

# From Palais des Nations to an island in the north

SARAH BENCHERIF, UNITAR

Amateur photographer and musician, Luca Solari is the son of a Peruvian diplomat and an Italian sculptress. He is a retired sound engineer, who used to work at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, and lives near Lausanne, Switzerland. Thanks to his Dutch wife, who wanted to explore the northern reaches of her country, he discovered the Wadden archipelago in 2009. The beauty and authenticity of Schiermonnikoog, its smallest inhabited island (17 km long, 4 km wide, 987 inhabitants), immediately captivated him. The island is a protected breeding and hibernation ground for up to 12 million birds annually, and the local residents fiercely protect its natural heritage. Schiermonnikoog is also inextricably linked to the world of the sea and has a rich maritime history. For centuries, Dutch skippers and captains received their training from the island's Maritime Academy. Luca Solari regularly returns there for short periods, most often in winter, to enjoy the particular light and calmness of that time of year.

Another highlight of the island is the billiards tournament that takes place there every winter. It is an important event for the locals since the island is home to a surprising ten billiards clubs. Worthy of note is that it brings together both young and old players and fans. During one edition of the tournament, Luca Solari befriended Tiny Dijkhuizen, an elderly lady who is one of the billiards players. Through her, he managed

to gain the trust of the players and befriended them, becoming the unofficial tournament photographer.

In addition to the portraits of the billiards players, Luca Solari captures the soul of Schiermonnikoog, as well as its beauty and authenticity. His pictures reveal a striking timelessness and show the recurring seasons unfolding over the small island. They consist of breathtaking black and white compositions and seem to play with shadows, light and contrast.

For the past nine years, Luca Solari has been busy working on a photobook and a photography exhibition about the island. The idea came, after Tiny Dijkhuizen and other locals asked him to exhibit his work. When Leeuwarden, the provincial capital and seat of the State of Friesland, was named the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2018, Schiermonnikoog was asked to join the events. Luca Solari was nominated to represent the islands, giving him another good incentive to publish his work in book form.

His photobook, *Schiermonnikoog – The Fortress*, was produced in collaboration with Mathijs Deen, who writes novels, stories and cultural-historical books and produces documentaries for radio, and with Eric Bos, a visual artist, writer, poet, art critic and art organizer. The foreword is written by Eric Bos and the texts are by Mathijs Deen. The book has been edited in English, Dutch and French, and was published



independently and printed in Italy. It is divided into seven themes: 1. Nature, 2. Traces, 3. Triptych, 4. People, 5. Village, 6. History, and 7. Billiards.

The photo exhibition accompanying the book's release was inaugurated in Leeuwarden in April 2018. Luca Solari will release his book and exhibit his work in Geneva as of 22 November at la Librairie de l'Île. We look forward to seeing you there from 6 p.m. ■

More information: <http://lucasolari.ch/>

