

Robert Bösch

## Where the gods rotate valleys

“Down with the Alps, clear view of the Mediterranean!” – this ultimate demand of the politically turbulent 1980s was certainly not created in the Engadin. The mountains don't get in the way “up there”; they neither obstruct the view into the distance nor do they block the sight of anything else. On the contrary: they guide your gaze across an open, serene lake landscape to the horizon at the end of this beautiful world, where the gently sloping mountainsides from the left and from the right meet in the wide valley area of Maloja. Exactly where the sun sets on the shortest days of the year, as if the good Lord had rotated the valley until it was just right.

In this high valley, everything is a little lovelier than elsewhere – nature that can be enjoyed, sensed and felt. Skiing, golfing, kiting, surfing, cross-country skiing, mountaineering, biking, hiking, yoga, readings and concerts in the light mountain forest: nature is the visitor's friend in the Engadin. Here you will not find deep valleys with raging mountain streams, wedged between steep and high mountainsides, or cold and barren high plateaus battered by the wind, demanding everything from man and beast in order to survive. Here, no masses of ice and rock clinging high up on the steep flanks threaten life on the small alpine meadows on terraced slopes or at the bottom of the valley. No, instead it is simply the most beautiful and lovely thing that a mountain range can offer to people accustomed to civilisation. Here you can feel the power of the mountains in the most pleasant way – without risk or danger.

When you hike into the Val Roseg or get off the cable car on the Diavolezza, you are on the threshold, so to speak, of the high mountains – where, according to Peter Handke, the pupils dilate – and it is not because you are confronted with an overpowering and oppressive mountain world. On the contrary: sitting on the terrace of the Tschierva Hut, seemingly in the middle of the high mountains, surrounded by the glaciers of the Tschierva basin with the high alpine skyline from Piz Bernina to Piz Scerscen to Piz Roseg, one is at the same time an appreciative and distanced observer. This triumvirate of peaks forms a horseshoe, but how far away it is from the other, the world-famous “horseshoe” of the three Himalayan giants Everest – Lhotse – Nuptse! There, at Camp II in the Valley of Silence above the Khumbu Icefall at 6,400 metres, you don't sit on the stands and admire what is being offered at a safe distance on the alpine stage. Surrounded by the highest mountains in the world, which almost crush you with their 2,000-metre-high walls rising steeply into the infinity of the sky, you find yourself in the middle of it all, small, tiny and defenceless. How much more relaxed it feels here, on the sun terrace of the SAC hut with coffee, cake and beer. The Engadin is not the Himalayas – and not Patagonia and not Antarctica – but it has picked out the most beautiful and pleasant of all these landscapes for itself, so to speak.

I have known the Engadin for a long time. Already as a young mountaineer – before I got to know other, bigger and wilder mountains of the world – I travelled countless times in the Bernina area and in the Bergell. I have climbed most of the mountains depicted in this book. On the most diverse routes, in winter, in summer, in the most diverse conditions, deep snow in stormy weather or glorious sunshine. It always feels like coming home when, after the Julier Pass, at the end of the long straight, the Piz Bernina with the Bianco ridge appears on the southern horizon. The bluish shimmering ice on the west face betrays high winter conditions: cold, brittle ice that splinters like glass when you try to hammer the ice axe into it. It will be cold up there, the snow plume at the summit betrays the icy storm. I reflexively look at mountains through the eyes of a mountaineer: ice and snow conditions, avalanche cracks, biting wind or warming rays of sun. But the same eyes also see the beauty of the mountains, the deep blue of Lake

Sils, the golden larches and above them the broad, freshly snowed peak of the Margna shining in the purest white.

But I also see the world differently, with other eyes, with the eyes of the photographer. That is a very different view. I have tried to approach the Engadin with this other view. I'm glad I didn't tackle this book project earlier, because I had been carrying the idea around with me for years. But only in the last few years have I understood that the project has a big problem: the Engadin is actually too beautiful to be photographed.

The Engadin is an alpine landscape cliché formed over thousands of years from stone, air, water, ice and light. And that's not what I wanted to show with my pictures. For me, photography has to go beyond what I see, what is simply beautiful, what I can also capture with my mobile phone. For me, photography means creating images that only come into being through me, through my camera, through the detail and moment I have determined. Images that you don't usually see when you look at the world. Like a painting: Segantini looked over the easel with its empty canvas into a landscape where everything could be seen, he looked into the everything of the Engadin mountains. What he saw was not yet a picture. Only when he forced his gaze, his decision to crop, into a square with brush and paint – forever, so to speak – only then did the everything become a picture.

In my search for something new, I discovered something that I had known for a long time but had not perceived as new. The larches, for example. Not the autumnal golden ones, no, the naked, wintry larches. Sometimes perfectly symmetrical, sometimes wonderfully abstract skeletons, graphics like Giacometti sculptures sketched with a pencil. Or the late summer glaciers, the dying ones. Even in their inexorable disappearance, these ice monsters are beautiful elements of the high mountain landscape. Naked, stripped of the last old snow, washed away by heavy rain, ogives and medial moraines tell of the constant flow of ice, a movement imperceptible to the human eye. Dead, cold material that is seemingly alive, that is always in motion within itself and that, as a total mass, advances further into the valley over longer climatic periods or retreats to higher, colder elevations, or dissolves completely. One would not like to imagine the Bernina mountains in summer without glaciers. But it will probably become reality: not even the eternal ice is forever. At some point, the glaciers will return and fill the wide high valley and its lovely lakes with their icy masses again. We will not live to see it.

My last book, “No Man's Land”, contained pictures I saw while travelling on this planet, but this book shows pictures that were taken while travelling in the Engadin. I didn't aim to show what the Engadin looks like. I never thought about which views I absolutely had to capture – the sunset from Muottas Muragl, the first rays of sun on Piz Palü, the blue hours on the Tschierva glacier or the golden larches of autumn. That didn't interest me. I wanted to show pictures that I had discovered, and which only came into existence through my camera. Pictures that – at least I hope – reflect as a whole the atmosphere of this unique mountain landscape.

The glaciers are retreating, the handholds are getting smaller, the mountains higher – everything is in flux, nothing stays as it is. I know that at some point even the not-so-high peaks of the Bernina will be too high for me. What remains are the memories of experiences and the joy of looking and searching for pictures.

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