

THE MIND'S EYE

Photographs and story by Robert Palmer. Taken from LEICA FOTOGRAFIE, 1983 ENGLISH EDITION

Robert Palmer has been interested in photography since 1959. A Canadian by birth, and a foreign service officer, Palmer has distinct views about art in general and photography in particular: "Since a camera is essentially an image recording apparatus, you have to add a good portion of fantasy yourself if the picture is to turn out the way the eye saw it. The latter, after all, is a human organ of quite a different nature than the optical device through which it views the scene. The translation of direct impressions and individual feelings can therefore prove to be difficult and frustrating experience. The photographer's endeavors are looked at for only a short moment - in magazines, books, an exhibition or during a slide show. The observers see what they choose to see, and not the full message intended by the author!"

Palmer regrets this state of affairs. He finds it like reading a short story or an essay in *Readers Digest*, *Time* or *Newsweek* - only the degree of condensation is greater. In other words, the presentation is far from a novel, a symphony concert or a painting in a gallery. These forms of art have an introduction, gradual development, and a finale. Furthermore the eye and the ear help to round off the impression spiritually. "Much present-day photography appears to me to be like the rock music of the 80's: short theme, loud, repetitious. The inner eye is blinded or apathetic."

When it came to taking photographs of nature, this situation confronted him with both a problem and a challenge. He began to look for ways in which he could realize his ideas yet avoid the notion of haste. He wanted the observer to study his work for a longer period than usual, as if it were hanging like a painting in a gallery. Palmer believes it is imperative to give the viewer a chance to think about a picture in peace and quiet to let him complete it in his mind. He suggests that portrait photographers, whose prints will later adorn some wall, ought also to give sufficient thought to the same question.

Robert Palmer had the good fortune to be sent by his government to Kenya for three years. This gave him an opportunity to pursue his hobby of wildlife photography in his spare time. Of course, due to his particular occupation, he was not able to take part in extensive, carefully-prepared safaris and thus watch the animals for days on end. Rather, he had to grab occasional opportunities and make do with the existing light and environment. Having passed through the usual stage in which we all "shoot wildly at anything" and having gotten over the disappointment at seeing the results, Palmer began to leave some of his equipment at home. To observe animals he had to remain at a safe distance. By law he was not allowed to depart from the recognized trekking paths or permitted to get out of his car - which proved frustrating.

However, after he started using an 800mm f/8 Minolta mirror lens, adapted to fit his Leica, his photos were pleasing. All of the accompanying photos were taken with this hybrid outfit. The extremely narrow depth of field is actually an advantage in the present domain, as it separates the main subject from the background, as the photographer had visualized.

Robert Palmer was born in Uxbridge, Ontario, Canada in 1934. After leaving school, he underwent training in the field of advertising (Toronto) while continuing his studies of art and music. In 1959, he moved to Los Angeles and enrolled in the Conservatory of Art and Music. It was at this time that he took up photography. In 1964, he returned to Canada and began his career in the foreign service. He has been posted to Indonesia, Poland, London, Tokyo, and Nairobi.