

# Jonas Bendiksen: Curiosity in Practice

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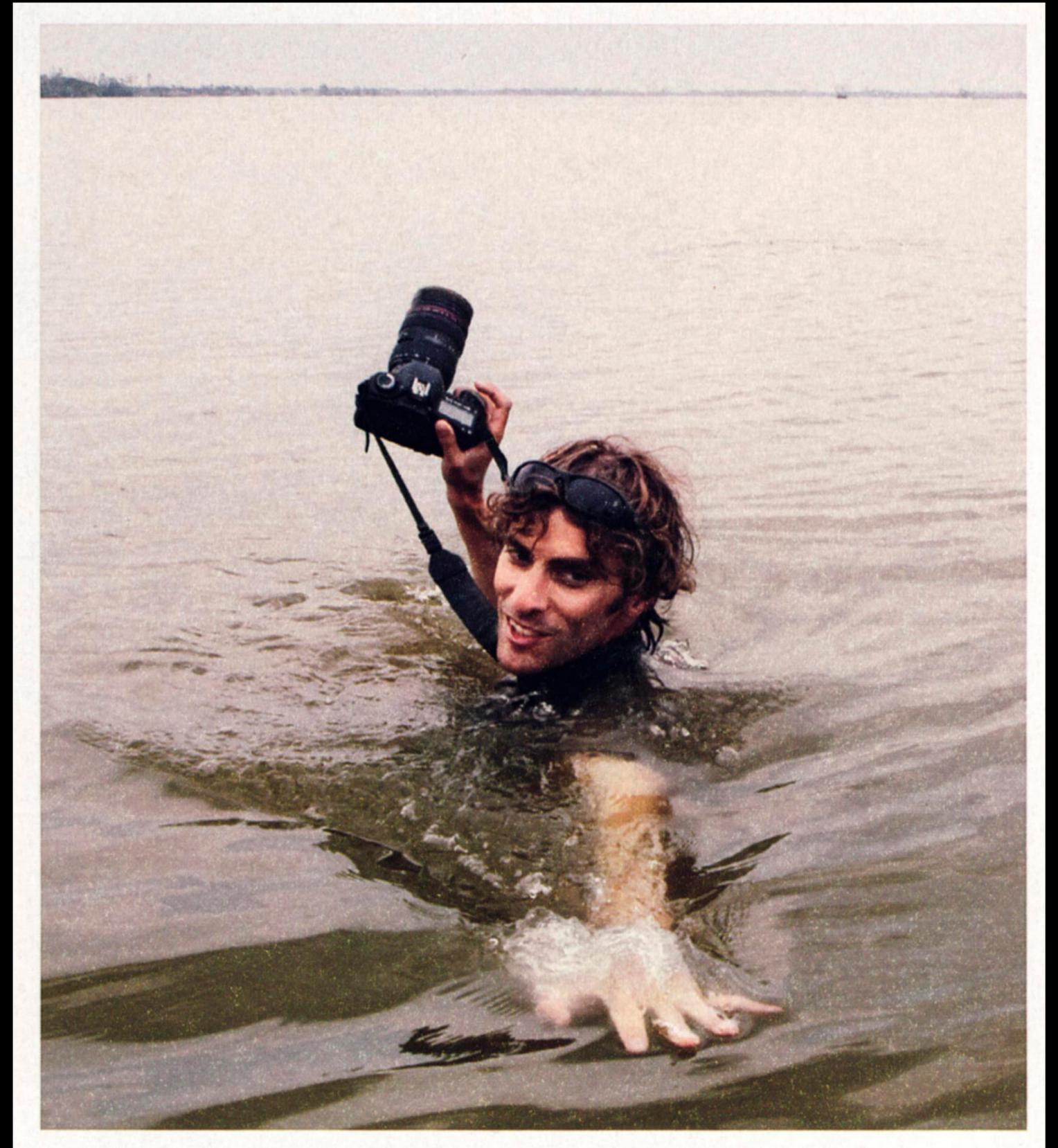
## 8. Advice from the Field

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# Equipment

For Bendiksen, the lighter the camera, the better. A small camera body gives you the agility to move quickly and easily around your subject and manage long days in the field. Likewise, having a simple, uncomplicated set up means there is less to think about or weigh you down when you are on the road, creating images. Only take the equipment you really need (not forgetting spare batteries, memory cards, or film!)

Great images have been captured on inexpensive equipment, so while it is definitely not necessary to own the latest model of camera, it is fundamental that, whatever camera you have, you familiarize yourself with it, and feel comfortable with it. This will mean that you are better prepared to take the shot when it presents itself, and can better manage any technical issues you might face when you are out in the field.



# The Basics

## **Use your feet**

When arriving at a location, Bendiksen's key advice is to move around the scene, using your feet to find the composition for your image as much as your camera. It is important to explore many vantage points when you are trying to capture a scene and it may be that going to higher ground or getting down on your knees is the deciding factor in the success of your image.

“A lot of people when they're starting out, they don't realise how important it is to move around in three dimensions. It's not just about pointing a camera but really like [finding] your vantage point above or below, I'm always trying to get my vantage point in the right spot. So I'm always sort of clambering up on things, trying things in three dimensions.”

## **Be patient**

A big part of photography is about enduring the elements: waiting for the sun to rise, the clouds to part, and the rain to stop. Bendiksen often visits locations where he sees potential for great images but the time of day or weather isn't quite right. Patience is therefore key to creating strong images and your efforts will be rewarded if you are prepared to wait for the weather to clear or to revisit at a different time of day.

## **Be prepared**

Being a photographer is a physically demanding job, often requiring long periods of time out in the field. People often underestimate the simple but very important tasks of getting a good night's sleep, wearing the appropriate clothing for the environment you're in, and packing food and water.

“For me, being creative and doing photography, it’s sort of an excess energy thing. I just can’t do it if I’m low on energy, or I’m hungry, I’m cold or I don’t have the right shoes... these kinds of things are as important as any sort of deep image analysis that I’ve ever heard because when I’m in the field, if any of those things kick in, I’m dead. You know, I can’t do anything.”

# Assignment: Different Approaches

Follow Bendiksen's advice by choosing a subject and photographing it from all directions, moving your body to capture images from above, below, near, far, in front and behind. Review the images afterwards to see how the use of your body positioning affects the success of the images and how you might choose to approach photographing other similar scenes in the future.



# Working with Fixers / Translators

Many of Bendiksen's projects involve working in territories where he does not speak the language or requires specialist access to communities. In these instances, he will employ a fixer (or translator) to work closely alongside him to produce the project.

A fixer's skills lie in their detailed knowledge of an area and the local relationships they can foster. Working with a fixer is very much a team endeavour and they can be invaluable in helping you navigate the geography, customs and personalities of a place.

For Bendiksen's long term project *The Places We Live*, he worked closely with several fixers who aided him in finding local accommodation and gaining access to photograph residents of some of the world's largest slums in their own homes. A key part of the project involved entering people's private spaces and therefore an important part of the fixer's role was to understand Bendiksen's vision for the project, so that they may accurately gain the consent of the people they meet, explaining what the objectives are and how the images are going to be used.

Another aspect of a fixer's role is safety. When working in volatile environments, a fixer's local experience is of paramount importance. An experienced fixer can help the photographer navigate difficult scenarios, explaining when it isn't appropriate to take photographs, and when it's time to leave an area.

'Fixer' is a very general term, many different types of people work in this field and there are parallels between the role of a fixer and the roles of a journalist or producer. It is important that you use recommended fixers who have worked with other photographers and discuss your project in detail before embarking on a trip. Having a collaborative, trusting relationship is key. It may also be that you are working with an experienced local journalist, who has covered the topic you are exploring over a number of years already. They might have spent some time developing relationships so it is important to be humble in your approach and open to local perspectives.

## Resource

[Witness \(by World Press Photo\): The Art of the Fix](#)

# Backup

Remember, back your stuff up! As Bendiksen reminds you, make sure you back your work up immediately after a shoot. There is nothing worse than losing what you've worked so hard to produce!



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