

STATE OF THE ART



For nature photographer **Frans Lanting**, these spiraled ferns are much more than pastel ornaments. "These ferns are among the earliest plant forms established on Earth—they've been uncurling fiddleheads for 370 million years," says Lanting, who photographed the pair at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. "Their stems serve as conduits for an internal plumbing system of vascular tissue—a major innovation that helped early plants grow upright out of water." Lanting's insights evince some of the detailed research behind his latest project, *Life: A Journey Through Time* (see Master Class, next page), which explores our planet's natural history and biodiversity. The venerable subject matter has a high-tech context: In addition to a stunning new monograph, Lanting's work is featured in a traveling exhibit, a multimedia stage show with music by composer Philip Glass, and an educational Website. For venues and more details, visit lifethroughtime.com.

MASTER CLASS

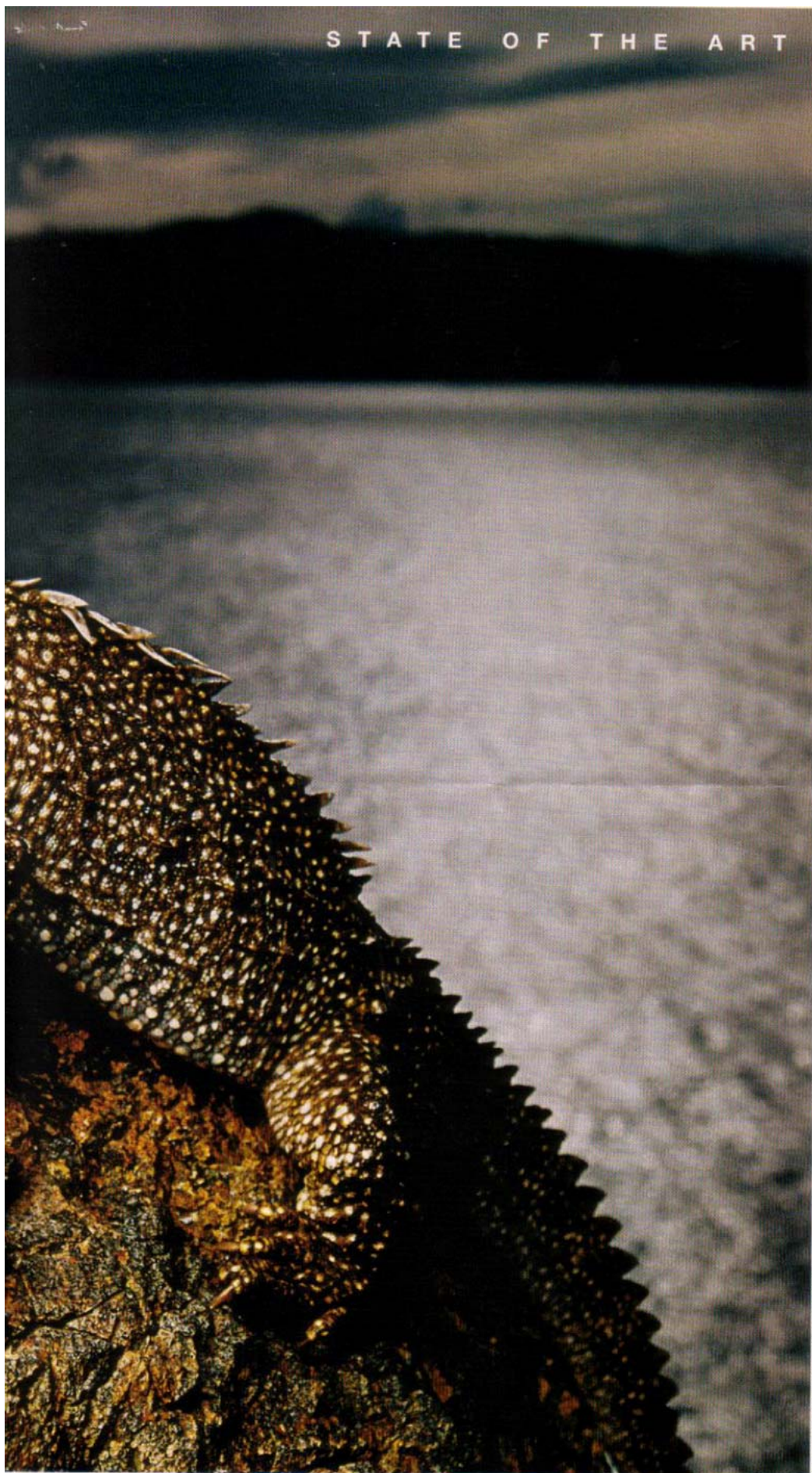
FRANS LANTING

A PREEMINENT
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ON EARTH.
BY JACK CRAGER

In 1999, at the end of the millennium, nature photographer Frans Lanting found inspiration in the mating rites of horseshoe crabs. "I watched the crabs come out of the water to spawn," Lanting recalls. "It's an ancient ritual that goes back hundreds of millions of years, and not much has changed in the basic behavior of how those crabs do it. And I realized I could see the past in the present. So I tried to create an image of the crabs that evoked that sense of prehistory. And I thought, 'If I can do that in New Jersey, it would be interesting to see what I could find in Australia, or in Brazil, or in South Africa'—places where things are more exotic to begin with."

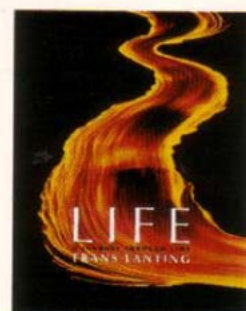
The experience led Lanting to embark on a global exploration of what he calls "slices of time": distinct natural phenomena that shed light on the vast subject of life on Earth. "I've tried to explore the roots of biodiversity and connect what exists in the natural world today with its origins," says the Dutch-born Lanting, 55, who lives and runs his





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Tuatara, North Brother Island, New Zealand: "This lizard is a living fossil," Lanting says. "It's been around, virtually unchanged, for more than 240 million years. Because of their unbroken connection to the past, tuataras are perfect symbols for this project, because they've seen dinosaurs come and go. I used sharp side lighting with a Nikon Speedlight to emphasize the stoniness, the folds in the lizard's skin, mirrored by the cracks in the rock." All the images in Lanting's *Life* project were made with Nikon 35mm and digital SLRs, this one shot on film with a Nikon F6.



studio in Santa Cruz, California. The results of his odyssey include a lavish 300-page photography book, *Life: A Journey Through Time* (Taschen, \$50), as well as a traveling exhibit that debuts at the Dutch natural history museum in Leiden, Netherlands; a multimedia stage show featuring music by Philip Glass; and a Website dedicated to the project, lifethroughtime.com.

Meticulously researched—with help from Lanting's wife, writer/editor Christine Eckstrom, and several scientists representing natural history museums—the new book is richly detailed but light on technical jargon. Its broad scope and luminous photography recall a seminal 1971 monograph, *The Creation*, by Ernst Haas. "Haas's work had a huge impact on quite a few photographers, including myself," Lanting says. "He tried to capture in a very lyrical fashion the panoply of the natural world, but he never connected it to the scientific view of life. And that's what I've tried to do here—to translate the insights of science, bring them together in a holistic perspective about life on

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Earth, but do it in a lyrical fashion through photographs that don't require people to feel like they're studying a biology textbook."

Lanting's project—at least thus far—deals more with the natural world than mankind's effect on it. The book has only a few images of humans, including a fetus, a pair of weathered feet, and shots of veins running through a hand and a brain. "We're recognizing that humanity, as a collective force, is altering the Earth in a dramatic fashion through climate change, or global warming," Lanting says. "And I intend to look forward and examine the consequences of climate change as this work continues. But I feel you can't really understand the present, or project into the future,

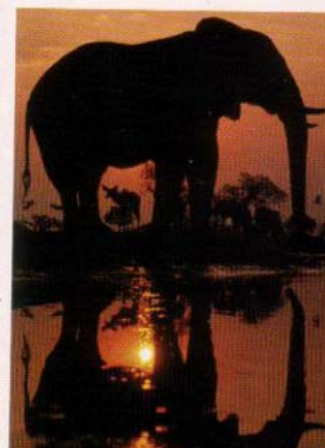
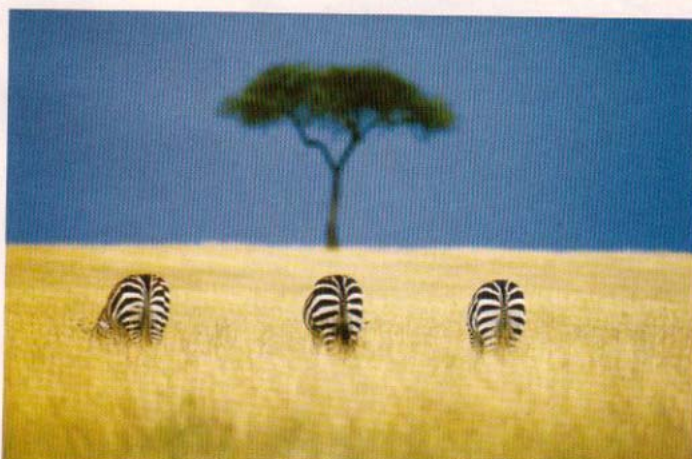
Water Lilies, Okavango Delta, Botswana:

"I wanted to get a different perspective on water lilies—we're always looking down on them," says Lanting, who shot this from the bottom of a swamp in ambient light with a Nikon F6 in an underwater housing. "Often I'm looking for different points of view to make the familiar look unfamiliar. This is a wonderful illustration of how plants respond to sunlight. That miracle of photosynthesis is visualized through those lily pads reaching up toward the sun."



Zebbras, Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya:

Lanting captured this with a Nikon 300mm f/2.8 telephoto lens. "These mammals have to have big guts to break down all that grass and the toxins within it. I thought it was interesting to focus on their butts and their guts," he says. "We all know what a zebra looks like anyway. They're surrounded by grass and vegetation, and that's enabled them to thrive."





THE PROJECT'S WEBSITE, LIFE THROUGHTIME.COM, SERVES AS AN INTERACTIVE COMPANION TO LANTING'S NEW BOOK.

Elephant and Kudu at Dawn, Chobe National Park, Botswana: "There was a coming and going of animals at this watering hole," Lanting recalls. "I looked for that moment when there was a juxtaposition between the elephant and the smaller antelope."

Nautilus Shell, South Pacific Ocean: "Nautilus are marine predators and they look like jellyfish or octopi, but they live inside shells," says Lanting, who shot this specimen in the studio with a Nikon D2X digital SLR. "Those spiraling shapes are cross sections through air chambers. That's what gives that nautilus the ability to rise up and down in the water—exactly the propulsion they've used for 400 million years."

Ashaninka Indian Feet, Vilcambamba, Peru: "He was my guide in the rain forest; he had never worn shoes, and his feet had been molded through circumstance," Lanting recalls. "They're very muscular with big splayed toes, adapted to walking on substrates and the need to grip—it's natural selection right in front of you."



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just had to bring them into the same depth of field while keeping the background open," says Lanting, who shot with a Nikon D2X. (For more on the ferns, see page 35.)

Trilobite, Ontario, Canada: "I photographed this [opposite, far right] at a fossil show," says Lanting. "Before there was any life on land, there were trilobites in the sea. They probably evolved in response to the very first predators that arose—they had to protect themselves with hard shells. You can see details of the compound eyes in the front of that animal—even though it's been dead for 400 million years."



Kangaroo, Murrumbidgee National Park, Australia: "The kangaroo's pogolike bounce is a perfect adjustment to local circumstances. Australia is starved for nutrients, so they've adopted the energy-efficient method of

hopping on two legs rather than running on all four," says Lanting, who shot this lying on the ground as an assistant pointed a strobe. "I used a slow shutter speed with the flash so you get a little bit of a ghost image of

the motion. This image is about locomotion—to show how the legs move and how the tail moves in response."

False Staghorn Ferns, Hawaii: "There are two fiddleheads unfurling, and I

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without understanding the past." Lanting has high praise for Al Gore's film on global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*: "It's the story of our time," he says. "But most of nature is not manifested in polar bears or penguins—it consists of microscopic life-forms, bacteria and what have you, and they will rule the world long after we're gone. A key part of this project has been to visualize the early stages of life on the planet, which deal with the evolution of bacteria and primitive ecosystems."

Lanting marvels that, for all the global effects of mankind, nature endures. "The past is still here," he says. "By tackling this photographically, I wanted to experience this fact myself—to immerse myself in it and prove that if a photographer like me can discover this, it really is accessible and open for anybody to experience."

“ I FEEL THAT YOU CAN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT, OR PROJECT INTO THE FUTURE, WITHOUT AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST. ”



Editor Christine Eckstrom and Frans Lanting.



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