

SILVIA SCHINKELS

AN INTERVIEW

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**PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF .
HOW DID YOU COME ABOUT BEING
A DOG PHOTOGRAPHER AND HOW
LONG HAVE YOU BEEN DOING IT?**

My name is Silvia Schinkels, I am 41 years old and photography is my passion. I prefer to photograph dogs and horses, but also cats, families and of course I love animals and their people.

The real passion started in 2015, but I also took photos before that. It happened in 2015 ... but more about that later.

I live with my husband and our two Ridgeback girls on the Lower Rhine, on the flat land between fields and forests in western Germany.

**HOW DID YOU FIRST ENTER THE
PHOTOGRAPHY WORLD? DID
YOU HAVE FORMAL TRAINING?
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A
PHOTOGRAPHER?**

BwZ.photography. Bhanu Wa Zulu means sky and sun. I'm behind it as a photographer, Silvia Schinkels.

The name Bhanu wa Zulu (BwZ) is also very closely associated with our Ridgebacks. I registered it as a kennel name and our first Ridgeback was called Bhanu.

Since I always like to have my own dogs in front of the lens, my photography should also be closely linked to the love for our Ridgebacks. Voila - this is how my baby was born in 2015: BwZ.photography.

Bhanu Wa Zulu, translated from African (Swaheili), means something like sky and sun. Both are elements that stand for light and light quality and are therefore an irreplaceable component and elementary component of my photography, but also of all photographs.

As already mentioned, I was born in 1980 and in 1999 I took part in courses and a more intensive approach to photography. Here, however, it was



more of a means to an end, a necessary evil, and far removed from passion and calling. That was certainly also due to what was in front of the lens ... they weren't animals.

In 2005 we got our first Ridgeback. BISS Hillvalleys African Bhanu Zulu. Bhanu reached almost 15 years old, we had to let him go in mid-2020. With Bhanu in the family, attitudes towards pho-

tography didn't change suddenly. Bhanu and two years later our new member Bheko (Corleo's Cobheko Bean) were always models in front of the camera. At this point, however, I was far from having a real understanding of the basics of photography. What was once learned, almost forgotten, are pictures of the dogs taken - not properly photographed. The first digital SLR camera arrived, but as I said, I was still miles away from un-



derstanding the relationships between different focal lengths and the light intensity of the respective lenses with regard to image composition.

Workshops, training courses and seminars:

I regularly attend workshops and seminars as well as personal coaching and have acquired a lot myself through a lot of training.

It's not just exciting to keep getting to know new colleagues. I'm particularly interested in the different ways of taking photos, the different angles of how we see our models and then photograph them. The exchange and the friendly togetherness. That doesn't always work because there is often a competitive factor involved. Especially with commercially active photographers. But it's not just the photography that makes it all in the end. The sympathy between the customer and me has to be right so that we can get involved. In addition, it is very common for photographers to shoot exactly the same, in the same place and at the same time, and the result just looks completely different in the end. Everyone has their own style of painting and that's a good thing.

WHAT OR WHO GOT YOU STARTED PHOTOGRAPHING DOGS?

How it all started:

At the time, photography itself was completely different. There were few wildlife photographers and the subject of professional photography was generally not very present. The desire for really nice pictures of your own dogs had been suppressed - the main thing is that you have enough photos of your own animals. However, a mass of images is no substitute for what may be the only image of the heart.

The desire for many of my own pictures of the heart grew bigger and bigger. I had a very specific idea of what my pictures should look like. Just like I've seen my own dogs. I have looked at many dog pictures from many animal photographers and always discovered little things that I would have photographed differently. A "slightly more leg" would have been nice, because "that looks kind of unfavorable in the background"; often something bothered me. I started looking deeper into the subject again and it quickly became clear that a DSLR (digital single lens reflex camera) is very useful for beautiful pictures, but a suitable lens also helps. And yes, an image should never be edited to improve something - on the contrary. With the image processing I underline my own style of image and despite a good image "out of cam" I can make a lot more of it. Image editing has always been around. In the past, processing was carried out in the darkroom during analog times; Today, the small details are done on the PC - with calibrated monitors and appropriate image processing programs.

WHAT TYPE OF CAMERAS DO YOU SHOOT WITH? WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE LENS AND WHY?

In the meantime, with my good equipment, I can fulfill my ideas, but also the wishes of the customers and photograph the dogs so that they become pictures of the heart. I take photos with Nikon cameras (D850 and Z6) as well as with different



bright lenses (f 2.8 or smaller). My absolute favorite is the Nikkor 300mm, f2.8. This focal length creates a unique representation that I just love for my pictures. But I have many other lenses as well as a mobile studio, so that recordings can also take place in bad weather or simply when the studio look is desired. All around I have equipment with which I can achieve the best possible technical results even under less favorable conditions (tight spaces, little light). As is so often the case,

the rest is a matter of taste.

With the best camera you can take bad pictures, that is without question. But high-quality equipment does no harm in terms of outstanding image quality.

WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION?

Inspiration ist everywhere ;)

There are many possibilities here to realize myself

with my photography. Depending on the season, our fields offer a wide variety of flowers, the forests are ideal for capturing a wonderful play of light. In autumn our forests present themselves in magnificent red, brown and yellow colors.

We have many lakes very close by, and here I prefer to take photos at sunset. It is such a wonderful light mood when the sun is reflected on the water, for me something very special.

A multitude of parks and special places offer me, almost all around the year, the opportunity to capture an infinite number of flowers.

Our wonderful, historic little old town is also only a short walk away. I have often staged many wonderful people and animals on many hundreds of years old buildings, alleys and paths. There are also a number of large cities in the vicinity that offer unique motifs with great parks.

I am completely satisfied with the wide range of options I have here at home. But I am happy to travel to my customers if something is required that my environment does not offer.

DO YOU CONSIDER IT A CHALLENGING JOB? HOW DO YOU GET THE ANIMALS TO STAY AND "POSE" FOR YOU?

First of all, it is important that the owner does not feel stress, because it only transfers to the animal. Everyone should have fun. I only need a split second for certain poses, so the dog doesn't have to stop for long. For the animal, it should be more of a game, with breaks and lots of rewards. Every

command is resolved and the dog is rewarded. Under no circumstances should you set yourself firmly and want to implement it 100%. It is a work with animals, there is never anything 100%. If the dog does not want to sit then it is not forced to sit. I would rather offer him another position and ask if he might like to sit there then. If not, maybe he would rather lie down ...

WHAT IS THE BEST PART OF BEING A FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHER? AND THE MOST CHALLENGING?

The best about being a dog photographer is the special moments. Let me tell you about some special shootings...

I'll tell you about my passion, about animal photography. What exactly do I photograph? My main focus is on dog pictures, horse pictures and emotional animal-human photography. Action shots, classic portrait shots, riding pictures, pictures that show the bond between animals and humans, there are no limits to creativity. Anything in which the animals like to participate voluntarily and without compulsion is possible. Here I just have to mention that the idea of a very specific image is entirely possible, but the implementation of this idea is largely determined by the quadruped. For the animals, too, the situation is mostly new and unfamiliar, it is work with living beings that sometimes proceeds differently than previously planned, whereby the result does not have to be worse than initially intended. On the contrary, spontaneous twists and turns in the course of an animal photo shoot are often very refreshing.





Of course, probably due to the fact that I can be a proud RR owner myself, I also have one or the other RR in front of the camera.

It's just a special breed, I don't have to mention how special ;-)
To be able to portray the character of my models and to photograph the bond between the dog-human team is a challenge but also an affair of the heart. The shootings should be fun for everyone involved and represent a wonderful memory for people. It is not uncommon for a normal shoot to result in good contact or a friendship between the customer and me as a photographer.

The most special shoot:

There is no such thing for me. I always take photos with passion, no matter how it turns out. Whether in winter with snow or in summer on the beach, I like all the moments when I'm out and about with the camera.

Of course, there are a lot of funny memories that I think back to often and fondly.

There were my first three Dachshunds in front of the





camera ... two were really "well behaved models", simply persuaded to sit down, stand here or walk there ... but the third was the "photo crasher". His passion was clear, repeatedly, suddenly, storming into the picture from the side, or spontaneously turning away from the group picture ... his looks also often told me: that bores me! ;-)

Nevertheless, many wonderful pictures were taken and the owners were so enthusiastic that I will soon be able to take them again. I am really looking forward to this.

Shootings on the beach are always special. Thundering waves, the salty air and dogs running across the beach. Ridgebacks enjoying the water, a feeling of limitless freedom. We like to spend our holidays on the beach in the Netherlands out of season, at times when tourists are a little quieter. After a 2 hour drive, the destination is reached from our home and we are in our little paradise. To be able to offer shootings here as well is a privilege and therefore always special.

But I also have fond memories of a shoot with 11 huskies in the snow.

It was really impressive how the pack greeted me on the snow-covered lawn in the large garden. I was alternately sniffed, cuddled or nudged playfully. At the moment I didn't have enough arms. They

were all really nice and were happy about my visit. Most of them also did really well in front of the camera, yes, most of them ... here too there were one or two "very active" candidates who, despite countless attempts at the end, were "captured" in my pictures.

The owners often do not trust the very "active models" to do a shoot. "My dog doesn't listen" or "he never looks attentive anyway" are comments often used to fear not being able to get good results during the shoot. I tell you this is completely unfounded. Every dog, really every dog, every horse and basically everyone can be photographed at the right moment in such a way that ultimately beautiful, wonderful and great results are achieved. People have to get involved and animals shouldn't be infected by people's nervousness. The shoot should be fun for everyone, and so are the results. You can see stress. Fun too, I'll put you in the right mood.

Active models are also puppies. Puppy shootings are always special. I don't need to tell you how great puppies can smell and how beautiful puppies are, regardless of their breed. What could be nicer for the dog parents than pictures of the little ones at the breeder? And to have cuddling and play moments with the little rascals during the shoot is always an extra bonus for me as a photographer.

The complete opposite and no less special are the old dogs. The sprightly retirees who know exactly what they want. At the Ridgeback, the dogs that improve their stubbornness and not only know what they want, but also do it easily. When we know that time is running against us and we can no longer have the oldies with us forever, then these shootings become very special.

I also like to capture the moments, of humans and animals, where neither feel observed. These are those special moments, a natural look, no forced smile, interaction without pres-



sure. These pictures are often taken during a short break, which I offer my customer, because such a shoot is usually an unfamiliar effort for the four-legged friends. A moment in which nobody feels observed. Togetherness. Especially with older dogs, a very special relationship between dog and owner can usually be felt. To be able to hold onto these moments for eternity is magical.

Animal welfare:

A shoot with an animal welfare dog will be fondly remembered. I voluntarily take photos for animal welfare in order to have better chances with beautiful pictures to find dogs for their "forever home". A very young dog with a not very nice past was registered in order to get nice pictures for his mediation. Such an open-minded dog, so cuddled and grateful for every bit of attention. Every look that was directed at him, every touch, the dog was just friendly and happy. Grateful. Maybe a human thought, but it never let go of me. I still think a lot about the little guy. He found a really great home. Not with us, although I've thought about it :)

DESCRIBE A TYPICAL SESSION FOR US. WHAT KINDS OF THINGS ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT WHEN YOU'RE BEHIND THE CAMERA?

What does a shoot with me look like?

We usually go for a walk together and take pictures of the dog in different places. There are pauses, no pose is held for too long or even forced. What the dog offers is accepted and at the end

there are pictures to choose from with different backgrounds, portraits, cuddly pictures, action pictures, classic still pictures ... everything to make the owner's heart beat faster while looking at it. Bhanu has been exhibited successfully at home and abroad for years - at that time it was still rare as a Livernose, because there were very few Livers at that time. Thanks to my experience there, I can assess the conformation very well, especially with the Ridgeback, and see the strengths but also the weaknesses. A Rhodesian Ridgeback is always an impressive representative of its breed, you should be able to see that in pictures.

Especially when certain flowers can put the dog in the limelight, such as the heather blossom, the magnolias or the rape, shoots are in demand. Then also males have to stand by their man and be immortalized on pictures with pink flowers ;)

Nature accompanies my photography all year round, but summer often suits the Ridgebacks the most. At all times of the day, often also at sunrise and sunset. Often there is no need for distracting motifs such as flowers or the like, just a free area to capture the magical and special lighting mood and not distract from it.

Autumn is also very special with its diverse, beautiful colors. I really like it when the leaves on the trees turn yellow, brown or dark red. Every forest becomes a magnificent play of colors. These colors are simply very special to the Ridgeback.

In landscape parks, on lakes or rivers. Wonderful pictures have already been taken on old disused buildings (Lost Place). I like to implement what is liked and desired.



A city center also often offers a lot of leeway, sometimes a special front door, a house wall, a fountain, a barn door or simply the street background with facades is a backdrop that a dog, especially an RR, can put in the limelight.

However, you can actually conjure up great pictures from almost any landscape or location. It doesn't matter whether it's a simple field or a small garden.

My imagination, or that of the customer, has few limits as to what is allowed and what pleases, I like to implement.

On my website I have described in detail for my customers how a dog photo shoot or a horse photo shoot runs or can run. There are a few things to consider, which I discuss before each appointment. Especially with the current situation, I don't take photos in the studio. In nature I can keep my distance to my customers without any problems.

Of course, enough photos are shown in the portfolio to get an insight into my style of painting in order to be able to estimate what kind of pictures you can expect from the shoot / from me. In addition to a few words from some of my previous customers, I also wrote down a few personal things about myself.

I myself attach great importance to empathy, as I just mentioned, trust has to be right. However, if you have only found each other over the Internet without personal contact, how should you decide whether or not sympathy can exist? Exactly, for this reason I will give you an insight into my work and describe myself as best I can. This is how you get to know me a little and you can decide whether you want to place enough trust in me for your very own photo shoot experience together with your dog, your favorite horse or both together.

WHICH BREED IN YOUR OPINION IS MOST PHOTOGENIC?

For the owner, every dog is certainly the most beautiful, and that's exactly how it should be. In the beginning I was very focused on the Rhodesian Ridgeback, but that has now changed. For me privately to live with the dog, it will always be the Ridgeback. I love this breed and of course also very much the look. Due to the many shootings with different breeds and mixed breeds, I have to say that every dog is beautiful! Every dog is individual and everyone has their own character. To be able to reflect that in the pictures is the challenge that makes it particularly exciting.

ARE THERE OTHER DOG PHOTOGRAPHERS THAT INSPIRE OR INFLUENCE YOU? IF NOT, WHO OR WHAT DOES?

I follow a lot of different animal photographers on Instagram and Facebook. As I have already written, here in Germany there is a lot of competition and envy. Sometimes it is very nice to take photos together and compare the pictures. In the end, everyone has their own style.

Influencing can sound negative. Copying someone else's pictures or trying to be as suc-

cessful as someone else. The focus should be on yourself. You have to like the pictures yourself and you can't lose yourself.

My website says "never take photos of something that doesn't touch your heart!" That's why I'm an animal photographer - and I believe you can see that in my pictures. It is also important to me that I touch you with my pictures.

IS THERE ANY ONE THING YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN OR PIECE OF ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO AN ASPIRING FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHER?

There is a big difference between just taking pictures and doing it commercially for customers. There are a lot of rules, a lot of facets that make up the whole. Photographing is a very small part of it. Anyone who is thinking of registering a business and taking photos for customers should deal with it early enough and plan and prepare everything well.

At the beginning of my business registration, I definitely underestimated the scope, it's just about more than just taking a few pictures. It is, however, the case that the fun of dealing with the different characters of the animals predominates. That the joy of the owners when they hold their finished pictures in their hands outweighs the feedback about wall pictures, immortalized forever with their favorite picture. When I then hear: you have captured my dog exactly as he actually is, it touches me. That is one of the reasons why photography became a passion. I see the character of an animal in the pictures. So, the fun and passion of what I achieve with my animal photography outweigh the stressful areas of a trader.

Because that's exactly what my photography is about. To give duration to the moment. Capturing the emotions and depicting the character. To the one picture of the heart. To memories for eternity. To be able to contribute and to be part of it is a privilege. A famous photographer (Henrik Cartier-Bresson) sums it up: "Photography can do something very special, it saves us from being forgotten. There is always something that continues to work, that remains in our memories - like an engraving. It's about triggering emotions. We look at the photos and at the same time experience the memories we associate with them..."

DO YOU HAVE ANY PETS OF YOUR OWN? AND WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE ANIMAL?

For many years we had a cat, even when the dogs moved in here. I spent my childhood with horses but never had my own. We currently have two Ridgeback girls, Eywa (Eywa by Bawean`s Hope) and Ziwah (Bonganis go to BwZ Ziwah). And as long as it is possible, Ridgebacks will probably always live here.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADD SOMETHING?

Yes, very much. All animal photographers hear very often that everything is too expensive, after all, it's just pictures. We all spend money - especially in today's society - on so many things, often on things that we later realize we may not need them at all. Of course, we don't have infinite amounts of money and we have to budget. But we save for things that are important to us in order to be able to afford them. Why did the lasting memories of our "fur children" not deserve this status? Why is it not worth "this price" for many? At the latest when we can no longer walk the path of life together - these memories should be worth more than anything else, right?

None of us know how long we are allowed to spend with our loved ones. One thing is clear: from the moment you notice that nothing works anymore, nobody will want to put the dog in front of a camera. Those who want that anyway won't get a photo from me at this point. No picture is worth the fact that a living being has to go badly for it. If you can already see in the pictures that the fur child is not doing well, then you will only reproach yourself later for having missed the right time. It doesn't have to be, do it now. Not because of me - because of you!

So, I would like to dedicate the last few lines to a matter close to my heart. Don't wait too long. Our Bheko was torn from life at the age of 10. He suddenly had seizures and had to go to the clinic. CT, diagnosis of brain tumor and we had to let him go. I am grateful for all the pictures I have of him. My heart's pictures are there. It's life-size on the wall in our living room. Always present, in the picture and in our memory. But the pictures help me a lot. Our Bhanu was almost 15 years old. He had a great dog life and in the end just couldn't take it anymore. I was able to deal with his loss differently because he was not torn from our lives so suddenly. But that is individual and certainly different for everyone. It doesn't matter how and when we have to accompany our fur children on the last journey - afterwards the memories are forever, lasting. Captured moments.

Your heart's pictures.

It's an RR magazine, of course I consciously chose Ridgeback pictures. In addition to my own dogs, only customer pictures can be seen.