

ZENITH



TALKING PHOTOGRAPHY WITH
ELLIOTT ERWITT

BY TODD HEISLER





by Cole R. | apple.com/worldgallery

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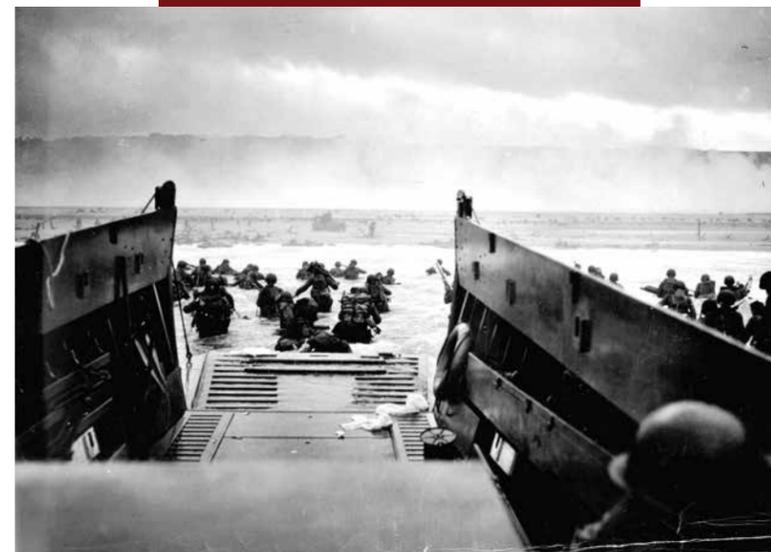
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Shot on iPhone 6



ELLIOTT ERWITT



I learned long ago that it's best to approach your heroes with trepidation, because they rarely live up to expectations. So when I met Elliott Erwitt in Perpignan, France, years ago, when we both had shows for Visa Pour l'Image, I was reluctant to talk to him. Imagine my surprise when he asked to trade prints. I upped the ante and asked whether if I bought his book, "Personal Best," he would sign it for me. "Don't buy my book," he said. "It's much too heavy to carry on the plane."

Thus continued my fascination with all things Erwitt. So what if some have called him "notoriously succinct?" Even he warns off others, insisting, "I'm not a good interviewee." I've always been looking for an excuse to sit down with him. In his studio, we are surrounded by unforgettable images from the 20th century, including one of Marilyn Monroe, who looks down on us as we speak. Some of his photographs are so ingrained in the

public psyche that I didn't even realize they were his until I started digging through his books. His latest, "Regarding Women," is about, well, women. "It just seemed like a good idea," he said of the book. "I have a lot of pictures of women and some of them are pretty good pictures and I thought it would make a book. It's as simple as that." He is matter-of-fact in explaining the method that has led him to produce about a book a year:

He is constantly combing his archives for things he missed and compiling themes he loves. He took a lot of beach pictures, hence a beach book. He likes dogs — a lot. "I have eight dog books out," he said. "And I don't have to give them prints or anything." A lot has been said about Mr. Erwitt's keen eye for the incongruous or absurd and his wry humor.

His favorite interview question happened in Moscow when someone asked him — seriously — "Were you there when you

took that picture?" His reply: probably. But when I was starting out, I stared endlessly at the photograph of his wife and first child lying on their bed, cat nearby. His celebration of the ordinary has always struck me. He has always stayed passionate about his personal work. But he conceded, those images don't always pay the bills.

"As you probably are aware, pictures of Marilyn Monroe sell more easily than pictures of your next-door neighbor," he said. "I must say that commercial work drives me too. It pays the bills. I make no excuses for my commercial work. On the contrary, I'm delighted to have it." And the commercial work usually creates an environment in which to do his personal work. "I don't think a lot," he said. "That's all I've ever done, so it comes naturally.

I've had some very good subjects: my kids, my wives, my travels and my leisure time. And usually on the backs of



commercial work." Mr. Erwitt has always been able to keep his personal vision throughout all his work. The two are so intertwined it's hard to tell them apart. When pressed about what holds it all together, he offers little. But he speaks with his photographs.

He attributes a lot to luck. But any experienced photographer knows luck carries you only so far. Luck doesn't sustain a career spanning more than 60 years. Or does it? "I came to New York to start a career," he said. "I had the good luck of meeting Steichen, Capa and Roy Stryker, and they were instrumental in getting me my first jobs. And that was it." Shortly after Stryker gave him his break, Mr. Erwitt was drafted into the Army and got another lucky break. "Half of them went to Korea and got decimated," he said. "The other half of

them went to Europe and had a wonderful time, and that was me." It was there, in Verdun, working at a PX, where he met his first wife, the one in the photo. And then there was that time in 1959 that he just happened to be in Moscow, taking pictures of a kitchen display. "Well, the vice president of the United States shows up where you are, in Russia of all places, what else are you gonna do?" he said of the historic confrontation between Richard M. Nixon and Nikita S. Khrushchev. "I went there for Westinghouse refrigerators.

The fact that I was in the display kitchen when they arrived was just luck. They were right in front of me for 40 minutes. Just me and them and a huge crowd behind them." Young photographers frequently ask me what advice I have for people starting out in the business.

In this rapidly changing industry, I wrestle with how to answer truthfully. Naturally, I ask Mr. Erwitt the same question. "Whenever I have a talk or something and someone always asks how do I get into the racket? My advice is to do it as a hobby, and maybe you can progress from there, but don't do it for a living," he said.

"The chances you succeed are..." It's at this point he is interrupted by a cuckoo clock striking the hour. We laugh. "A gift from my daughter." "Are very slight." He finishes. "Personalities, celebrities, you can't go wrong. Take the lousiest pix in the world, you cannot go wrong. Maybe that's the advice ... next time somebody asks me. Take pix of nobody but celebrities. They don't have to be good. They just have to get it in the center."

THE POWER OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Bernie Boston, 1967

PHOTOJOURNALISM: MAKING AN IMPACT

“Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world.” So said AP photojournalist Eddie Adams after winning the Pulitzer Prize for an image that gave the anti-Vietnam war movement in America fresh momentum.

Photographs are immediate. The amount of information they can convey in a few seconds can transform public opinion. They can damage or enhance reputations – witness the controversy over the recent Obama selfie – hasten the end (or the beginning) of a war and provoke governments to respond to humanitarian crises.

Occasionally these world-changing images come from amateurs, victims of catastrophe or even perpetrators of violence. One of Time magazine’s top 10 photographs of 2013 was the iPhone snapshot of a woman and her five grandchildren sheltering from Tasmanian wildfires under a jetty.

Much more often, they come from trained photojournalists, who have the resources, experience and bravery to

venture into conflict zones and capture images that tell complicated, provocative stories.

So why is the photojournalism under threat? In November, to highlight the importance of the art form, the French newspaper *Libération* ran an entire issue with blank boxes in the place of images.

“PHOTOGRAPHY TAKES THE PULSE OF OUR WORLD”

culture editor Brigitte Ollier wrote in a front-page editorial, saying of the issue: “Information is missing, as if we had become a mute newspaper.”

Timed to coincide with Paris Photo held at the Grande Palais, the edition drew attention to a wave of pay cuts and staff reductions among photojournalists around the world. The same month, the Pew Research Center announced that the number of U.S. journalists had

decreased by 43 per cent between 2000 and 2012 – a bigger decline than any other type of journalism.

Advances in digital photography and the growing capacity of smartphones to take high-quality images has meant that reporters armed with iPhones and ordinary bystanders can often be the first to take a snapshot of a historical event. Relying on these pictures is cheaper than paying staff photographers, and the dwindling ad revenue supporting the traditional print media has led to a culture of cost-cutting.

With growing numbers getting their news via Twitter and Facebook, taking the first picture can become more important than taking the best picture, but haunting photographs like Robert Capa’s close-up shots of the D-Day landings or Dorothea Lange’s portrait of a migrant mother during America’s Great Depression endure and colour our sense of history. Without a new generation of talented working photographers to replace them, we’ll all be worse off.

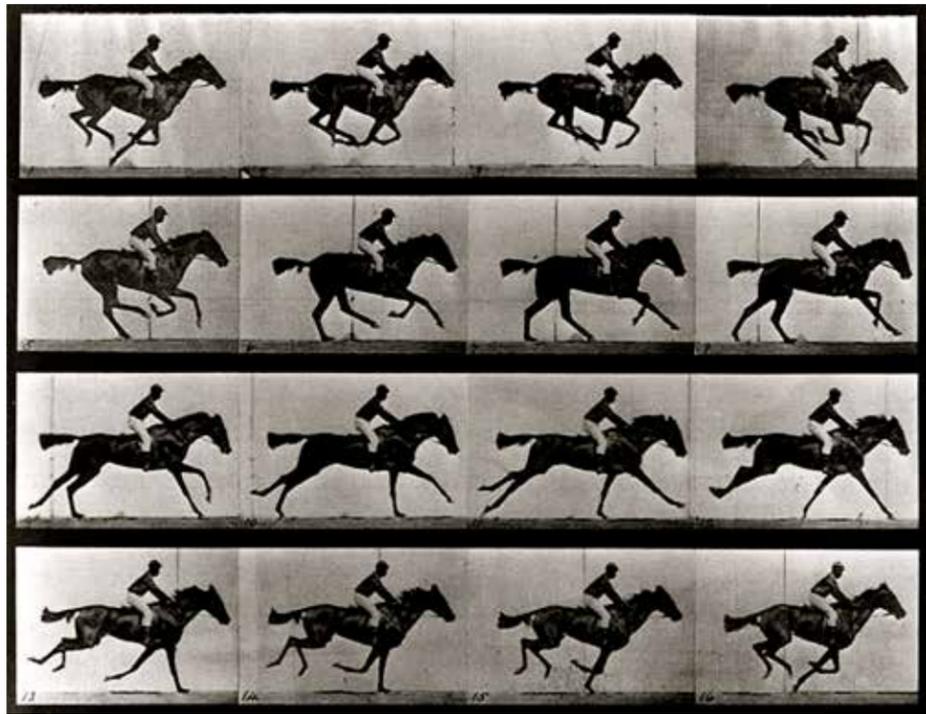


ELLIOTT ERWITT,
SEGREGATED
FOUNTAINS,
1950

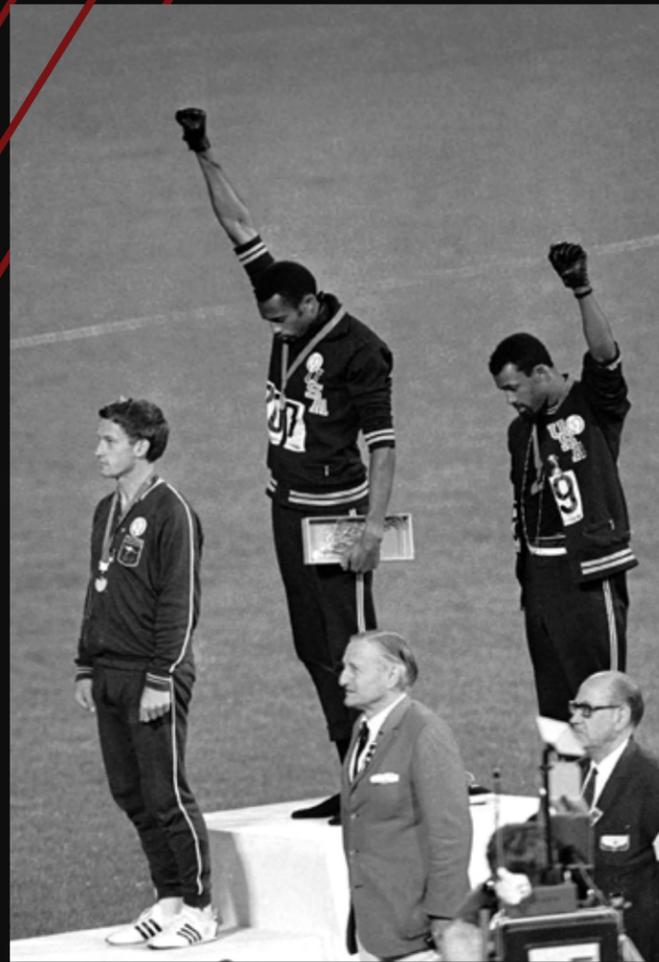


EDDIE ADAMS, THE
BURNING MONK,
1963

OVER
THE YEARS



1878



2010

PROFILE



HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

Henri Cartier-Bresson began traveling in 1930, at the age of twenty-two. For nearly half a century he was on the road most of the time, and the geographical range of his work is notoriously wide. Its historical range is just as broad—from ancient patterns of prein-

dustrial life to our contemporary era of ceaseless technological change. In the realm of photography Cartier-Bresson's work presents a uniquely rich, far-reaching, and challenging account of the modern century. The two most important developments in photography in the

first half of the twentieth century were the emergence of lasting artistic traditions and the rise of mass-circulation picture magazines. Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) was a leading figure in both domains.

In the early 1930s he helped to define photographic modernism, using a handheld camera to snatch beguiling images from fleeting moments of everyday life. After World War II he turned to photojournalism, and the magic and mystery of his early work gave way to an equally uncanny clarity and completeness.

Before the dominance of television, most people saw the world through the eyes of picture magazines. Early in Cartier-Bresson's postwar career, his photographs of Gandhi's funeral and the Communist revolution in China were journalistic scoops. But the vast majority of his photographs describe things that happen every day, for his essential subject was society and culture—civilization. This retrospective exhibition—the first since the photographer's death—draws extensively on the collection and generous cooperation of the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, in Paris.





THE PULITZER

EDDIE ADAMS DID NOT WANT

Everything captured my interest, but Eddie's journals were the gems. It turns out that he did, in fact, very much want I sat in the basement of the Briscoe Center reading his 1963 and 1964 journals — scrawled in little red leather notebooks — was that Eddie wanted to win a Pulitzer long before he'd ever encountered a Vietcong prisoner named Nguyen Van Lem or Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, chief of the South Vietnamese national police. There, in his own handwriting, Eddie acknowledged how deeply he wanted to win a Pulitzer for his photograph of the first lady, Jacqueline Kennedy, holding the folded flag that had been handed to her at President John F. Kennedy's funeral in November 1963. Eddie was angry when he didn't win a Pulitzer and then furious when he found out that an administrator at The Associated Press had submitted other A.P. pictures to the Pulitzer jury instead. His photo hadn't even been entered.

So Eddie watched the Pulitzer for coverage of the Kennedy assassination go to a reflex picture rather than one so intentionally poignant, one that captured a national moment of mourning, a timeless and heartbreaking milestone in America's history.

But that doesn't seem enough to keep him angry about the Pulitzers for so many years. Especially in his early career, he suffered from what friends called "insufficient adoration." Eddie thought he'd won the Pulitzer for the wrong picture. There's something you have to take into account about Eddie. Before he was a photographer, he was a Marine. And some Marine principles took root in his heart: honesty, fairness and the importance of holding and protecting a higher moral ground.

He wanted me to understand that "Saigon Execution" was not his most important picture and that he did not want his obituary to begin, "Eddie Adams, the photographer best known for his iconic Vietnam photograph 'Saigon Execution.'" He wanted to be remembered more for his 1979 essay on Vietnamese refugees, "Boat of No Smiles," and for the hundreds of photographs he'd taken of children with muscular dystrophy and for his many Parade magazine covers. Where "Saigon Execution" had ruined a man's life, "Boat of No Smiles" had changed the lives of more than 200,000 refugees who were being denied entry into the United States.

Eddie boarded their boats with them, with no food, water or provisions, not knowing his own fate or theirs as he sailed with them under a baking sun. The pictures helped push the government to open the door to the refugees, changing the fabric of American culture. He was very proud of that accomplishment. But not of the 1969 Pulitzer. I finally came to see that his repudiation was not a matter of petulance or envy or impatience. It was a matter of deepest principle. But he didn't let this long-simmering dilemma dull his sense of humor.

As I was putting his wartime journals back in archival containers, one entry caught my eye. "Death is the greatest kick of all," he wrote. "That's why they save it for last." I wondered if Eddie ever imagined someone would be reading this scribbled entry one day in a university archive, laughing while missing him so and relieved that a question asked long ago in Indiana had finally been answered.



PROFILE

STEVE MCCURY

His career was launched when, disguised in native garb, he crossed the Pakistan border into rebel-controlled areas of Afghanistan just before the Soviet invasion. When he emerged, he had rolls of film sewn into his clothes. Those images, which were published around the world, were among the first to show the conflict. His coverage won the Robert Capa Gold Medal for Best Photographic Reporting from Abroad, an award dedicated to photographers exhibiting exceptional courage and enterprise.[2]

McCurry continued to cover armed conflicts, including the Iran-Iraq War, Lebanon Civil War, the Cambodian Civil War, the Islamic insurgency in the Philippines, the Gulf War and the Afghan Civil War. [2] His work has been featured worldwide in magazines and he is a frequent contributor to National Geographic. He has been a member of Magnum Photos since 1986.

He is the recipient of numerous awards, including Magazine Photographer of the Year, awarded by the National Press Photographers Association. The same year, he won an unprecedented four first-place prizes in the World Press Photo contest. In 2014, McCurry was awarded The Royal Photographic Society's Centenary Medal.[3]

McCurry focuses on the human consequences of war, not only showing what war impresses on the landscape, but rather, on the human face. "Most of my images are grounded in people. I look for the unguarded moment, the essential soul peeking out, experience etched on a person's face. I try to convey what it is like to be that person, a person caught in a broader landscape, that you could call the human condition." [4]

Steve McCurry is portrayed in a TV documentary *The Face of the Human Condition* (2003) by French award-win-

ning filmmaker Denis Delestrac. In May 2012 Steve McCurry was Pirelli's inspired choice of photographer to shoot the pictures for the 2013 Pirelli Calendar in Rio de Janeiro.

McCurry took his most recognized portrait, "Afghan Girl", in a refugee camp near Peshawar, Pakistan.[5] The image itself was named as "the most recognized photograph" in the history of the National Geographic magazine and her face became famous as the cover photograph on the June 1985 issue. The photo has also been widely used on Amnesty International brochures, posters, and calendars. The identity of the "Afghan Girl" remained unknown for over 17 years until McCurry and a National Geographic team located the woman, Sharbat Gula, in 2002. McCurry said, "Her skin is weathered; there are wrinkles now, but she is as striking as she was all those years ago."



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LEADS TO ANOTHER