

БЪЛГАРИЯ
от птичи
поглед Александър
Иванов



BULGARIA
A Bird's-Eye
View
Alexander
Ivanov



222 aerial photos
снимки от въздуха



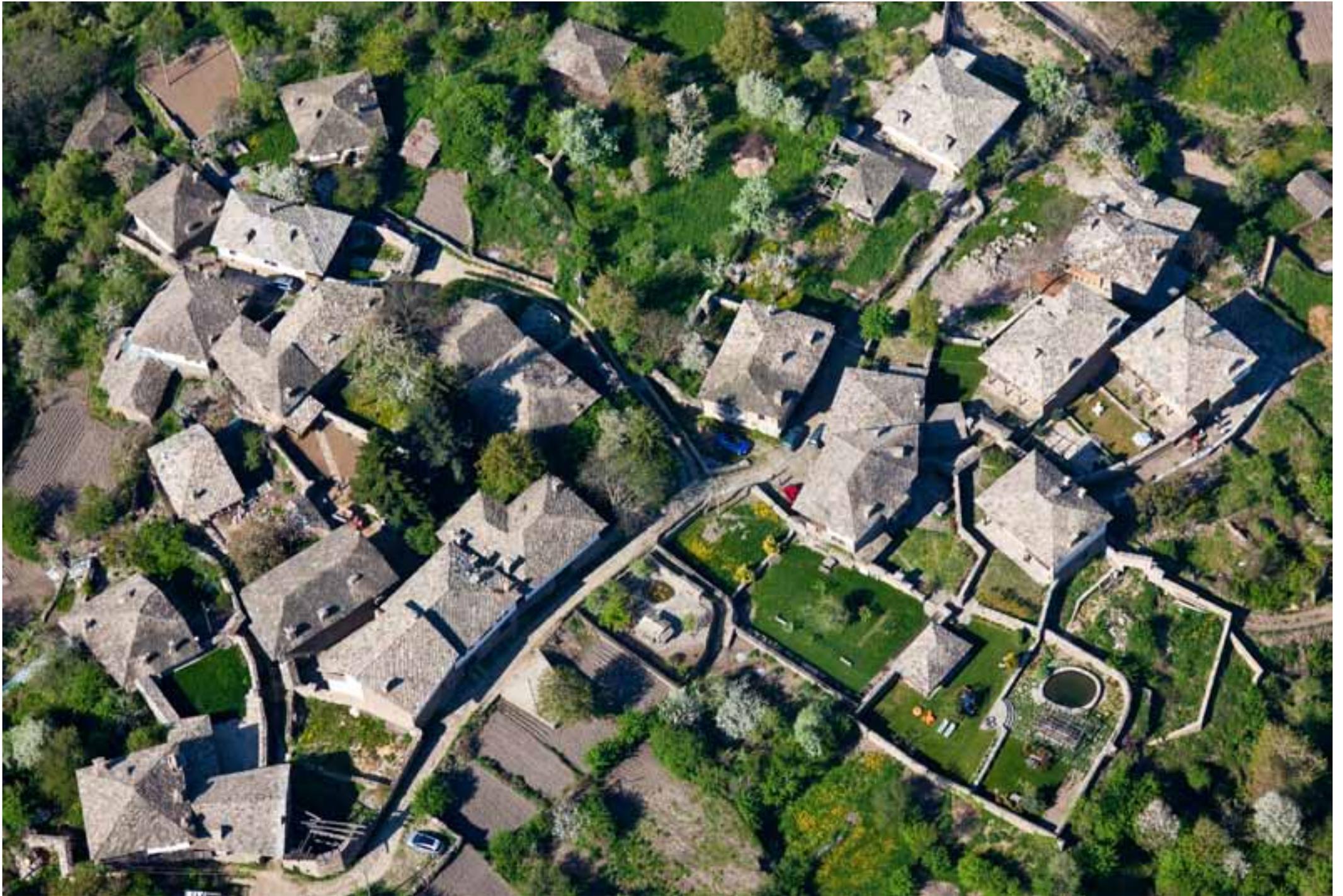
Рилският манастир, обект пог езигата на ЮНЕСКО от 1983 г.

The Rila Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1983



Белоградишкото кале

The Belogradchik fort



Арнаутската махала на с. Ковачевица, Западни Родопи

The Arnautska neighborhood, Kovachevitsa, the Western Rhodope Mountains

Alexander Ivanov's photographs

Digital photography brought smiles on the faces of amateurs and frowns on the faces of the pros. In its wake the medium became seemingly unconstrained, and dilettantes started feeling like peers with people who have studied optics, composition and light for many years. Clearly, that was a confusion brought on by technology, and the discriminating eye could still easily sort out the boys from the men. To my mind contemporary art presents, arguably, the same problem. Salvador Dali once sent a telegram to Pablo Picasso: "Pablo, thanks! Your last ignominious paintings have killed modern art. ... You have achieved the limits and the final consequences of the abominable in a mere few weeks."

With Alexander Ivanov things are much less arguable. One fine day—just like Karlson on the Roof—he took to the sky, and once he had made his first few shots from the air, he realized the strong pull of the sky on him. He also recognized new and unknown aspects of the beauty of the landscape as seen from the sky. Clearly, he is not the first air-borne photographer, but the only one to have concentrated so passionately and thoroughly on unseen views from that tiny part of planet Earth called Bulgaria.

When I look at Alexander Ivanov's photographs I realize what beauty has been hidden from my eyes and also, alas, what intractable damage we have brought on nature. We have mutilated it, spoiled its vistas, contaminated it with greed, unpardonable ignorance and heedless indolence. We are the hypocrites who still have the effrontery to sing "You are beautiful, my forest"...

We live in times of blatant and widespread crime against the state, yet conclusive evidence is ever missing to convict the offenders. Well, as far as crime against the land is concerned, Alexander Ivanov's photos are evidence more than enough. Just see how we have been gnawing at the Etropole mountain, digging around Vezhen Peak, and ruining thousands of acres of fertile land so that rich people could play golf there. Look at Slanchev Bryag resort, put a hand on your heart, and say if you have ever seen anything as mangled? Frank Lloyd Wright once said that the good building "makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built." How idealistic! Nothing is more predatory than the slave who has tasted freedom and has then been given a license to plunder. This kind of marauder will eat up the sand on the beach.

Well, what about those black scars on Strandzha Mountains' green body? Oak woods, devastated to provide charcoal, mostly for the barbeque and grills of our increasingly overweight and impoverished Bulgarian people.

I don't want to end on a gloomy note. Even only because Alexander Ivanov is a person who loves light and color. And his photographs, like all significant art, evoke both sorrow and elation. Look at his "Rug from Kazanlak" or "Lavender Field", and you should agree with me. So I would like to finish with "Thank you and never give up!"

Georgi Danailov



Розови пеликани в езерото Вая край Бургас

Pink pelicans in Vaya Lake near Burgas



Бургаските солници

Salt pans near Burgas



Бургас със солниците

Burgas and the salt pans



Вторият по големина в Европа гъбов масив – Странджа планина

Strandzha Mountains, the second largest oak-covered massif in Europe



Мраморният дял на Северен Пирин

The marble section of Northern Pirin Mountains



Никополис ад Иструм, основан през 102 г. н.е. от император Траян
в чест на римската победа над даките.
Районът на с. Поликраище, Община Горна Оряховица

Nicopolis ad Istrum, founded by Emperor Trajan
in 102 AD to honor the Roman victory over the Dacians
The area of Polikraishte, Gorna Oryahovitsa Municipality



Древният Перперикон, Източни Родопи

The ancient Thracian city of Perperikon, the Eastern Rhodope Mountains



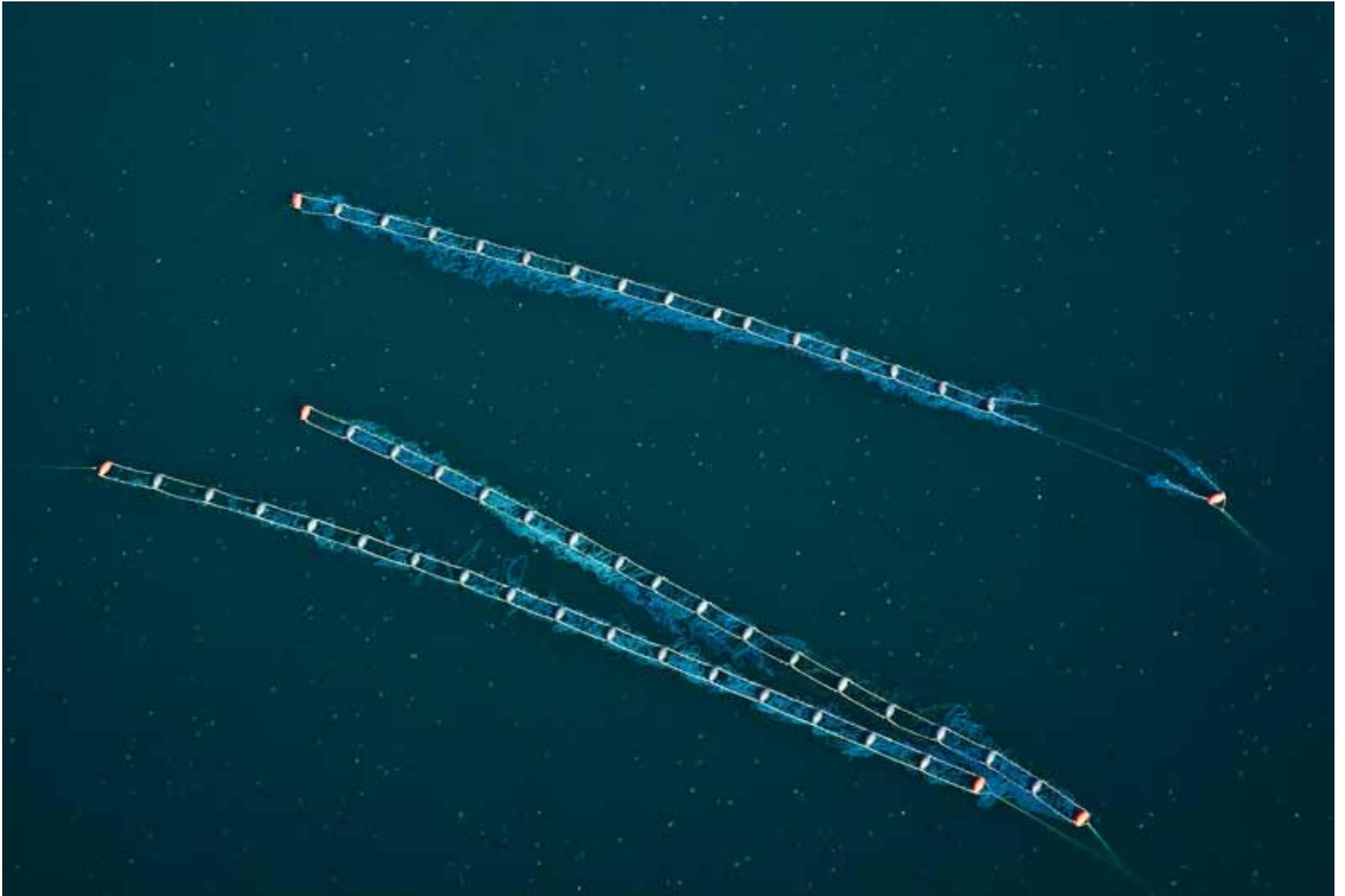
2000 души от 21 страни играят паневритмия на Петомо езеро в Рила, 20 август 2008 г.

2000 people from 21 countries practice Paneurhythmy at the Fifth Rila Lake, August 20, 2008



Прибиране на сол, Бургаски солници

Harvesting the salt pans of Burgas



Мигено стопанство в района на Маслен нос,
Южно Черноморие

Mussel farm near Cape Maslen,
Southern Black Sea coast

NATURE AS IT IS

presents such a rich array of photographic possibilities that it is frivolous to resort to fancy modern methods of manipulation of the gilding-the-lily type. It is perfectly possible for a photographer to find self-expression in nature working only with its visible surfaces without any manipulation. The journey from reality to its image representation is fraught with surprises, pitfalls and metamorphoses. Alexander Ivanov says: "The world as seen through the eyes of a photographer is an overwhelming sight, and in the case of some images I am bound to believe that the image has more grace than its real-life source." We could consider this statement to be a credo of sorts for Alexander Ivanov as he tenaciously follows it through his many years of art making.

Until he turns fifty, this photographer walks the earth and photographs from ground level. He climbs mountains, crisscrosses Bulgaria, and examines the landscape in its vistas and minute details. In four seasons Ivanov covers Bulgaria from seacoast to the highest peaks. He seeks self-expression while in love with his land. Some of the finest photographic landscapes of Bulgaria are thus created. We can see them arranged by altitude: from the Black Sea to the Rose Valley to the Rila and Pirin mountains. Driven, ever enthusiastic, and always on the verge of satiation-by-beauty, at age fifty this photographer discovers the world as seen from above.

Photographic history knows quite a few names who at some point were impelled to go upward. Thus Nadar took a hot-air balloon over Paris, and Rodchenko climbed the stairs of Moscow's high-rise apartment buildings, a Leica in his hand. In this case Alexander Ivanov took off in paragliders and powered hang gliders over Bulgaria.

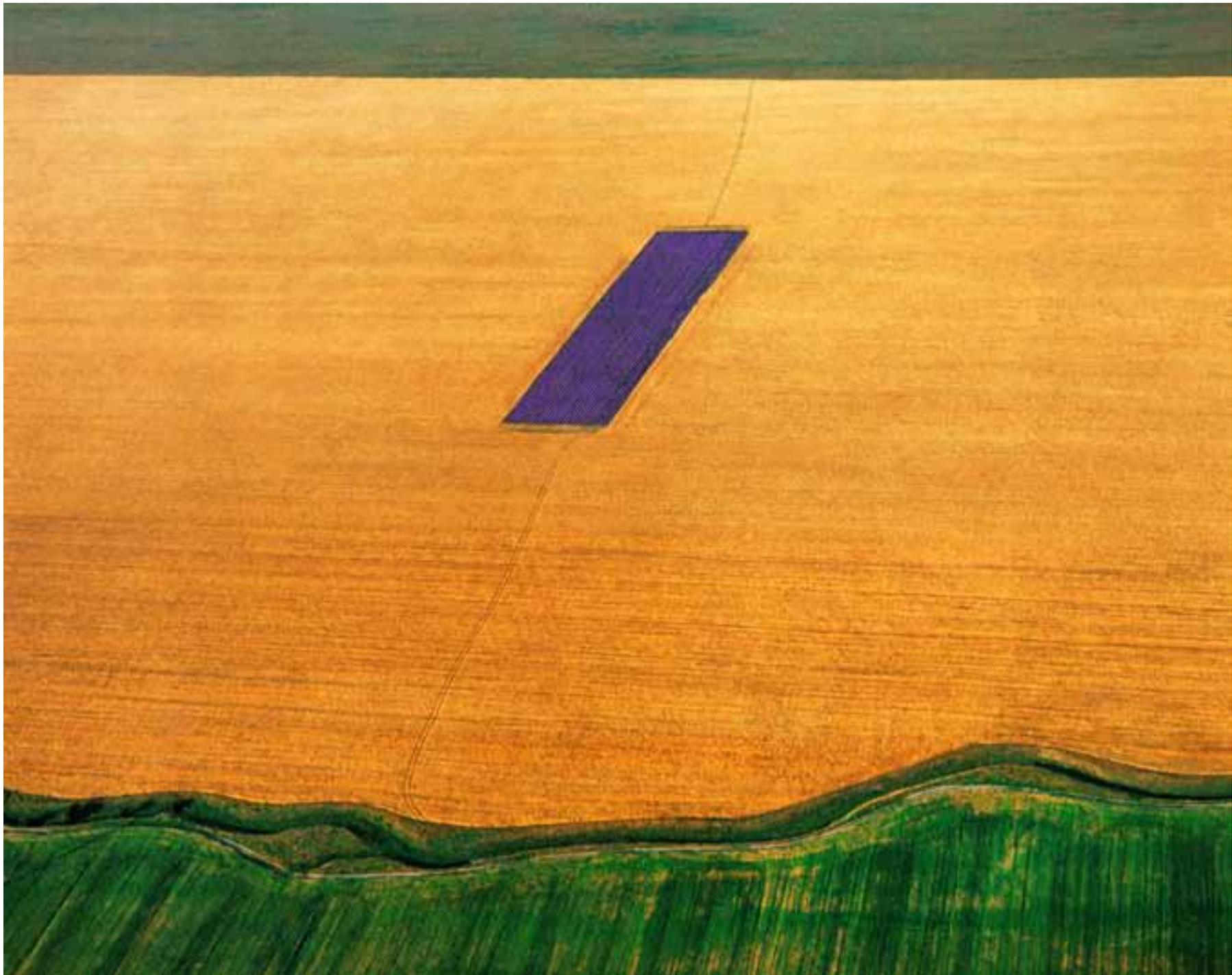
The bird's eye view is an essential means of expression in photography's toolbox. In its wake proportions shift, the terrain absorbs ground structures, and the horizon disappears. The high viewpoint undermines the differences between beauty and ugliness, specificity and abstraction, and familiarity and strangeness. Time and again Alexander Ivanov's choice of subject matter plays out those shifts. Take the case of Slanchev Bryag seen from the air: the image delights the eye, while the real-life concrete sprawl is loathsome. Images like this one make us think about how difficult, yet exhilarating it is to love Bulgaria. As to the question of whether it is worth it, you are invited to find the answer in these pages.

Nikolay Treiman



Бившето Военно летище на Балчик със строящо се голф-игрище

The former military airfield in Balchik, with a golf course in construction



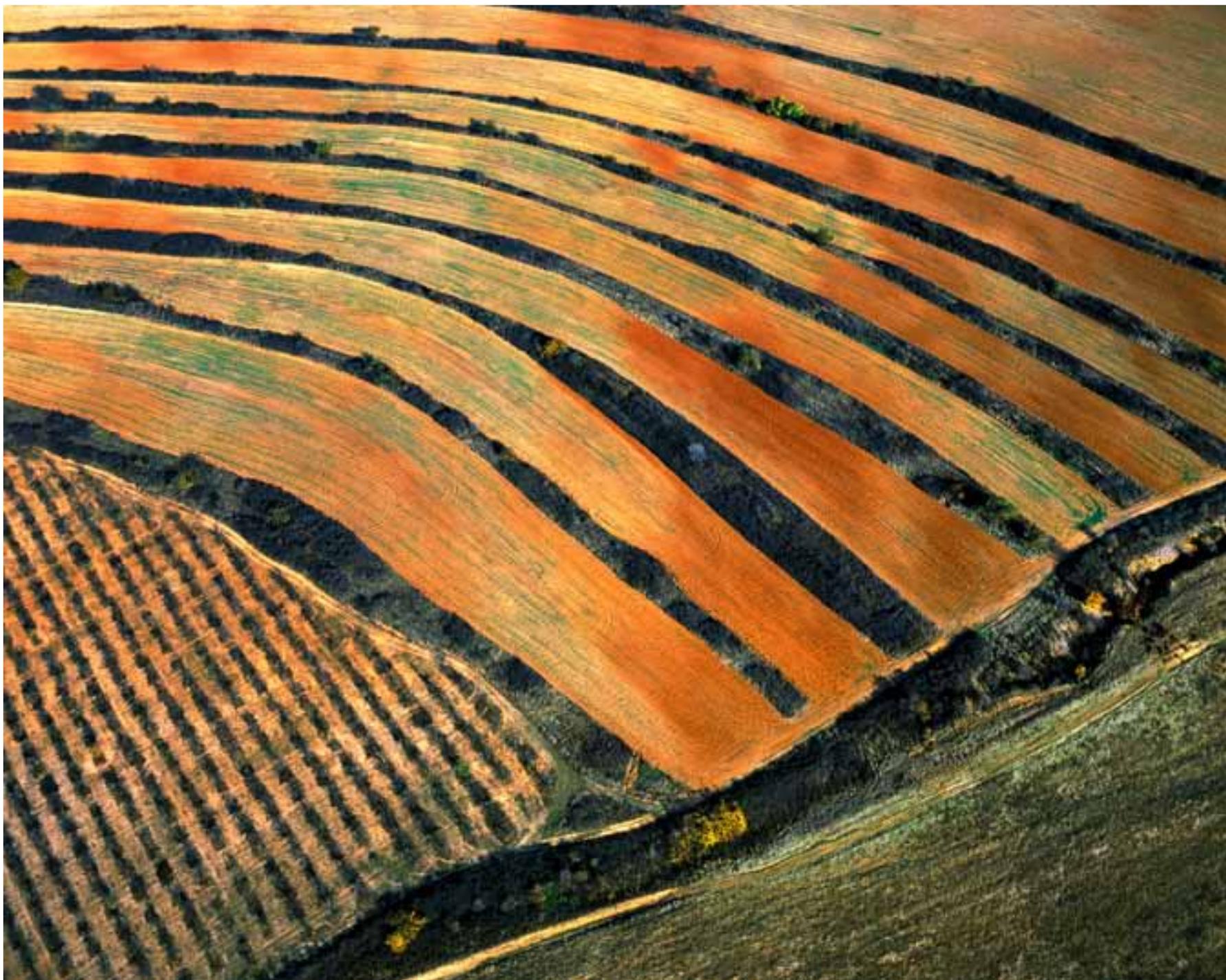
Насаждение с лавандула край гр. Шипка

Lavender fields near Shipka



Далян в околностите на с. Равадиново, Община Созопол

Fishing nets near Ravadinovo, Sozopol Municipality



Терасирана нива в землището на с. Горно Черковище, Казанлъшко

A terraced field in the lands of Gorno Cherkovishte, near Kazanlak



Ливади в Тунджалъка, Казанлъшко

Meadows along Tundzha River near Kazanlak



В Дунавската равнина, землището на с. Батин

In the Danube plain, near Batin



Овчарник в близост до град Разлог

A sheep pen near Razlog



Парчета земя и много труд,
околностите на гр. Кърджали

Small lots of land and lots of hard work,
the vicinity of Kardzhali



Страничните канали на остров Калимок са рай за рибарите, Тутраканско

The side streams on the island of Kalimok near Tutrakan are a fisherman's paradise.



Храм-паметник „Рождество Христово“, гр. Шипка

The Nativity Memorial Church, Shipka

A few words

for those interested in the technical aspects of aerial photography and my working method.

In the last ten years I have put in more than 300 hours shooting from different “birdies”, and I have taken about 50,000 shots of my favorite Bulgarian places. I fly in tandem with experienced pilots I fully trust: by paraglider, powered hang glider, and only rarely, by helicopter. While air-borne, I have to consider the light and atmospheric conditions at hand, but since I am not directly involved in piloting I can concentrate on shooting. I try to make the most of it, regardless of the difficulty of the flight. Being spontaneous and quick helps a lot in the air, as it is practically impossible to go back to a specific spot while flying at 60 or 100 km/h. I never use goggles because of the camera’s viewfinder. In winter I put on two pairs of gloves, but when working for a long time at minus 20°C, that doesn’t help much...

Paragliding gives me great pleasure because I am in the front seat with full visibility in all directions. On the powered hang glider I usually lean sideways and out, my body farthest to one side, in order to avoid the ropes, the “birdie’s” rigging and landing gear.

Naturally, I prefer side lighting and long shadows, but I’ve been lucky at times with a high noon sun as well. We fly at altitudes between 40 and 4000 meters, but most commonly we are at 100 to 600 meters above the subject on the ground. The hidden beauty of some locations—especially sprawling fields and plains—can be fully appreciated only from a bird’s-eye view.

The Dobruja plain, Kazanlak valley, the mountain of Strandzha and the Danube river are some such places. Other areas are attractive anyway: Veliko Tarnovo with the winding Yantra river, Pirin mountain in winter, and the salt evaporation ponds near Burgas and Pomorie.

During my first five years of photographing from the air I used a Pentax 67 with a 135/4 macro lens loaded with Fuji Provia 400 slide film with only 10 frames per roll. Loading and unloading the film in the air took more time than shooting itself. On October 26th (St. Dimitar’s day) in 2005 I shot 17 films in 2 ½ hours flying over the Rila Monastery.

After changing to a digital Canon 20D camera I spent several years working with a Canon 5D, and in the last two years I have been working with a Canon 5D Mark II camera. I use three zoom lenses, but when up in the air I don’t change them: Canon EF70-200 1:4 L IS, Canon EF17-40 1:4 L, and most often Canon EF24-105 1:4 L IS. Lens stabilization helps, yet I rarely go below 1/125 sec. The ISO setting is usually between 200 and 400, depending on lighting. Nowadays I am able to shoot as many as 1200 shots in a 90 minute flight, working almost without interruption and at various focal lengths. Surely, quantity and quality are not the same, yet the Canon camera gives me freedom, reliability, and ease of use. On March 19th, 2010, I flew for 100 minutes at minus 20°C at an altitude of 4,000 meters over Pirin mountain, and the equipment didn’t fail me once.

Flight itself is an emotional experience I recommend to all my friends. It is hard for me to describe the exhilaration of freedom and unpredictability—especially on a paraglider—that every flight brings.

The sensation of flying without a propeller of any sort, just like a bird, is beyond words. Indeed, the emotion of the flight invariably carries over in the shooting, and that emotion has me in its grip until the end of the flight. It’s an experience of a thousand frames, some of which are worth the effort.

From a bird’s eye view Bulgaria looks sometimes sublime, sometimes dreary. Bulgarians, as seen from the sky, look tiny, but their accomplishments (and their blunders) loom large.



Китка в небето над планината.
Кръг от Световното първенство по парапланеризъм,
август 2008 г., гр. Сопот

Iridescence in the sky over the mountain -
the World Championship of Paragliding near Sopot,
August 2008





Лечебни бани, Бургаски солници

Healing baths, the salt pans of Burgas



Устието на река Варовита
при язовир „Копринка“, с. Дунавци

The mouth of the Varovita River
in Koprinka Reservoir near Dunavtsi



Оловно-цинковият комбинат – Кърджали

Lead and Zink Complex, Kardzhali



Открит меген рудник „Елаците“, Етрополски балкан

Elatsite, an open pit copper mine in the Etropole part of the Balkan Mountains



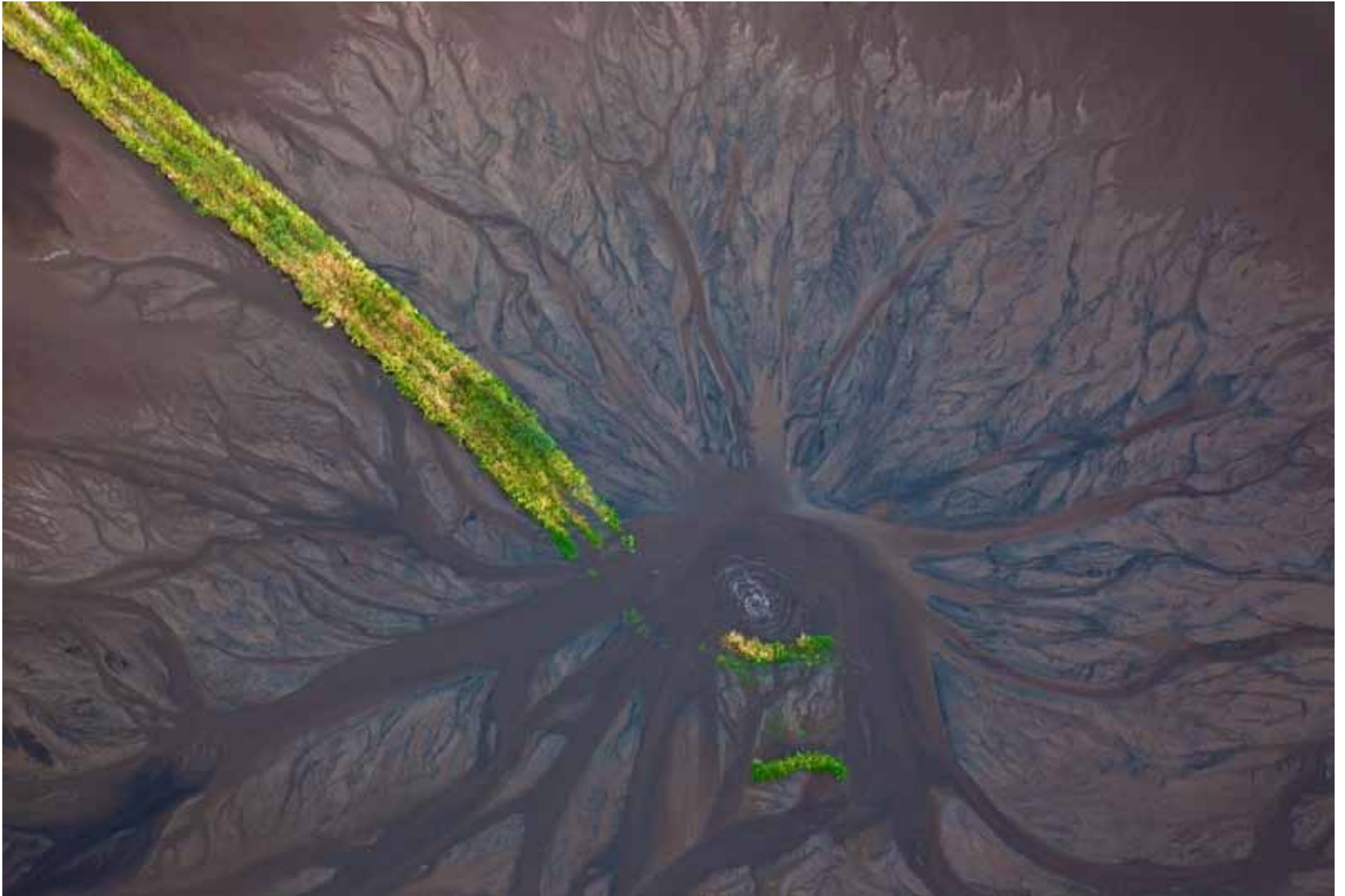
„Черното езеро“ на ТЕЦ-1 при гр. Гълъбово

The "black lake" of thermoelectric power plant I, Galabovo



Голф-изрище край Балчик

Golf course near Balchik



„Черното езеро“ на ТЕЦ-1 при гр. Гълъбово

The “black lake” of thermoelectric power plant 1, Galabovo



Слънчев бряг, октомври 2009 г.

Slanchev Bryag resort, October 2009



Районът на Иракли, октомври 2009 г.

The area of Irakli, October 2009