

Press Release

## Don McCullin. A Desecrated Serenity

443 West 18th Street

3 September – 8 November 2025

A reception with the artist will be held on 24 September from 6 - 8 pm at Hauser & Wirth 18th Street.



**New York...** Hauser & Wirth is honored to present its first New York City exhibition devoted to the work of Sir Don McCullin CBE, lauded internationally as one of the most significant photojournalists of our time. Coinciding with his 90th birthday, McCullin's most comprehensive US presentation to date brings together over fifty works, as well as seldom seen archival materials and historical ephemera. 'A Desecrated Serenity' offers a deep look at both the beauty and brutality of McCullin's expansive archive. From the gritty unfiltered images taken on the battlefield and in postwar Britain to painterly European vistas and meticulously crafted still lifes, the exhibition reveals the twin forces that course through and characterize McCullin's oeuvre: an innate and profound compassion for humanity and exceptional mastery of composition and process.

'A Desecrated Serenity' chronicles McCullin's remarkable seven-decade career, including his seventeen-year tenure as special contract photographer for The Sunday Times, when his assignments took him to the frontlines of war across Greece, Vietnam, Biafra, Bangladesh, Northern Ireland and Beirut. It was during this time that he captured searing images such as 'A shell-shocked US Marine, Hué' (1968). This widely circulated photograph shows an American soldier gripped by quiet distress during the brutal battle to retake Hue City—one of the Vietnam War's fiercest conflicts—his intense expression capturing the war's deep personal toll. 'A Desecrated Serenity' presents these harrowing images alongside personal objects that speak to the extraordinary risks McCullin faced in the field, most notably his Nikon F camera that absorbed a bullet during combat. McCullin's deep, hard-won sense of empathy, shaped by his youth living through poverty and violence in East London, is evident in these images and objects.



Examples of photographs taken during McCullin's formative years, portraits such as 'The Guvnors in their Sunday Suits, Finsbury Park, London' (1958) and stark industrial landscapes—reflecting the grim realities of crime and unemployment in Northern England in the 1950s and 1960s—serve to demonstrate the photographer's innate ability to capture sorrow and dignity in equal measure, finding poetry within bleakness, serenity within desecration. The exhibition also delves into the work McCullin made during his personal travels across India, Indonesia and the Sudan, where he often turned his lens to local communities, everyday rituals, celebrations and architecture. Intimate compositions such as 'India, The Great Elephant Festival, The River Gandak' (1965) transcend a straightforward documentary practice and engage the viewer through their emotional charge, a result of McCullin's empathetic exchange with his subjects.

In the late 1980's, McCullin turned his lens toward more peaceful subjects—the landscapes of France, Scotland and England, in Somerset, where he had been evacuated to as a child during the Blitz and where he now makes his home. Rendered in richly tonal black and white, these painterly depictions of the English countryside—the place the artist himself has described as his greatest refuge—offer an exquisitely personal and poignant meditation on solitude, memory and the longing for stillness. They capture wild, windswept vistas that echo the emotional resonance of McCullin's earlier reportage, revealing nature not merely as an idyllic escape but as a site of quiet reckoning. The same chromatic and emotional gravity carries over to a selection of still lifes inspired by the work of Flemish and Dutch Renaissance masters, as well as images of Roman statuary evolving from his 'Southern Frontiers' series, McCullin's 25-year survey of the cultural and architectural remains of the Roman Empire. Imbued with both awe and unease, these images, like much of McCullin's oeuvre, inhabit a space between beauty and brutality, evoking the psychological weight of history seen through the photographer's unflinching eye and compassionate gaze.



#### About the artist

Sir Don McCullin is widely regarded as one of the most important and celebrated photographers of the late 20th century, renowned for his unflinching and deeply empathetic documentation of war, famine and human displacement worldwide. Don McCullin is the recipient of the University of Oxford's Bodley Medal: Life and Work award (2025), for his outstanding contribution to photography and journalism. He was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Medal at the London Design Festival (2022). In 2020, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Center of Photography in New York. He was knighted in the 2017 New Year Honours, for his lifetime services to photography. He was named Master of Photography at the 2016 Photo London Fair. In 2006, he received the Cornell Capa Award for Lifetime Achievement at the International Center of Photography in New York. In 2003, he received the Royal Photographic Society's Special 150th Anniversary Medal and Honorary Fellowship (HonFRPS). In 1993, he was the first photojournalist to be honoured with a CBE, for his sustained and significant contribution to photojournalism.

McCullin has been the subject of a number of major retrospectives in institutions worldwide, including Tate Liverpool, UK (2021); Tate Britain, UK (2019); National Gallery, Canada (2013); C/O Berlin Museum, Germany (2009); Rome International Festival, Mercati di Traiano, Italy (2004); Foam, Amsterdam (2002); Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France (2001); Centre National de la Photographie, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (1993); Les Rencontres de la Photographie, Arles, France (1992); and the Victoria & Albert Museum, UK (1980). Other important solo presentations include 'Don McCullin in Rome', Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, Italy (2023); 'Don McCullin. Stillness of Life', Hauser & Wirth Somerset, UK (2020); 'Don McCullin: Southern Frontiers', Château La Coste, France (2019); 'Shaped by War', Imperial War Museum, UK (2011); 'Cold Heaven. Don McCullin on AIDS in Africa', Whitechapel Gallery, UK (2001), United Nations Headquarters, New York, NY (2001); 'Don McCullin: Sleeping With Ghosts', Barbican, UK (1997); and 'Hearts of Darkness: Photography by Don McCullin', ICP International Centre of Photography, New York (1981).

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**Caption and courtesy information:**

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Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Catholic youths escaping from CS gas, Londonderry, Northern  
Ireland  
1971

Shell shocked US Marine  
1968

Still life in my garden shed  
1989

India, The Great Elephant Festival, The River Gandak  
1993

Diana in Turkey, Antalya  
2021

Upton Noble, flooding meadow, Somerset  
1992