

# CREDO

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AMBITION | XXVIII 2019

# Ambition

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Being an activist isn't a matter of age, says the young woman who set up the Green Hope Foundation. Since early childhood, she's been campaigning single-mindedly and passionately for environmental protection, sustainability and the rights of children.

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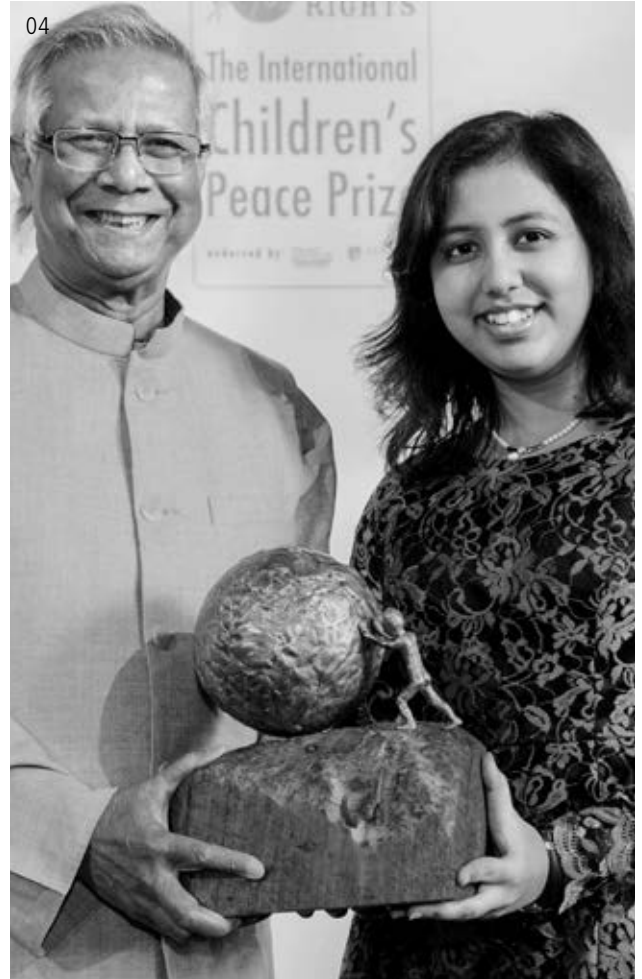
In his "Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man," the great German writer offers us a parody of the pursuit of fame and admiration – ambitions that also drove him throughout his life.

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Who invented it? Even in the world of research, the gloves are off in the struggle for renown and money. The science journalist Mathias Plüss explores why.

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Until a dreadful accident, the Swiss ski racer Daniel Albrecht was one of the best in the world. He managed a sensational comeback – but nevertheless pursues other goals today.



**Dear Readers,**

Ambition doesn't have the best of reputations. Unlike those of us who feel committed to certain ideals, the ambitious tend to be less focused on the well-being of others. They are more concerned with realizing their own goals. But is social commitment really imaginable without any ambition to drive it? After all, when members of the Princely Family pursued their ideals in politics and business over the centuries, their commitment to the community was surely also in part founded on personal ambition.

Our hitherto youngest-ever title personality, Kehkashan Basu, is also someone with a great sense of dedication. This 18-year-old environmental activist has given numerous speeches at international conferences. This has both made her the mouthpiece of youth, and at the same time brought her worldwide renown. The prospect of success is also what drives the young, talented musicians of the LGT Young Soloists. We have interviewed three of them – Sophie Bundschuh, Emilia von Albertini and Leo Esselson – and they tell us just how much time and passion they invest in their careers.

Whether or not ambition is perceived as being positive or negative depends on the result, says the former ski racer Daniel Albrecht in our Carte Blanche. Whoever achieves something on the basis of high ambition will get respect for it, he says. But if you fail to reach your goals, “they soon think you're crazy.” Some might have harbored similar thoughts about Sylwester Zawadzki when he set out. In our Report, you can find out how this Catholic priest in a little town in Poland overcame adversity to build the tallest statue of Christ in the world.

“Only that ambition through which no vanity shines can have a future,” wrote the French Nobel Laureate in Literature Sully Prudhomme. His tenacious colleague Thomas Mann nevertheless had his eye firmly on posterity when he created his own oeuvre of lasting significance – including the “Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man,” which Ijoma Mangold introduces here.

I hope you enjoy relaxing and reading this issue of CREDO.



H.S.H. Prince Philipp von und zu Liechtenstein  
Chairman LGT

# Eco-warrior, and citizen of the world

Text: **Gerd Braune** | Photos: **Chris Thomaidis**

**Since early childhood, Kehkashan Basu has been campaigning against climate change, and advocating sustainability and protecting the environment. As the founder of an ecological youth initiative, this 18-year-old activist today has a network all over the globe, and speaks at international conferences about our responsibilities toward tomorrow's world.**



Young, modern and dedicated. Contemporary means of communication help Kehkashan Basu to manage her worldwide environmental organization, the Green Hope Foundation, from her home in Toronto.

On her eighth birthday, Kehkashan Basu planted her first tree. Four years later, in June 2012, she was one of the youngest international delegates at the UN summit conference Rio+20, where she spoke about sustainable development. It was after this experience that she set up the Green Hope Foundation. This has made Kehkashan a spokesperson for young people who are committed to sustainability, environmental protection and children's rights, and are active in the struggle against climate change. "We won't have any future at all if we don't take our fate firmly in our own hands," she says.

This young woman with the long black hair clearly delights in bright colors. Her pink coat offers a striking counterpoint to the often dreary weather that dominates the long winter months in Toronto, the Canadian metropolis on the shores of Lake Ontario. "These radiant colors reflect our personality," says Kehkashan, smiling, as she takes off her coat and sits down at a table in the espresso bar of the Royal Conservatory of Music in the heart of Toronto. Her bright green T-shirt bears the "Green Hope" name on it – and its logo, too, which is an Earth opening up, and a tree emerging from it. "The colors display our joy in life and the hope that we want to spread," she says. "And the tree comes out of the heart of the Earth."

Kehkashan's ethnic roots are in Bengal in the east of India. Her parents lived in the West Bengali capital Kolkata before emigrating to Dubai in 1993. Her father Maushum Basu, an engineer at an electronics company, and her mother Swati, who taught political sciences, wanted to spend a few years living in Dubai to get to know a different culture. Kehkashan was born there in the year 2000. Although she has never lived in India, she is an Indian citizen just like her parents, because the United Arab Emirates usually never gives citizenship to immigrants. But that doesn't bother Kehkashan. She describes herself as a global citizen: "I identify myself with my roots and with the places where I grew up and where I now live – with India, the United Arab Emirates and Canada." She speaks Bengali with her parents, but has also mastered English, French, Arabic and Hindi. This year, she wants to apply for Canadian citizenship.

### Does age play a role?

Kehkashan's name comes from Persian and means "shining like a galaxy" or "Milky Way" (the first "h" is aspirated). She was born on 5 June – that's World Environment Day, as she points out, beaming. "It was probably preordained that I should grow up to be an eco-warrior." Shortly before her eighth birthday, she saw an image of a dead bird on TV whose stomach was full of plastic waste. "That was when I knew I had to do something."



Kehkashan is enrolled for a degree in environmental studies at the University of Toronto. One of her biggest challenges is how to combine her studies with her work for Green Hope.

This is why the first tree she planted on her birthday wasn't enough. Her parents are her role models. "They made me aware at an early age that I shouldn't throw away any food and that I should save water and electricity." Kehkashan also decided she had to reduce plastic consumption, so she started campaigning for her neighbors to stop buying products that used it. Some of them listened, while others refused. "Adults can be so cynical and patronizing. 'You're just a kid, why do you want to tell us what to do?' I heard that quite a few times." She began to get her friends involved. "They understood how terrible it is that we are polluting our environment with plastic waste." On Kehkashan's initiative, the children in her Dubai neighborhood embarked on a campaign against plastic. And they were successful! A restaurant promised to renounce all use of plastic, and a cosmetics salon followed soon after. This was when the children realized that they could actually get things done. And this left its mark on Kehkashan: "I'm convinced that every young person can bring about change. Age doesn't play a role."



## Into the public eye

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) became aware of Kehkashan through its youth program “Tunza: Acting for a Better World.” In 2011, she was invited to the Tunza International Children & Youth Conference on the Environment in Bandung in Indonesia. “I spoke to thousands of other young people from all over the world about how we can help to preserve our environment. That was my first step on the international stage.”

There were many more steps after that. In 2012, Kehkashan flew to Rio de Janeiro to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also known as Rio+20. There she spoke at a press conference about the struggle against desertification and severe droughts. Among all the heads of government and heads of state who were debating the future of the planet, she realized that an important segment of the population was almost completely absent. “We are the future.

The adults talk about it, but the actual generations of the future weren’t there. By the time I returned to Dubai, it had become clear to me: young people have to act.” Together with a few friends, Kehkashan set up the Green Hope Foundation on International Youth Day, 12 August 2012, with the aim of providing a platform for young people who want to campaign for environmental protection.

The young activists call themselves eco-warriors. Their activities include local projects such as removing trash from streets, rivers and lakes, caring for the endangered habitats of animals and plants, going on excursions to get people better acquainted with the environment, organizing activities on social media, and planting trees, time and again. “Up to now, we’ve planted more than 15 000 trees across the world,” says Kehkashan. They campaign against land degradation, and advocate sustainable production methods and conscious consumption, using alternative energies and renouncing fossil fuels. Although it is itself an oil



“She’s on a mission – a passionate mission for a greater cause,” is how Swati Basu describes her daughter’s sense of commitment.

producer, Kehkashan maintains that Dubai is a role model when it comes to expanding its use of solar and wind power. These young people pass on their convictions about the environment to others in the course of workshops called “environment academies” that last from a few hours to a whole day. Their most important target audiences are schools, but today they are also getting invitations from businesses. In Toronto, the local school authority is interested in Green Hope and its concepts. The Foundation’s guiding principles are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as defined by the UN.

### Passionate and single-minded

Kehkashan is meeting her friend Lauren Phillips-Grande in the espresso bar of the Royal Conservatory of Music. Lauren is also wearing the light green T-shirt of Green Hope. The two girls have known each other only for a few months. “We attended

the same sustainability workshop at the university,” explains Lauren, who’s 23, and who comes from Goderich on the shores of Lake Huron. She would like to become a teacher, specializing in environmental education. Kehkashan enrolled for environmental studies at the University of Toronto in the summer of 2018. The chemistry was right between these two young women right from the start. “We realized that we have the same goals. That was the basis for our friendship,” says Lauren.

What does she especially like about Kehkashan? “When she speaks, you immediately feel her passion for the environment. She’s just so passionate.” Passionate. Lauren uses this adjective most of all when describing Kehkashan. “Her commitment to the environment is part of who she is, not what she does. It’s not something that she engages in just for fun and then forgets again. She lives her message.”



Kehkashan excuses herself for a moment – she’s got a text from the Gulf. Her friends in Dubai want to collect trash on the coast this coming weekend and need her help with the organization. In this digital age of ours, it’s easy to sit in Toronto and find a contractor in Dubai who’s willing to take all the plastic trash away.

This young woman stands out for her single-mindedness. Once she’s solved the logistical problem in Dubai, she continues: “By the time I was 13 or 14 old, I already knew the path I would take.” She came to Toronto on a vacation with her parents in 2007. “I liked Canada right away,” she says. In 2013, her campaigning took her to the UN in New York for the first time, and from then on she combined every trip to this metropolis with a visit to Toronto. She began to plan a new foothold for her organization in North America. Toronto held a special appeal for her, as it is a multicultural city. In 2016, she settled here with her family, and in the summer of 2018 she completed her schooling at the North Toronto Collegiate Institute. Green Hope is recognized in Canada as a Not-for-Profit organization.

## En route all over the world

It wasn’t easy to get an interview date with Kehkashan. She lives in Toronto, but is in Dubai at least twice a year. Then she also has to attend meetings at international gatherings – because she’s not just the founder of Green Hope. Already back in 2013, she was elected for a 2-year term as UNEP’s Global Coordinator for Children & Youth. She is one of 22 Human Rights Champions who are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and she is a member of the World Oceans Day Youth Advisory Council that wants to protect the seas. She is also a youth ambassador for the World Future Council based in Hamburg, which sees itself as “the voice of future generations.” In March 2017, when she was 16, she spoke about climate change and the rights of children at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and in November of that year she spoke at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP 23 in Bonn. In 2016, she was awarded the International Children’s Peace Prize for her work, and in 2017 she received the National Energy Globe Award.

In September 2018, Kehkashan spoke on behalf of the World Future Council at the UN’s Conference on Disarmament, appealing to the governments of the world to work toward a future without nuclear weapons. After her speech in New York, also in fall 2018, she attended the One Young World conference in The Hague – a meeting of young people with the potential to become future leaders. Then she spoke at the 2018 Parliament of the

World’s Religions in Toronto, and a little later in Helsinki at the HunderED Innovation Summit, where the hundred most inspiring innovations in education are presented and honored. The prize winners included Kehkashan Basu and Green Hope.

## Commitment, not indifference

In Toronto, the winter months are uncomfortably wet and cold. All the same, young people from Green Hope recently came together on a rainy Saturday to clean a stream. Because talk is no substitute for action. That’s also evident from their most striking projects of recent years. In Lebanon, Kehkashan and peers from the United Arab Emirates visited a camp for Syrian refugees. They played with the children, made music with them, and cleared away waste and trash in the camp. In Suriname, the most heavily forested country in the world, they came together with more than 2000 children and young people, including many from indigenous peoples. Preserving the mangrove forests in Bengal is another topic close to Kehkashan’s heart.

Kehkashan’s mother accompanies her on many of her activities, because the young people shouldn’t travel to unsafe regions on their own. “She’s on a mission – a passionate mission for a greater cause,” is how Swati Basu describes her daughter’s sense of commitment. “It’s important to listen to children and young people. We have to offer them respect. The times are long gone when adults spoke and the children just had to listen.”

Kehkashan’s guiding principle is to work passionately for this planet of ours. “We have the right to decide our own fate,” she says. Time and again, she returns to what motivates her in her work. “If we don’t concern ourselves with the present, we will have no future. You’re never too young to achieve something.” She wants commitment from everyone, not indifference, whether young or old. We should always ask ourselves what impact our actions will have on this planet. “Every little step counts.”

## Thinking positively, while swimming against the tide

Kehkashan is aware that her many flights mean she has a considerable ecological footprint. But she believes that her work with Green Hope, her environmental campaigns and her tree planting will balance it out. She isn’t asking anyone to abandon their hitherto behavior from one day to the next. “There are lots of little steps you can take: don’t throw away any foodstuffs, don’t use aerosol sprays, and buy local food.” Kehkashan wants us all to think positively, even if it’s not always easy. Even a man like Donald Trump can’t destroy her optimism. “There’ll

always be naysayers. But we have to continue, despite them. In the USA too, there are people who are helping to mitigate climate change.” The fact that her commitment isn’t welcomed by everyone is confirmed by the e-mails she gets, which include messages such as “Stop your work!” She’s already experienced cyberbullying, even to the point of getting death threats. “But that just motivates me even more to work for change,” she says.

Breakfast and dinner with her parents are permanent fixtures in Kehkashan’s daily routine. She describes them as her best friends. There’s a piano in her room, and her closet is full of advertising materials for Green Hope: T-shirts, sweatbands and flyers. She loves sports, soccer most of all. Her favorite international team is FC Barcelona, but she also supports Toronto FC and the local ice hockey club, the Toronto Maple Leafs. Last fall she played in the Global Goals World Cup, a soccer tournament for girls organized by the UN. The final took place during the General Assembly in New York. At present, her main occupation is studying. Toward 10 a.m. she goes to the university, and sometimes her courses last until 8 p.m. She doesn’t draw any dividing line between her private life and Green Hope. “Green Hope is so much fun for me,” she says, though naturally she also meets up with friends who aren’t involved in it.

## Time for change

In the summer of 2022, Kehkashan aims to complete her Bachelor and then move to Harvard University to get an MBA before going to work for the World Bank. She wants to expand Green Hope in parallel to all that. The organization is dependent on donations. “I hope that one day we’ll even be able to offer green jobs,” she says.

Kehkashan looks at her watch. Her international commitments meant she recently missed a test, and she’s got to take it now to catch up. And this evening, she wants to Skype with friends in Dubai and Oman with whom she’s formed a band. They want to make music together – with Kehkashan in Toronto, and her friends in the Gulf. One of their songs is the “Song for Climate Justice.” Its words run: “It’s time for change now ... for a better tomorrow, for all.” ♦

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Gerd Braune has lived in the Canadian capital of Ottawa since 1997 in order to report on the country. Many Europeans regard Canada as a paradise, but hardly anyone really knows it. Braune writes for several newspapers in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg, including the Handelsblatt, the Stuttgarter Zeitung and the Tagesspiegel.



On a rainy winter's day in Crothers Woods in Toronto, Kehkashan and her fellow eco-warriors Lauren Phillips-Grande (left) and Alexandra Santos (right) pick up trash and sweep up leaves.



### Green Hope Foundation

The Green Hope Foundation was set up in 2012 in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates by the then 12-year-old Kehkashan Basu. It is a youth organization that campaigns for sustainable development, responsible lifestyles, environmental protection, peace, gender equality and children's rights. It is home to young people who want to learn about the dangers that threaten the environment, and how we can act to neutralize or at least to mitigate them. Today, Green Hope has over 1000 members and is active in twelve countries, including Canada, the USA, the United Arab Emirates, India, Suriname and Chile – and through its workshops it has been able to get more than 15 000 children and young people enthusiastic about protecting the environment. "Young people have immense potential and possess the capability to bring about change," says its website. "The future belongs to us!" It is financed by private donations.

For more information, go to [greenhopefoundation.wixsite.com/greenhope](http://greenhopefoundation.wixsite.com/greenhope)

# The crème de la crème

**“Elite” comes from the French verb “élire,” meaning “to elect,” and that is precisely what elite schools do. They educate, they stimulate ambition, and they (s)elect their students rigorously. We here take a tour through some of the most renowned talent academies of the world.**

Text: **Thomas Weibel**



## **Juilliard School, New York**

Whether you want to study music, dance or drama, the Juilliard School in New York is a world-class home to them all. It was founded in 1905 as the Institute of Musical Art, and was later renamed after its patron Augustus D. Juilliard, who died childless in 1919. It was designed to be an American conservatory on a par with those of the Old World. Today, even the list of its dropouts reads like a Who’s Who. There’s Miles Davis, for example, the trumpeter of the century, who entered Juilliard but left when the jazz clubs of Manhattan promised more excitement. The saxophonist and clarinetist Alan Greenspan was the same age as Davis and had done the same three semesters earlier, leaving Juilliard to join a big-band tour instead. Davis left his mark on the world of jazz, Greenspan on the world of finance – becoming famous not for his music, but as the Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve.



## **Central Saint Martins College, London**

James Bond 007 *aka* Pierce Brosnan, fashion designer John Galliano, and the singer Sade might not have that much in common, but all three are familiar with two things: the venerable building of Central Saint Martins College on Southampton Row in Holborn, and the concept of “crit.” Derived from the word “critique,” it’s a mixture of presentation and examination that takes place every few weeks, and is feared by all students alike. Whether they’re studying fashion or art, furniture or media design, those with a bad crit really have to burn the midnight oil – or will find themselves out on the streets altogether. Central Saint Martins is both a university and a hive of popular culture, and its alumni have taken all kinds of unusual career paths. Pierce Brosnan, for example, began by studying painting, but ultimately found his true calling in Her Majesty’s Secret Service.



## **École nationale de cirque, Montreal**

“Circus” is Latin for “circle,” and that’s something that all circuses have in common. Their arenas are round so that the audience has an unobstructed view – and because the riding acts need centrifugal force to help them perform their tricks. The “Tohu” is the circus ring of the École nationale de cirque, the National Circus School in Montreal, founded in 1981. It offers preparatory and high school training that its most exceptional students can pursue further in a three-year, full-time program for the circus arts. They study languages, literature and philosophy plus circus history, music and anatomy, and undergo several hours of circus training every day. The students practice disciplines such as floor and aerial acrobatics, balancing and juggling – all at the highest level. At the end of their training, its graduates get a college diploma – and the chance of a career as an artiste in the best circuses of the world.



### **École nationale d'administration, Strasbourg**

After the devastation of the Second World War, Maurice Thorez, a communist minister in the cabinet of Charles de Gaulle, was well aware that France could only reinvent itself by appointing the finest talents to its administrative system. So the École nationale d'administration (National School of Administration, ENA) was founded in 1945 to promote the cream of the crop. Right down to the present day, its entrance examination, the “Concours,” remains a huge challenge. There are some 3000 applicants on average, of whom just 120 are accepted. Over two years, these “énarques,” as they’re called, are formed into pillars of the state system. They study economics, law, management, and the art of negotiation, all within a context that is French, European and international at the same time. About a dozen presidents and prime ministers have attended the ENA.



### **Moscow State Academy of Choreography**

The Moscow State Academy of Choreography, also known as the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, is not just the world’s most renowned ballet school, but also the oldest. It was founded on the orders of Tsarina Catherine the Great in 1773, and since then it has trained most ensemble members of the famous Bolshoi Ballet. Up to 150 boys and girls attend its boarding school, and can thereafter enroll for a Bachelor and a Master – all conducted in Russian, of course. Arabesque, battement, croisé – whoever is accepted into the ranks of the Bolshoi has to master the ABC of ballet. There are thousands of applicants. If they can’t audition in person, they can participate in a preliminary audition by sending in a video, but only a few have any hope of ever achieving the final goal to which they all aspire: joining the legendary Bolshoi Ballet.



### **Kaospilot, Aarhus**

Any traditional business school relies on centuries of experience. But Kaospilot in Aarhus in Denmark, founded in 1991, has no desire to be a “traditional” school – after all, its founder Uffe Elbæk today leads the “Alternative,” a left-leaning, green party in Denmark. “Our teaching programs are not designed simply to shape students to fit the future,” says Kaospilot, “but to help them create it.” Creativity is here the top priority for future managers, though it’s not for everyone: the school only accepts 35 students a year. Playful, but reality-based; risk-taking, but balanced; streetwise, but compassionate: it wants its graduates to become entrepreneurs and managers who embody all of these attributes. Just like its founder Elbæk, who was once a social worker – then later a journalist, entrepreneur, politician and a government minister. In other words, he was a “chaos pilot” from the word go. ♦

“I felt this  
**drive**  
in me right  
from the start”

Interview: **Daniele Muscionico** | Photos: **Julian Salinas**

**They are young, successful, and have made music the focus of their lives. These three members of the LGT Young Soloists come from Vienna, Heidelberg, and Herrliberg near Zurich. They are all united in possessing ambition as one of their prime characteristics. But how does a young person come to terms with this? And can ambition be a vice as well as a virtue?**



They want to keep a sense of fun in their music-making:  
Leo Esselson, Emilia von Albertini and Sophie Bundschuh (f.l.t.r.).



*CREDO: Sophie Bundschuh, Emilia von Albertini and Leo Esselson: I imagine that you wouldn't have got where you are in the music world today if you all weren't ambitious. But how did this ambition come about? Did you have ambitious parents, or did you just realize one day that you were far more ambitious than your friends of the same age?*

**Sophie Bundschuh (born 1998):** I grew up as the youngest of four siblings. Perhaps in a case like mine, ambition is a survival mechanism. I grew up in a family that practiced competitive sports at a high level, and that will certainly have influenced me too. But I think it's more your personality that's the determining factor. I'm a perfectionist and I push myself.

**Emilia von Albertini (born 2002):** I used to push myself when I was still just a kid, and I noticed that I was somewhat more ambitious than those around me.

*What exactly do you mean by "push"? Do you mean you treated yourself like the ambitious moms of ice skaters, always goading yourself on to do better?*

**Emilia:** For me, pushing myself means I realized when still a kid that I can improve myself. That applies to my music – playing the violin – and to other areas too. So I practiced more and worked harder, regardless of whether it was for school or outside it. My ambition runs through all aspects of my life.



“If you're too ambitious, it can make you less passionate.”

Emilia von Albertini

**Leo Esselson (born 1999):** My career in music began when my parents tried to get me to take part in different activities, both in sports and in music. It was my mother and father who got me to love music, and now I have to say I'm very grateful to them for it.

*Sophie and Emilia, you say your ambition is a strength that you noticed regardless of your parents, and that comes from inside you. But in your case, Leo, it seems the outside influence was the most decisive. Is that true? And how important are role models for you?*

**Leo:** That's true. My mother used to play the piano, and if it weren't for her, I probably wouldn't have come to music. Later, of course, I had role models, such as my violin teachers. And a great soloist was always at the back of my mind because I'd seen him play live: that was Maxim Vengerov. I heard him play for the first-ever time when I was five or six years old. Wow! He was a superstar!

**Emilia:** It was also Maxim Vengerov for me! But another role model of mine was Anne-Sophie Mutter. I first heard her when I was eight, and from that moment onward I wanted to practice more.

**Sophie:** Anne-Sophie Mutter also fired my ambition. It was an early recording of hers. When our family used to drive to Italy, there was a really beautiful stretch of road through the mountains. Whenever we drove along it, we'd always listen to this recording in the car. The music suited the landscape perfectly, and it had an incredible impact on me. As for being pushed, that comes from inside me. I always wanted to be very independent. The same is true today. It's my parents and siblings who put their foot on the brakes and sometimes tell me I don't need to work so hard. So it's actually the other way around!

*It strikes me that you two ladies seem more ambitious than Leo. Is that a matter of chance, or is it actually gender-specific?*

**Sophie:** I do think that girls are more perfectionist than boys. But let's be honest: when you're five or six years old, it's still your parents who make sure that you practice. Ambition might come from inside us, but how we realize it depends on our parents.

*Do you have any idea why girls might be more perfectionist than boys?*

**Sophie:** I think it's got to do with having different interests. Girls tend to be tidier and better organized when it comes to their personal surroundings, whereas boys see things differently.

**Leo:** She's right, I know all about that. I'm lucky to have this young lady sharing our apartment – we are three boys and three girls. But as for being untidy and disorganized, I don't feel it applies to me personally ...





“You have to stay at it. In the wild years of puberty, that wasn’t so simple.”

Leo Esselson

*What value does your generation place on ambition? If you’re ambitious, does that make you an outsider, or is it perhaps even looked upon as being sexy?*

**Emilia:** I’d say that being successful is “in”. I see it in the music world and at school. I go to a private school, and success is important there. Success is also a personal goal. I want to grow and improve.

**Leo:** In my opinion, it depends on your environment. In our orchestra, where many of us have the goal of becoming a soloist, everyone is ambitious to a high degree. But just wanting to become a musician means you have to possess a certain amount of ambition from the start.

**Sophie:** I also think that appreciating ambition has to do with your environment. I attended two very different schools when I was younger. One of them was a private school in an upmarket area of Vienna. Parents had a lot of influence there, and the students had to fulfill expectations and be successful. We managed that, but on weekends we did nothing but party. At the Music High School in Vienna, things were completely different. Human values were also important there!

**Leo:** I find ambition necessary in music because there’s no limit to the amount of knowledge you can acquire. There’s always a lot to learn, and you can always get better. And if you’re a teacher yourself, you’re going to be ambitious for your students to achieve success.

*Is there a price to be paid for ambition in your lives? Does it mean a sacrifice of some kind? Turning down parties perhaps, or forgoing relationships and friendships?*

**Sophie:** It all boils down to time management! If you want, you’ll always find time for what’s important to you.

**Emilia:** I agree wholeheartedly with that.

**Leo:** Coping with both music and school is something I had to learn. Practicing three or four hours besides going to highschool is something to which you’ve got to adapt. You get home, eat something, practice, do some homework for school – and then it’s already evening. What’s important is being productive. Practicing productively. That means practicing only as long as you can concentrate properly. They say that after five hours, your brain isn’t fresh anymore.

**Emilia:** Practicing three or four hours a day is average – but it’s not the maximum.

*It’s clear that you’re all able to achieve the notorious work-life balance without any problems. But are there times when you’re playing your violin and you think that it might actually be the best friend you have – maybe your only real friend?*

**Sophie:** Many claim that their instrument is their real life partner. And as a musician, you’ll always have too little time for friends. But while I like my violin, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that I have an intimate relationship with it, not like you can with another human being.

**Leo:** It’s weird to try and describe the relationship you have with your violin. Either way, your love for it has to grow. But it’s not a romantic relationship. Playing the violin is more like a partnership.

**Can you learn ambition?**

**Emilia:** Yes, you can learn it! I think you’re definitely born with a certain drive. But you can develop ambition by surrounding yourself with people who themselves are very ambitious. It then rubs off on you. For example, my mother is very successful. But I felt this drive in me right from the start.

**Leo:** Your upbringing plays a big role. When I see how happy my parents are to support me, then I want to give something back in return. You want to thank them; if they see their son practicing

four or five hours, then they'll think it was worth paying for his violin lessons! When my mother sees me play in a concert, she's really proud. I've learned to appreciate the support I get from my parents. And that also helps to make me ambitious.

**Emilia:** Ambition is also bound up with the desire to be independent. If that weren't the case, I don't think you could call it ambition. This is also why your upbringing is so important.



“If you want, you’ll always find time for what’s important to you.”

Sophie Bundschuh

*You talk a lot about your upbringing, your home environment and your parents. Were there also moments in your childhood when you would rather have banished the violin from your everyday lives? Have you ever asked yourselves if a career in music is really worth being so focused?*

**Sophie:** I grew up with sports. Music was just another activity for me and my siblings – a hobby. Back then, I had no interest whatsoever in the violin or in classical music. If my parents weren't at home, we'd make deals with each other to pretend we'd actually practiced. Or we'd change something about the instruments so it looked like we'd practiced.

**Leo:** Sometimes I'd rather have played soccer with my friends

than practice. And to be sure, now and then you can give yourself a break and just do it. But then you have to focus properly again, because you know that if you stop practicing for a few days, then it's like having to start from scratch. You have to stay at it. In the wild years of puberty, that wasn't so simple.

*When you look at the music world with what you know today, do you think you can have a big career and achieve outstanding things if you aren't ambitious?*

**Emilia:** Can you achieve anything outstanding without ambition? I think there are limits here. You have to push yourself to reach a point where you're achieving more than the average. Otherwise, it's just learning – you're doing what's necessary, just enough, or maybe not quite enough. Maybe you can become successful without ambition, but ambition will make you more successful. They say that if you're to get ahead, then you have to leave your comfort zone!

**Sophie:** I think that's what we all do. We're always trying to grow beyond our own limitations.

*Can you explain what that actually means to someone who isn't musical?*

**Leo:** The real work begins when you get down to the finest details. You're no longer practicing to be able to play a piece. You can already do that. Instead, you're practicing consciously and cautiously because you know exactly how you want to interpret it. Jascha Heifetz was one of the greatest-ever violinists, and he once said that success was 5 percent talent and 95 percent hard work.

**Sophie:** It's also important because at the start you don't know what's behind the façade of a piece. You have to discover what you can really achieve, and what lies hidden away in a score. If you can get past this façade, then a whole world can suddenly open itself up to you.

*Do you have any ideas or aspirations regarding what you'd like to achieve in the music world?*

**Leo:** Our teacher once asked me: What is it you'd really like to learn? It's a very good question. Back then I had no idea how to answer him. Today, I'd like to have complete technical control over what I do. Because only then can I decide what I want to do. In other words, my goal is to be able to do everything I want on my instrument.

**Emilia:** I don't have any concrete goal as yet. So I can't say that I hope to become a soloist, for example.

*So there isn't any specific scenario you want? There's no ideal orchestra you'd want to work with, no ideal conductor to play under?*

**Sophie:** At our age, you're in such a state of change that you never know in which direction you're going to end up. No, I can't decide that now, and I don't want to, either. I know that I definitely want to stay in the music world, but I don't know anything more than that. My goal is to develop as best I can on my instrument, and to realize what's in my head. If I had to say today that I want to be either a soloist or an orchestral player, or to play in a specific orchestra, then that would mean being pretty blinkered. I'd feel that I was ignoring all kinds of other options.

**Leo:** That's how I see things too. I don't want to suffer from tunnel vision right now. Some musical kids have parents who insist on them becoming soloists. That can often be a big burden on a kid. I've recently become involved in orchestral management, and it's really exciting. It's only then that you realize everything that goes on behind the scenes in an orchestra. It's not just about whether the musicians play well or practice well. I had no idea about all that before. So you never know what might arise in your life.

*Finally, I want to ask you all a question that you must have asked yourselves before: Can ambition also send a musician in the wrong direction?*

**Sophie:** Sure, especially young musicians who're only doing music because of their parents. You see that a lot – and you can also see how those kids suffer because of it. After all, they might well have very different interests. Kids like that can also become really good musicians – but I think you notice it when they play.

**Leo:** If you're absolutely set on achieving a goal because of your ambition, then it can be a really bitter experience if you don't achieve it. But what's positive is that music isn't a career in which you simply earn money. You have so much fun in it, and you never stop learning. Ambition shouldn't prevent you from doing that.

**Emilia:** If your violin is your sole concern, day and night, then you might just stop loving it. I think if you're too ambitious, it can make you less passionate. ♦

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Daniele Muscionico worked for many years as a culture editor at the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" (NZZ). Today, she is responsible for theater reviews at the NZZ, and works freelance as an author and columnist for various German-language publications. She also publishes on the theory of theater and has written books about artists.



## LGT Young Soloists

This string ensemble was founded in 2013 by the violinist Alexander Gilman and the pianist Marina Selteneich, in collaboration with LGT. It brings together young, talented musicians from 15 different countries aged between 12 and 23. The idea behind the project is to allow highly gifted individuals to appear with their peers in an orchestral setting. Their regular performances enable them to showcase their skills as soloists, as chamber musicians and as an orchestra, and to develop their stage presence. These musicians are given the opportunity of playing on exceptional instruments, to exchange ideas among each other and to establish new friendships and networks. In 2018, the LGT Young Soloists played in venues including Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, Belgrade, Zurich, Munich, Düsseldorf, London and also – for the first-ever time – the Dresden Music Festival.

[www.lgtyoungsoloists.com](http://www.lgtyoungsoloists.com)

An aerial, black and white photograph of a town. In the foreground, there is a large, dark, open field with some faint tracks. A road or path runs across the middle ground. In the background, a residential area with many houses is visible, along with a large commercial building that has 'TESCO' written on its side. The sky is overcast and hazy.

# The colossal ambitions of a little town

Text: **Gerald Drissner** | Photos: **Raphael Zubler**

**“He will be great,” says the Gospel according to St. Luke about Jesus. In Świebodzin, a little-known town in Poland, the local Catholic priest took this prophesy at its word and decided to build the tallest statue of Christ in the world. So was it ultimately worth the trouble?**



Awe and magnitude: The statue of Christ on the outskirts of Świebodzin is nearly 120 feet tall and makes people and houses seem tiny in comparison. The town wanted a world record for the fame that comes with it.



Sylwester Zawadzki and his Mercedes: an eloquent priest who feared no opposition.

On 31 August 2009, Sylwester Zawadzki, the priest of a little town in Poland, called together his flock for a farewell ceremony: “Goodbye, little blue car.” His car – a light blue Mercedes W 123 with the license plate IGF 4704, had finally given up the ghost after 32 years and over 600 000 miles. The members of his parish knew they had a lot to thank this car for. Over the years, their priest had traveled back and forth across Poland in his efforts to realize his dream: to create the biggest statue of Christ in the world. He visited dozens of churches and museums, and looked all over, in courtyards and gardens, to find the perfect model for the Son of God. And when he finally saw the first heavy equipment arrive, the locals also saw their priest drive his Mercedes through all the dust and dirt up the hill to the construction site.

We’re in Poland, some 50 miles beyond the German border, one November morning in 2018. Flocks of crows are ignoring all the scarecrows and are cawing and congregating here above the fields of Świebodzin as if looking for something. It smells of winter here, like there’s something burnt in the air. That’s because many people here burn coal in their stoves and fireplaces to keep warm.

## Number games for the Lord

Until just a few years ago, this little town with 21 000 inhabitants was absent from all the travel guides because there was simply nothing here. But many tourists drive past Świebodzin on their way to their vacation destinations because two major roads cross here: the A2, which on the East German side is crumbling away, but here in Poland shines with new asphalt, and the old highway S3, which runs from Szczecin in the north all the way to the Czech border in the south. The priest of Świebodzin was convinced that his statue would attract the attention of “every one of the tens of thousands of people who drive past here each day.” Those who saw it would involuntarily begin to think of “things in their lives that are more important than the place they’re traveling to.” His plan to create a monumental figure to the glory of the Lord would make his little town world famous, he was sure of it.

Father Zawadzki left nothing to chance. Jesus is said to have been 33 years old when he was crucified. So it was decided this should be the height, in meters, of the monument. Zawadzki also decided that his Messiah should have a gilded crown three meters high, symbolizing the three years that he spent on his



Świebodzin, not far from the German border. You can see the statue of Christ in the distance – it was intended to protect the town from harm.

ministry. If you add all this together, this colossus, weighing about as much as a Boeing 747 with a full passenger load, is 36 meters high – nearly 120 feet – which makes it 20 feet taller than Christ the Redeemer, the famous landmark that towers over Rio de Janeiro. When it was unveiled on 21 November 2010, there wasn't a single statue of Christ in the world that was taller than that of Świebodzin. Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz was the main celebrant of the Holy Mass at its inauguration. He blessed it and said: "Świebodzin has now appeared on the map of Poland and of Europe."

### Abandoned Holyland

It's now been standing here for eight years, this whitewashed concrete statue. If it hasn't brought world fame to Świebodzin, at least it's managed to get into the German-language travel guides. But the construction site has never quite disappeared. The whole site looks like a large vacation complex for which the money at some point just ran out. For years now, a crane has stood next to a quickly raised building in which pilgrims can spend the night, and who are willing to put up with instant coffee for breakfast. The visitors' restrooms are housed in a corrugated iron shack, while the snack bar next door is empty.

The path up to the statue leads along a boulevard whose trees are too young to be noticed. The "Holyland Park" that Father Zawadzki had once imagined, with a bubbling spring at the feet of the Lord, a Sea of Galilee, a manger of Bethlehem, a hill of the Ascension and millions of pilgrims who would come, pray and donate – all this remains a pipe dream. Volunteers help to maintain those things that need it. There's an elderly man, for example, with a canister on his back who is spraying all the plants with pesticide.

Most visitors look for somewhere to take a good selfie. There are young couples here, some families, and three bikers in full leather gear. Now and then, someone will set down a picture or a candle. An old woman throws herself to the ground, kisses a rosary and tells God of her troubles. "Every day when I drive to work, I see people there," says Anna Anklewicz, 33, the chef at the Mimoza Restaurant. After a difficult day at work, she'll sometimes drive up there herself to go and think. "Some people have even spoken of miracles," she says. "I'd love to experience something like that. But no, nothing big has happened yet." And in any case, the reality is this: "A miracle is something that's different to everyone. It can also be something small."



The whitewashed statue of Christ was a matter of intense debate in Poland – and also raised questions about the influence of the Catholic Church.



## The two callings of Father Zawadzki

Faith can move mountains – or, as the Evangelist Matthew puts it, “nothing is impossible with God.” But how can you convey a belief in something big to others? How can you get them to be just as passionate, so that the mockers, doubters and the envious have no chance? Big deeds – whether good or bad – are usually carried out by people who think little of modesty, consideration or compromise, and who prefer things loud, not soft. People like Sylwester Zawadzki.

On photos of the priest during the construction phase, you see a well-nourished man in a cassock – not a man you would want to get in the way of. Not least on account of his ample girth. Anna Anklewicz, the chef, received her first communion from him. She describes him as a “very concrete person.” The sort of man who’s always wanting to start new things. “Everywhere you saw his light blue car, you’d know that something was happening.”

Sylwester Zawadzki was the son of a farmer and grew up in a village near Zwoleń, some 300 miles to the east of Świebodzin. He was fascinated by buildings when still a child. “I loved observing construction workers, how they built walls and created new things,” he said to a Polish church newspaper. He even admitted the following to a journalist from the “Märkische Oderzeitung,” a German newspaper: “I received two callings in my life. The first was to the priesthood, the second was to build.” The oppressive socialist authorities who controlled the country after the Second World War weren’t interested in the dreams of any individual. So Zawadzki studied theology because a life as a priest offered him the breathing space he needed to pursue his real passion: building.

Zawadzki built his first church in 1981 in the village of Radnica. And if he came to a place that already had churches, he renovated them – installing heating systems, new floors and water pipes, revamping the interior and the lighting, and procuring new organs. It was at that time that his colleagues in the priesthood gave him the nickname “Ksiądz Budowniczy,” which means “building priest.”

## Impervious to any doubts

Zawadzki’s studies took him to Gorzów Wielkopolski, which was already quite close to his last, most important domicile and place of activity: Świebodzin, where he worked as the Catholic priest from the early 1980s onwards. After the fall of communism, he bought up all he needed for his own construction company – an old brick factory, a sawmill and building machinery. All this was so that he could build a church in the new district of town.

Zawadzki drew up the plans for his church himself. It got bigger and bigger and was ultimately named the “Sanctuary for the Mercy of God.” He knew how significant his building was. The Third Polish Republic that emerged after communism was a country still searching for its own identity. Zawadzki’s “Sanctuary” was the first Polish church in the town, because its two other churches had been built by the Germans, long before, when they ruled this region.

At the turn of the new millennium, Zawadzki is supposed to have heard an “inner calling” to create the world’s biggest monument to the Lord. He was almost 70 years old at the time. Those people who are keen to say good things about him will tell you that he had a big heart for the poor, and that he helped the weak to solve things “unbureaucratically.” But if anyone ever dared to cross their priest, he is said to have resorted to any and all means in return, threatening to deny people baptism, communion, confirmation, marriage, and even the burial of a family member. Zawadzki was a man who was willing to use his office to



For some visitors, the statue of Christ exudes a power of its own. Others come just to take a selfie.

ride over anyone and everyone, and was impervious to any doubts – even when it came to his interpretation of the Ten Commandments. A little cheating and cursing was all part of his style.

### Satanic intrigues?

Although Father Zawadzki was seized by his enthusiasm for a colossal statue back in November 2000, it took him a long time to find the right piece of land for it. It was not until March 2005 that he succeeded in buying four acres of vegetable field. He then made an official building application to be able to construct a “garden sculpture.” In order to carry out the heavy work of excavating and raising up a 50-foot-high stone hill for the base of the statue, he brought in prisoners from the local jail (though without paying them anything). When a convict made a getaway from the construction site, the press caught wind of it and the prison warden was compelled to stop his collaboration with Zawadzki. And opposition to the priest’s plans suddenly began to arise on all sides. Critics claimed the money he was spending on the statue ought rather to be used for hospitals, and they also wanted to compel Zawadzki to disclose where the money actually came from – according to some estimates, he had gathered between 1.5 and 3 million euros for the statue. Zawadzki would only explain that people had given donations for it, and he didn’t even know himself how much it was costing. “I’m not going to keep the books for a holy thing,” he said.

In early 2009, the whole project threatened to be on the brink of failure. A local building inspector raised doubts about the construction permit and stopped all the work. Father Zawadzki was by now 76 years old, but wasn’t to be discouraged. In front of the cameras he promised to fight these “satanic intrigues.” He loftily told journalists the story of a building supervisor in Zielona Góra, from whom he had wanted to commission a church in 1988 but who had reputedly cried: “Over my dead body.” Three months later, the man was dead, quite unexpectedly. The mood in Świebodzin now became more aggressive. One night, unidentified perpetrators slashed the tires on the building inspector’s car. The town council now intervened to exert its own pressure on the inspector, who relented and gave his permission to continue with the project.

The statue was finished in November 2010, just in time for the Feast of Christ the King on the Sunday before Advent. Father Zawadzki, now 78 years old, got in a plane and circled around the culmination of his life’s work. “I’m so happy!” he said, looking down on his imposing edifice from above. His flight was paid for by a former altar boy who had gone into the real estate business and become a rich man.

### Bastion of the Catholic faith

Was it ultimately their religious convictions that gave the people the strength and the courage to believe in the ambitious ideas of their priest? The members of Zawadzki’s parish certainly met together dozens of times to pray through the night for God’s help with their project. Or was it simply an unknown little town yearning to become famous? The then mayor once said to the Polish newspaper “Metro” that his model was Egypt, where thousands of shop and hotel owners lived from the pyramids. Or was this monumental sculpture only made possible because a crafty priest wanted to achieve a form of immortality? It’s presumably a mixture of all of these.

Right down to the present day, Poland is regarded as a bastion of the Catholic faith. During the communist era, a church was a secure space where people were more or less free to say whatever they actually thought. In 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Cracow was elected Pope, giving himself the name of John Paul II. At his first mass as Pope, he spoke the famous words: “Do not be afraid!” Even today, people in Poland still talk about how close he was to the common folks – that he secretly went skiing when he was Pope, and that he would just turn up at people’s doors up in the mountains. When he visited Poland in June 1979, millions attended his masses. One year later, the shipyard workers of Gdańsk went on strike and the union *Solidarność* became a popular movement opposed to the regime. And they had public support from the man in the Vatican, who represented over a billion people on Earth. Some Poles even suspect that the Pope was put in place by the CIA in order to destroy communism.

### A heart for the statue

Polish identity is a tricky topic, says Marek Nowacki, the director of the Regional Museum in Świebodzin. “This ground here wasn’t originally Polish. If we want to find something Polish here, we have to go back to the Middle Ages,” he explains. “So how should we function if we have 600 years of German history but only a few decades of Polish history?” The Jesus figure has given the town a sense of self-identity, he says. “If you’re in Warsaw and mention where you’re from, you now get the answer: Świebodzin, I know that place.” Companies, too, have become aware of the town. The German company Recaro has opened a production facility here some 100 000 square feet in size. It makes airplane seats for economy class and employs 150 workers, with more jobs in the pipeline.

In April 2014, three and a half years after the Christ statue was blessed, Sylwester Zawadzki died at the age of 81. In his will,



The man who made the monument possible now lies beside it: Father Sylwester Zawadzki asked that his heart be buried here.

he had requested that his heart should be buried at the feet of his statue – even though this is contrary to Polish law. His last wish was granted.

### **Precarious prospects**

Father Mariusz Kołodziej has been in charge of the parish since August 2018. He receives us one Tuesday evening in his residence, and has dinner served to us: potato salad with herring, home-made sausage and English breakfast tea. There are moving boxes in every corner. He's only unpacked a few personal items up to now. On the wall there is a photo he took himself that shows a snow-covered mountain in the Zillertal in Tyrol. The priest is an enthusiastic skier. He pulls out a T-shirt and proudly reads to us what it says on it: "I survived Harakiri. The steepest piste in Austria. 78 percent."

He likes this area, he says, but there are also "unlovely things" happening around the border – meaning prostitution. Part of his office ceiling is damaged. It was a water leak. "Zawadzki achieved a lot," he says with a slight sigh. "But some things he did too quickly. He rarely commissioned companies to do the work and instead saw to it all after his own fashion. You know what I mean." Mold had already begun to form on the Christ statue several years ago, and a ventilation system had to

be installed. But above all, the statics of the statue are causing headaches to experts. According to their calculations, the proportions of the statue are problematic, and the foundations are not deep enough to support it. "We give the statue 20 years, then it will fall down," is the opinion of the engineers who've spoken to the Polish media.

Perhaps ultimately, some higher instance will decide whether it survives or not. In 2014, when Father Zawadzki died, there were heavy storms in Rio de Janeiro. A bolt of lightning struck the famous statue of Christ and destroyed a middle finger, then a storm broke off a thumb. In Świebodzin, people assure us, all lightning strikes have missed the statue up to now. ♦

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Gerald Drissner is an Austrian journalist who lived for many years in Israel, Egypt and Turkey – three countries where Christianity has historical roots. His reports and analyses have been published in the "Berliner Tagesspiegel," the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung am Sonntag," and in the magazines "Stern" and "profil," and have won several awards including the renowned Axel Springer Award.

▶ You can find a video about this Report at [lgt.com/credo](https://lgt.com/credo)



Nicolas Colombel, detail from "Atalanta and Hippomenes," around 1680  
© LIECHTENSTEIN. The Princely Collections, Vaduz-Vienna

# The race

There are different reasons why a painting can appeal to us and fascinate us. The big attraction might be the artist, regardless of whatever his work depicts; or it might be the subject of his painting that draws us to engage with it. In the case of Nicolas Colombel (1644–1717), it is certainly not the artist himself who is the prime object of our interest, but his painting – for the work shown here is probably one of the finest that this largely unknown French artist ever made. Of course, it is far better to possess something exceptional by a lesser-known painter than something peripheral by a great name.

This painting depicts the myth of Atalanta and Hippomenes, a story that has attracted many artists. Both painters and sculptors have felt compelled to depict the fate of these two mythical figures. The best-known example is by Guido Reni (1575–1642), of which two versions are extant – one in the Museo del Prado in Madrid, the other in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte in Naples. We can be sure that Colombel knew Reni's work when he approached this topic himself.

The source of the story is Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Atalanta's father Iasus had hoped for a male heir, so in his disappointment at her birth he puts her out on a hill near Calydon. But Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, sends a female bear to suckle the child and help it to survive. Atalanta thereafter grows up among hunters, becoming the swiftest of them herself, and taking an oath of virginity. She has to prove herself in combat, not least in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar. Ultimately, her father is so impressed by her attainments that he recognizes her as his daughter and desires to marry her off.

But Atalanta intends to keep her oath, and so demands that her future husband should be able to beat her in a race. If a suitor loses, then she is to be allowed to kill him. Many men try, but they fall behind and are killed. Then Hippomenes comes along. He has never seen Atalanta before, but observes one of her contests with a suitor, both of them naked. He is entranced by her beauty and wishes to race against her. Atalanta, however, tries to dissuade him, as she finds this young man too attractive to wish an inevitable death upon him.

Hippomenes now begs for help from Aphrodite, the goddess of love. So she gives him three golden apples that he is to throw

to the ground in order to slow up Atalanta. After all, what woman could possibly resist the allure of glittering gold, and simply run on regardless?

The race begins, and the two participants remain equally matched for a long while. But when Hippomenes begins to falter, Aphrodite gives him a sign to drop the first apple. Atalanta promptly bends down to pick up the golden fruit, and so falls behind. After Hippomenes performs the same ruse twice more, he is able to cross the line as victor.

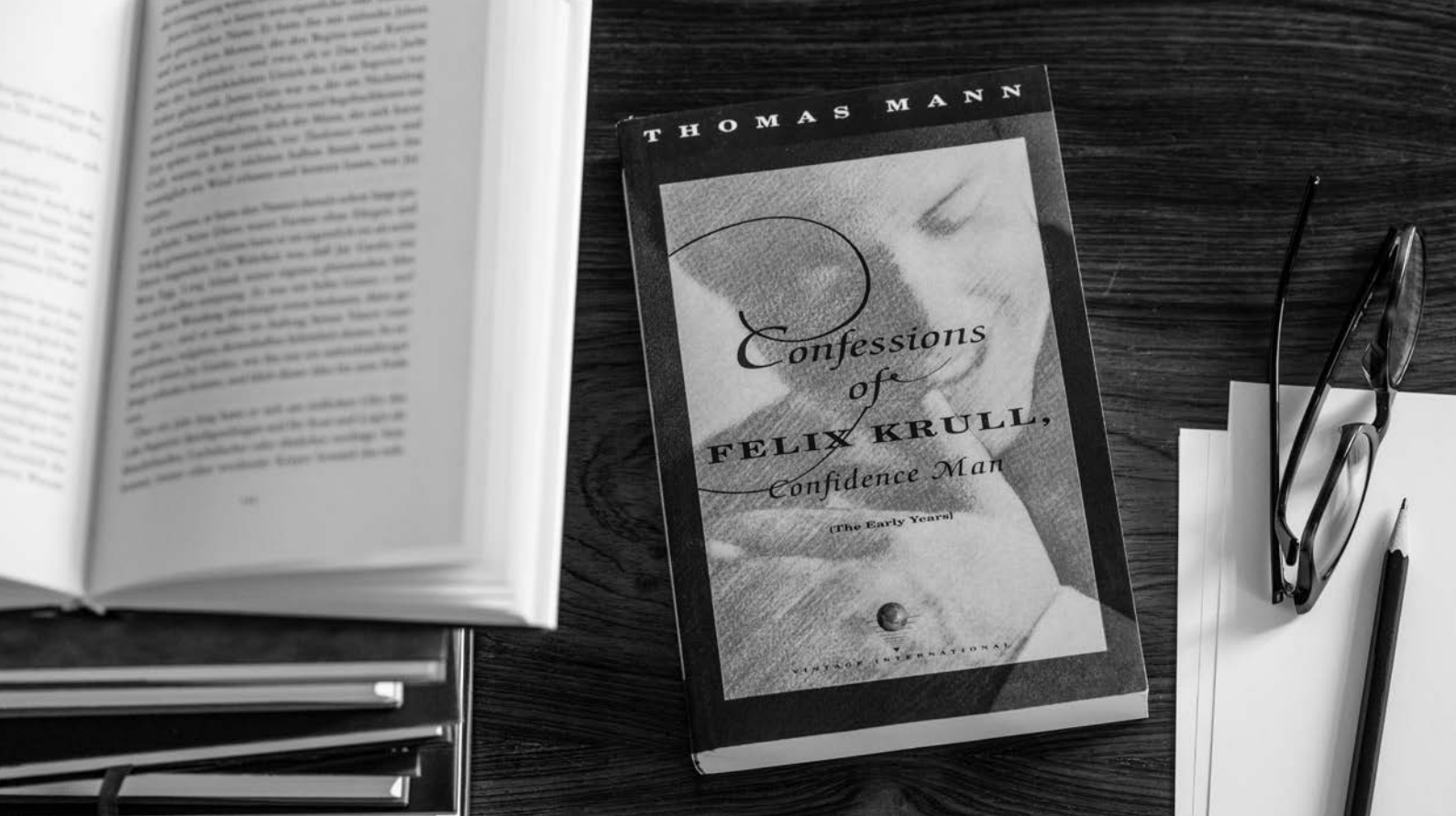
Colombel depicts his two runners in the heat of the chase in a meticulously executed Arcadian landscape. Their bodies are painted with seductive sophistication, and a cherub holds up the torch of love and life, thereby hinting at the outcome of the story.

Artists have long been fascinated by this race, by the tenacity shown by the two runners in pursuit of their goals, and ultimately by the victory of Hippomenes that in fact signifies a victory for both of them. On the one side there is Atalanta, who has risen up by dint of her own persistence, staunchly proclaiming her invincibility but succumbing at just the right time; and on the other there is Hippomenes, who has desired her from the moment he set eyes on her, and does everything to make her his wife.

The Princely Collections possess another depiction of this myth in the form of a recently acquired Hippomenes in Doccia porcelain. Its companion piece, a depiction of Atalanta, is lost and is currently on the Collections' list of sought-after items. Here, too, persistence will be required if it is to be found. Or is it perhaps forever lost, shattered and discarded somewhere? Only the course of history will tell. We might have to hold our breath a long time ... ♦

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Dr. Johann Kräftner is the director of the Princely Collections of the House of Liechtenstein and from 2002 to 2011 was director of the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM, Vienna. He is the author of numerous monographs on the history and theory of architecture.



# From social climber to darling of the gods

Ambition – the desire to achieve success, fame and social advancement – doesn't have a very good reputation. Those who've belonged to the upper crust from time immemorial tend to turn up their noses at upstart arrivals who've had to struggle hard to reach their elevated echelons. If you've always belonged, then you're a stranger to struggle. But the expression on the face of a social climber is often enough to betray him, as he has the stressed look of someone who lifts heavy weights. It's rare for such a man to evade general disdain, though we find a special exception made for the con artist. Even though he plays the hierarchical system *ad absurdum*, the confidence man gains our admiration because he's seen through society – to his own benefit, of course, but at the same time to the general amusement and enlightenment of everyone else. We also forgive him his deceptions because he is able to impersonate the attitudes of the upper class with a grace and charm that surpass his models. Just as an actor can appear even more regal than any true king, it's in the confidence man that the style of the privileged classes reaches absolute perfection.

In 1954, Thomas Mann devoted a whole novel to this social type – or, to be more precise, half a novel. His “Confessions of

Felix Krull, Confidence Man” is a fragment, for he only finished the first half of it. It tells a story of success that proceeds almost without any resistance. Wherever Felix Krull turns up, doors open to him because everyone succumbs to his charm and cannot get enough of his flattery. Krull always beguiles them with blandishments, addressing them with titles that extend far beyond their actual rank in society.

## Optimism despite loss of status

And yet Felix Krull's childhood and youth seemed to pass under an unlucky star. He is the son of a sparkling wine manufacturer from the Rheingau region. His father is a man who revels in Baroque excess, delighting in booze and frivolity, and given to inviting the local Bohemians to erotically charged costume balls in his upper-class villa (“Since my parents bored each other to distraction, they often invited guests from Mainz and Wiesbaden, and then our house was the scene of merriment and uproar,” writes Mann). Sadly, old man Krull lives way beyond his means, because despite its elegant label, his “Loreley extra cuvée” bubbly is as ghastly as dishwater, and his winery is in a state of constant financial decline. No matter how hard they try to keep up their pretense of glitzy living, the family can't maintain their

status. And then, one day, the bailiff finally arrives at their door. Felix Krull's father is too much of a dreamer to be able to confront this new reality, so he shoots himself. This means his son is now out on his own. But he does not despair. On the contrary, he's utterly confident, because his sense of self is barely distinguishable from a pathological narcissism. And whoever loves himself will attract the love of others.

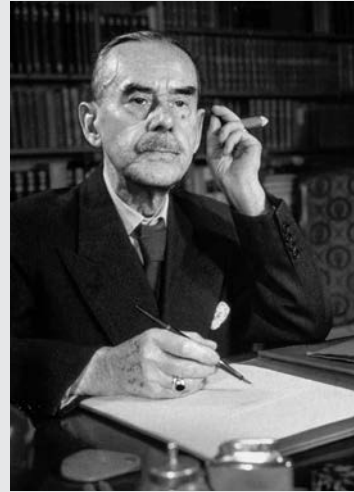
### The key to success is looking the part

The life and career of Felix Krull are founded on more or less two things: his abovementioned self-confidence, which when still a child had convinced him that he was made "of finer stuff" than others; and his powers of observation, which are just as well developed. Because every confidence man is like a chameleon, able to adapt to any environment. If he is to succeed, he has to be able to grasp every detail intuitively. And Felix Krull knows that the key to success in society is to look the part. If you act like a count, you'll be treated like one too. Since fine feathers make fine birds, all doors in the world will be open to a confidence man like Krull, as long as he invests his meager start-up capital in the right clothes.

With the aid of his godfather, Krull junior gets a job as a liftboy in one of the better hotels in Paris, the Saint James and Albany. This is an ideal venue for him to open up a path to the top, for here he is constantly confronted with the rich and the beautiful. He can learn from them how to move and behave. At the same time, such a hotel is also ideal for a young, comely liftboy to catch the eye of the lonely hearts among the wealthy. Amorous adventures are the most reliable way to get onto the rungs of the social ladder. Madame Houplé, for example, is the bored wife of a toilet bowl manufacturer, and repeatedly invites Krull to her room. And just like Hermes, the god of thieves, his role in their lovemaking includes stealing from her, because Madame finds the humiliation it entails especially arousing.

### The charm of a double life

In this way, Krull begins to build up his first nest egg. As he advances from liftboy to waiter, and thence to maître d', he invests his money in an elegant wardrobe. Now he can embark on a double life. On his days off, he transforms himself and is no longer a waiter, but a cavalier to be waited on by others, in other well-known restaurants. When the Marquis de Venosta actually recognizes him as the waiter from the Saint James and Albany, he at first cannot believe his eyes at just how suave Krull can act. But then the Marquis has an idea. He wants to stay in Paris because he's in love with a girl here. His family, however, regards her as beneath his station and has been planning a trip around



### Thomas Mann

When the young Thomas Mann published his first novel in 1901, "Buddenbrooks," it promptly turned him into one of the best-known writers in Wilhelmine Germany. His native Lübeck hated him for it, however, because it's a *roman à clef* that holds up a mirror to the patricians of his home city. But for the

educated classes in Germany, Mann was now their most representative writer of all. His attitudes were conservative, and his "Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen" ("Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man") played a role in the general mobilization of Germany in the First World War, elevating German culture as a paragon in comparison to western, French civilization. But in the 1920s, Mann became an important pillar of the Weimar Republic. He had always harbored a personal ambition to be seen as the most significant German writer among Goethe's successors, and in 1929 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. When the Nazis assumed power in 1933, Mann was on a lecture tour to the Netherlands. He did not desire to make common cause with the Nazis, so he did not return to Germany. In 1938, he emigrated to the USA, moving to Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles in 1941. His BBC radio broadcasts to Germany entitled "Deutsche Hörer!" ("German listeners!") made him the most prominent voice to speak out against the murderous regime in his native country. He insisted that "where I am, there is Germany." Thomas Mann died in Switzerland in 1955.

the world for him. So he now suggests remaining in Paris, while sending Krull off under his name instead. Krull accordingly travels to Lisbon in the guise of the Marquis de Venosta. This new title seems tailor-made for him, and the world soon lies at his feet. Wherever ambition is paired with elegance, it loses its bitter aftertaste. The social climber has become a darling of the gods. ♦

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Ijoma Mangold is a cultural-political correspondent of the weekly newspaper "Die Zeit." He has won the Berlin Prize for Literary Criticism, and is a member of the quartet of critics featured in the literature program "Lesenswert Quartett" on SWR TV in Germany. In 2017, Mangold published his first novel, entitled "Das deutsche Krokodil. Meine Geschichte" ("The German crocodile. My story").





# Clash of the titans

Text: Mathias Plüss | Illustration: Markus Roost

**Science is just like sports. It's all about honors, money and medals. Most of all, it's about being first. But not everyone plays fair.**

Two professors meet at the entrance to their university, just as the flag is being lowered to half-mast in mourning. “Do you know which of our colleagues has died?” asks the one. “Not a clue,” says the other. “Any one of them will do for me.”

Sure, it's just a joke. But there's more than a grain of truth in it. As a science journalist, I've often been witness to scenes that are more reminiscent of a kindergarten than a university. I'll never forget the professor of geography who made fun of the “little grasses and mosses” that a rival colleague had discovered in glaciers. “He's not even a geologist,” was his rival's reply, which was apparently quite an insult in their exalted circle. And he added that he'd withdraw everything he'd said for my article if I dared to describe the geography professor in question as being “renowned.”

If we are surprised at such scenes, it's only because we have a false image of scientists. We imagine them to be like unfeeling eunuchs, committed to truth alone. But in so doing, we ignore the fact that scientists are just ordinary people with all the same urges, needs, difficulties and weaknesses. “In my experience scientists are no different from other human beings,” wrote Hans J. Eysenck, the German-British researcher into human intelligence. “Many of them (not all!) do make wild claims, appeal to prejudice and authority, claim omniscience, fight like Manx cats, and are jealous of their peers.”

## A matter of speed

In the early 1980s, the American virologist Robert Gallo and his French colleague Luc Montagnier were engaged in a race to discover the AIDS pathogen. Initially, the two of them cooperated – Montagnier even provided Gallo with virus samples. But when it seemed that the Frenchman was about to win the race, Gallo

responded with an act of defiance. He declared himself the winner, quickly published the details of the virus he'd supposedly discovered – along with photos of it – and even registered a patent for a blood test. Gallo vigorously protested any hint that something might be amiss. But ultimately, it was proven that he'd not actually isolated any virus at all, and was only working with material that Montagnier had sent him.

How can a highly intelligent man decide to act so unfairly and to lie so outrageously? Because it's do or die. Science functions like sports. It's a race to the finish, and victory is all that matters. The winner takes it all. It's also about money, but most of all about honor. About getting your name in the history books. And about getting the medal. Yes, you also get medals in science – they're awarded every year by the Nobel Prize Committee, and they're highly coveted. Montagnier won it in 2008, together with his colleague Françoise Barré-Sinoussi. Gallo didn't get one. His foul play hadn't done him any good.

Justice doesn't always win out. The German-Swiss geologist Jean de Charpentier is largely unknown today, but he and two of his colleagues were the most important pioneers of the theory of the Ice Ages. In 1841, he published a comprehensive, carefully crafted essay on it. The problem was that his younger colleague Louis Agassiz had beaten him to it by a few months, despite having had to be convinced of the theory himself by de Charpentier. Agassiz published a sensational, hastily written book that barely took note of the contributions made by other researchers. But all that counted was that he'd got there first. Agassiz was quicker. That's why the discovery of the Ice Ages is still linked to his name today.

In fact, Agassiz's behavior was relatively demure. Some researchers are prepared to do absolutely anything to get the honor they crave. That's why the history of science is so rich in scandals, forgeries and plagiarism. This unscrupulousness knows almost no boundaries. Some professors pilfer the ideas of

their assistants, or they blacken their colleagues' names to such an extent that they cannot publish anymore. The 19th-century "Bone Wars" between two dinosaur researchers in the USA were particularly bitter. They would sneak fossil fragments into the other's dig so as to cause confusion. In one case, an archaeological site was even blown up so that the researcher in question couldn't excavate there anymore.

## Malice abides

Regrettably, even the brightest scientists aren't above such seemingly petty behavior. In fact, it seems that it's precisely the greatest among them who are unable to accept anyone else as their equal. In the field of psychology, for example, we have the enmity of Freud and Jung, while microbiology offers the example of Koch and Pasteur. And math gave us Brouwer versus Hilbert.

There's hardly any scientist of importance who hasn't paid considerable attention to ensuring his precedence. The more reflective among them have at least struggled with their ambition and realized that it didn't fit the image of the modest scientist devoted only to the truth. "I wish I could set less value on the bauble fame, either present or posthumous, than I do," wrote even Charles Darwin, probably the greatest biologist of all time. Nor did he always play completely fair either – today he is regarded as the sole author of the theory of evolution, even though another man, Alfred Russel Wallace, had developed the same idea at the same time.

The most famous dispute about priority, however, was the feud between Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, which began in the mid-1680s and lasted for several decades. They had independently discovered infinitesimal calculus, which allows one to calculate planetary orbits, for example. Newton did it slightly earlier, but failed to publish promptly. When Leibniz published his own method, Newton seethed with anger, claiming that Leibniz had stolen his idea. Which he hadn't.

There were no holds barred in the dispute that followed. Newton might have been paramount as a physicist, but he resorted to particularly malicious means. A low point was reached when the venerable Royal Society acceded to his insistence to form a commission and decide the issue once and for all. The catch was this: the president of the Society was none other than Newton himself, which meant he could influence the case to his advantage. He not only picked the members of the commission, but even secretly wrote most of their report himself. It was no

wonder that its judgement was devastating for Leibniz. In this manner, Newton succeeded in partially ruining the reputation of his opponent, while he himself was showered with honors.

## Battling new ideas

Disputes about precedence are just *one* manifestation of the bitter, emotional altercations that occur in science. Another is the dispute about new ideas. Here, too, it's ultimately about who gets his name in the history books. A typical case is when a young researcher comes on the scene with a brilliant theory that seems to wondrously explain a specific problem. According to general scientific practice, this idea ought then to be investigated objectively and – if proven fit for purpose – accepted.

But in reality, it's often the complete opposite that happens. Groundbreaking proposals are rejected lock, stock and barrel – often with ridiculous arguments. Thus the German meteorologist Alfred Wegener met with an icy reception when he presented his theory of continental drift in 1912. The experts were committed to the idea that the Earth's crust was fixed, and so rejected his concept as a figment of the imagination. It took 50 years for Wegener's theory to become accepted.

The problem is that new ideas often call well-loved convictions into question. People are not good at admitting: "Yes, you're right, I've been talking rubbish for decades." So they develop an irrational ambition to expose the smallest discrepancies in their opponent's arguments, which then allows them to hold to their own theories, even when these have long been proven untenable. This is why some philosophers believe that our intellectual capacity and our argumentative capabilities are not intended primarily to help us find the truth. Instead, they think they might be meant to bolster our sense of being right, so that we can amass power and keep it.

The physicist Max Planck experienced such situations several times, and once summed it up in words that are apt, if a little resigned: "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die." ♦

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Mathias Plüss is a science journalist and writes for "Das Magazin" and elsewhere.



# “Ambition is passion intensified”

Recorded by: **Doris Büchel** | Photos: **Rob Lewis**

In 2009, an accident upset all the life plans of Daniel Albrecht, a 25-year-old Swiss ski racer. He fought his way back onto the piste – but then stopped when he lost his passion for the sport. Today, he pursues other goals. He wants to teach others natural, sustainable construction methods.



“I was ten or eleven years old when people started to tell me I should be more ambitious – both in my sports and at school. I remember that I often suffered from a guilty conscience because of it. Sure, I wanted to become a ski racer, and sure, I knew I’d have to give 120 percent to achieve that. But at the same time I had a good feeling early on about what I could expect of myself and my body. That was an instinct I had – perhaps it was also a sign of mental strength. Maybe I inherited this from my parents, or perhaps I got it from the ski lift attendants – I used to spend a lot of time with them when I was a kid.

My parents ran a mountain restaurant on the Fiescheralp, so I was left to my own devices at an early age, and I came to skiing quite naturally. There was nothing else I ever wanted to do. When all my friends switched to snowboards, I kept to my skis. I regularly went skiing on my own, without an instructor, often all the way down into the valley. The first time I saw poles and gates on a ski run was at an ‘Ovo Grand Prix’ race. I eventually became a member of the Swiss ski squad, came in fifth, sixth or seventh – neither really good nor really bad. My dad accompanied me to the races and said: ‘You’ve trained well, you’re on the right path,

just carry on like that.’ There was no pressure from his side at all. He’d been the world champion in skibobbing and knew how to deal with an athlete like me. Because I wouldn’t let myself be pushed into anything. Quite the contrary. If people wanted to foist their opinions on me, I just bowed out. That was probably a stroke of luck for me. Today, I’m certain that if people had early on pushed me into the whole business, I wouldn’t have become a ski racer. But for a long time it meant I was regarded as lazy in training. All the same, I stayed faithful to my motto: less is more.

Once, at school, we all had to take turns to say what career we wanted later. I said: Ski racer! The teacher replied: ‘That’s not a career.’ I think that was the moment when I started asking myself seriously: Do I really want this, or not? And my answer was: Yes, I do! From that moment on, the only thing that interested me was how to organize everything properly so I could reach my goal. There’s a renowned ski academy in Stams in Tyrol. So that seemed the next logical step for me. I wanted to know what you have to do to get accepted there. What, there’s an entrance exam? Fair enough, bring it on! No sooner said than done. Suddenly, at the age of 14, I was living on my own in

Austria, where I had no friends and didn't know anyone. But it was a purely rational decision. And that's how I proceeded from then on, step by step.

I think you can only develop healthy ambition if you can do something well and also enjoy doing it. Then it's your passion. So ambition is passion intensified. It means showing a lot of commitment for something that's really important to you. And willpower. You have to keep your goal in mind, 24 hours a day. And you must not ever get tired of it. But more isn't automatically better. If you do too much, nothing will come of it. At least nothing good.

After my accident in Kitzbühel in 2009 and my severe brain injury, probably no one imagined that I'd ever race again professionally. So I had to develop a new kind of ambition to prove to myself that I could still do it. And I did manage to get into the top thirty again. But sadly, I lost my passion for it. I became unsure, listened too little to my own body and too much to others. And as soon as I became uncertain, I was no longer quite so willing to place all my eggs in one basket. Suddenly, I didn't know what was best for me anymore.

I'm still convinced that I could have achieved more. But if I'd continued, everyone would have thought I was nuts. That's how it is. If you invest everything to reach a specific goal without knowing whether it will work in the end, people interpret your ambition as something negative. Ambition is only recognized as something positive and character-building when you've reached your goal. Then everyone says: 'Wow, he's put everything into it, that's why he's achieved so much. Respect!' Otherwise, they think you're crazy.

As regards crazy: back then, when I was a kid, people laughed when I told them my goal was to become world champion. They laughed when I was a professional ski racer and launched my own clothes brand 'Albright' on the market. But I was successful in both. Today they'll probably laugh again when I launch my new project – the Moon House. Here's what happened. Initially I just wanted to build a house that's good for me and my health. So I got to grips with the topic, immersed myself more and more in the subject matter, and then founded my limited company Mondhaus GmbH. Other people are also busy thinking of new ways to build houses, so it's my ambition to help them get access to natural, sustainable, health-conscious construction methods that are as locally based as possible. In concrete terms, this means dispensing with all chemical agents, and instead using knowledge from the times of our forefathers. That's where the

name of my company comes from. Just like in former times, the trees whose wood we use to build our houses are felled during a specific phase of the moon. That means the wood is drier, more resistant and more stable in its form. I built my own house according to this philosophy, and would now like to pass on this knowledge.

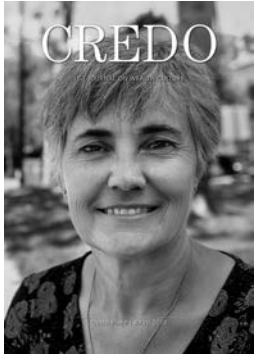
Basically, it's just the same as when I was skiing. It's about finding something that you enjoy doing and becoming passionate about it. Today, I don't have to prove anything to anyone anymore. My memories of ski racing are good. I've put it behind me in a positive way. I had the great fortune to achieve everything. Then came the accident. And after that, what had worked before didn't work anymore. Period. Today, I lead a happy life, and I haven't suffered any permanent damage. Instead, I started a family at the age of 30, I've built a house, and we've got two dogs now. Sure, I tried to get back into it and was able to pick up a few World Cup points. But I wasn't quite able to make it right to the top again. Nevertheless, all that unremitting training showed me a more direct way to a healthy, self-determined lifestyle. Perhaps it's what actually made such a lifestyle possible for me in the first place.

Someone once said to me: 'If you really want to do something and invest a lot of time and energy, then it's bound to go well. Even if things end up differently from what you'd planned, it will work for you. That's a law of nature.' Back then, I laughed at him. But today I know he was right." ♦

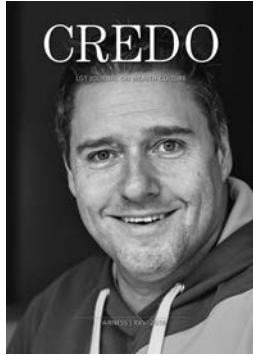
Daniel Albrecht (35) was one of the best ski racers in the world. When he won three golds and a silver at the Junior World Championships in 2003, he was one of the most successful newcomers in history. In 2007, Albrecht became world champion in Åre in Sweden and was the only athlete present to take a full set of medals home with him. He followed this up with several World Cup victories. In 2009, he suffered a severe fall during the second downhill training run in Kitzbühel. He was placed in an artificial coma and only woken up three weeks after the accident. He had to relearn all his motor functions, but he made his comeback in the giant slalom in Beaver Creek (USA) on 5 December 2010, achieving a sensational 21<sup>st</sup> place. He injured his left knee in 2012, and announced his retirement the next year. Today he's a successful guest speaker, a ski race advisor and an ambassador for Fragile Suisse, an association that helps brain-damaged people. In 2018, he founded Mondhaus GmbH, which aims to build natural, chemical-free houses with local wood.

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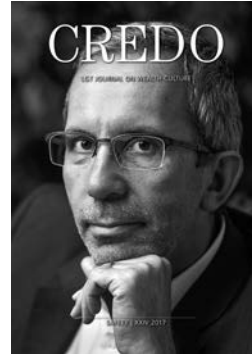
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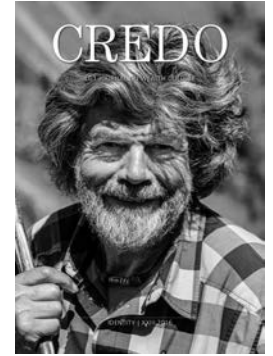
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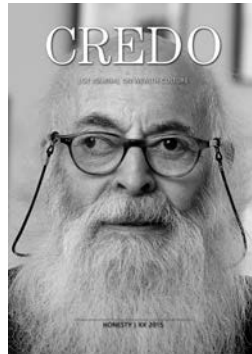
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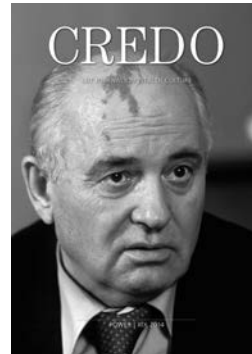
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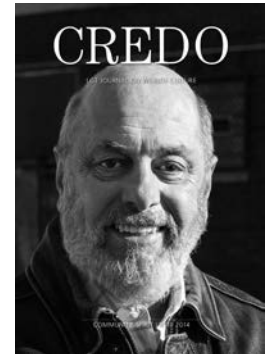
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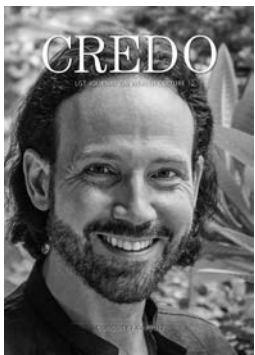
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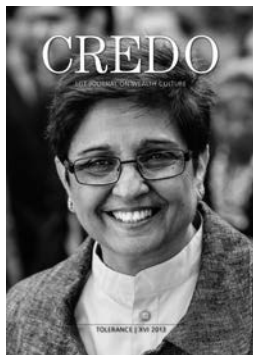
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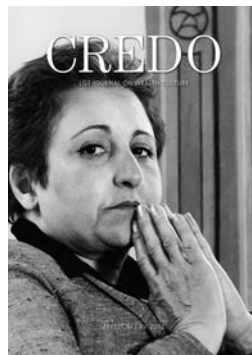
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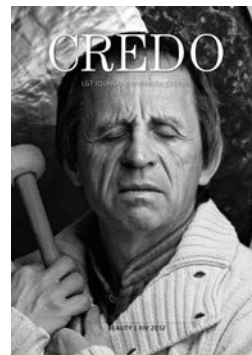
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