks in the desert sand look like a child has been playing in a sandpit and a soccer field in the red soil of the semi-desert is partially covered with strange green circles. Unusual geological and architectural structures, human settlements and animals form interesting patterns on the ground, and biological and geographical phenomena create weird fantastically-coloured shapes.



9 September

Desert, west of Cairo, Egypt

Random scoop marks show where mining samples of the sands have been taken.



12 September

Near Lake Nasser, Egypt

The dark hues of the mountain play with perspective in the morning light.



16 September

Erta Ale, Ethiopia

When the sun has completely set, an intense red shimmer over the crater can be seen, even from far

away. All night the sky is illuminated by the glow of the boiling lava. Erta Ale, in the Afar or Dankil Depression, is an active volcano with a lava lake. (There are only four persistent lava lakes in the world.) The entire party agreed that landing in a three ton helicopter on the edge of the crater, 36 meters above the molten lava, was the highlight of the trip.



17 September

Lalibela, Ethiopia

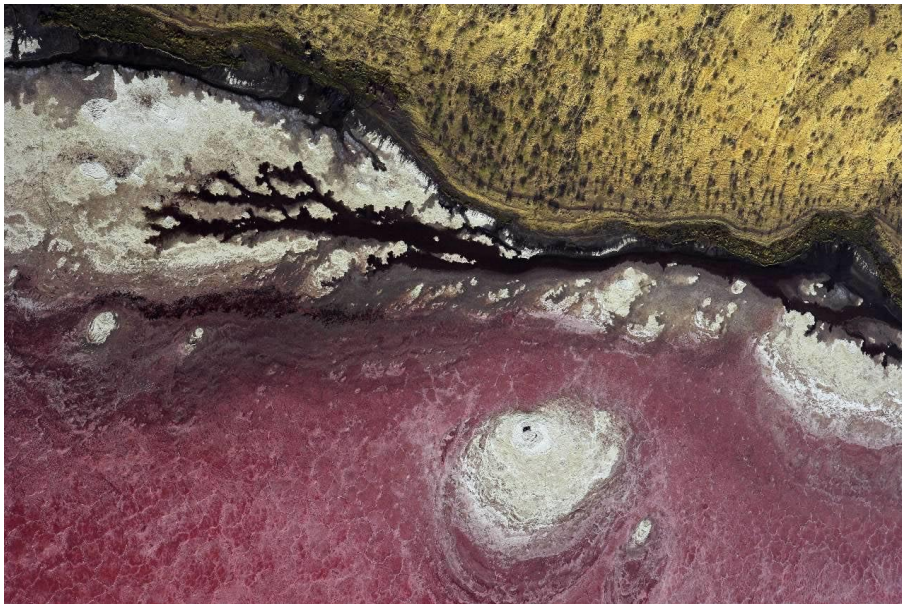
The Church of St George, standing 15 meters high and excavated below ground level from solid rock, is the most recognized of the 12 rock-hewn churches that were built during the 12th and 13th centuries in response to the acquisition of Jerusalem by Muslims.



29 September

Northeast of Nairobi, Kenya

A splash of flowering colour livens up a sparse settlement.



2 October

Lake Natron, Tanzania

The colour of the lake is characteristic of those where very high evaporation occurs. As water evaporates during the dry season, salinity levels increase and salt-loving micro-organisms begin to thrive, giving the lake its red hue.



8 October

Rufiji River, Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania

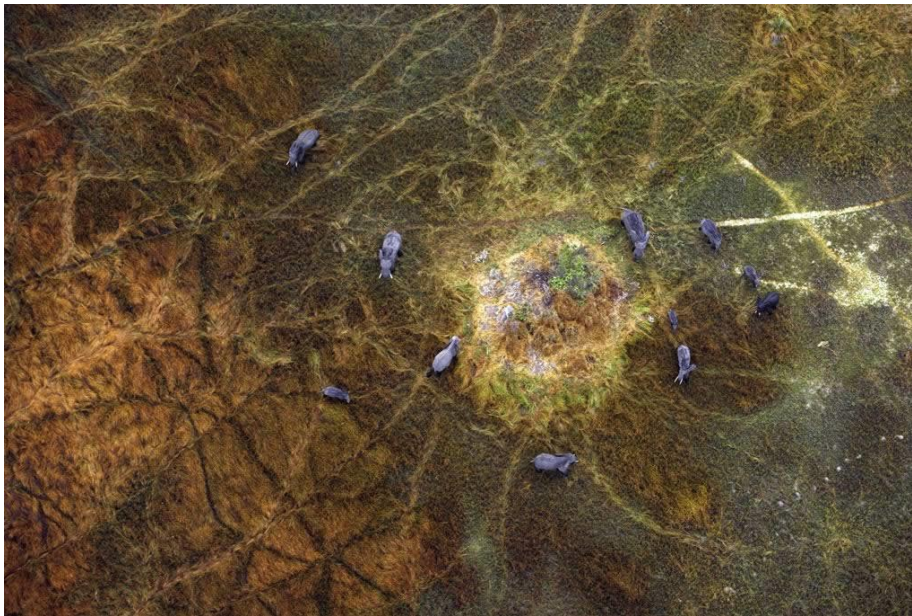
Buffalo crossing rivers are vulnerable to predation by crocodiles.



9 October

Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

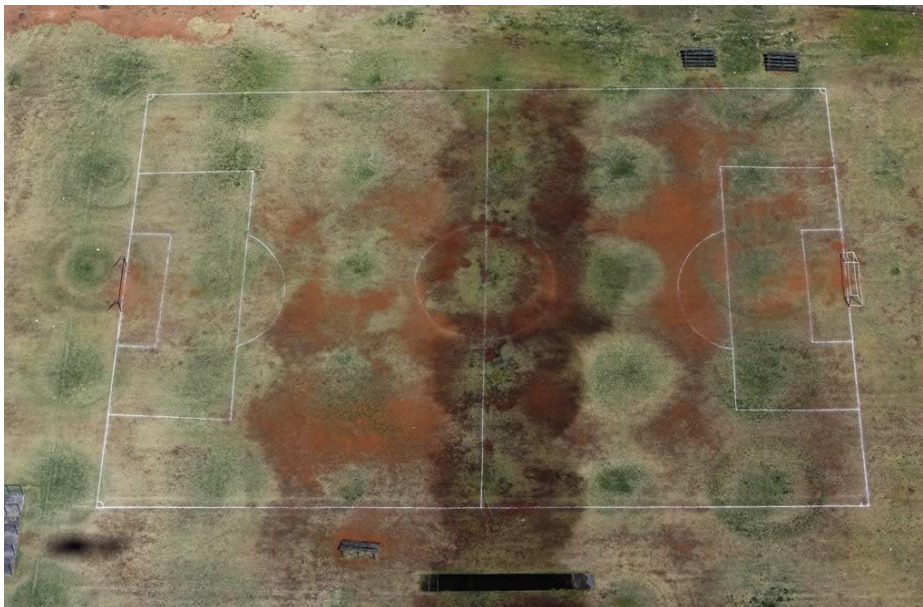
The interplay of land and sea on the northernmost Mozambique coastline creates magnificent patterns as rivers disgorge silt-laden waters and the sea's currents and tides grab at the coastal sands.



16 October

Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana

A group of elephants meanders around a muddy patch created by some of the first rains of the season.



25 October

Upington, South Africa

A football field near the Orange River shows the circular patterns created by the multiple sprinklers used to maintain a semblance of green in the dry conditions.



25 October

Cape Town, South Africa

The end of the journey. The Agusta landed at Cape Town's V & A Waterfront. A Capetonian, David Mostert, carried journalists and photographers in his Agusta so that they could take photographs of the arrival from the air.

The *Cape Times* published a weekly selection of the photographs Poliza took. Poliza posted his diary and photographs on his website as well as the *stern* website. And, after his arrival in Cape Town, the Hamburg magazine published a 35 page photo essay (one of the longest in its history) from the 25 000+ photographs that Poliza had taken.

The photographs taken in this 7 week period constitute 80% of the book. The rest were taken on two trips the same year, one over the northern Serengeti in August and one to Namibia in March just after the exceptional rains they had there. Though not taken from a helicopter, they remain true to the theme of the book being all aerial photographs. The book is dedicated to Wolfgang Rapp, a former Namibian pilot and close friend of Michael Poliza, who flew him around during his March trip to Namibia. He died tragically later the same year while taking off in his aeroplane.