

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Don McCullin

Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles

23 June – 23 September 2018

Opening reception: Saturday 23 June, 6 – 9 pm



Los Angeles... Hauser & Wirth is proud to present the first gallery exhibition in the United States by British photographer Sir Don McCullin, CBE, including a selection of his acclaimed images of war from around the world and societal upheaval in his home country. This show is a prelude to McCullin's forthcoming retrospective at Tate Britain in 2019, which will be the museum's first survey for a living photographer.

The exhibition at Hauser & Wirth introduces American audiences to the photographer's unique ability to convey the emotion and humanity of his subject matter with the unvarnished grit of traditional photojournalism.

The majority of works on view are limited-edition platinum prints, created through a special photographic process that delivers a particularly wide range of tones unattainable in more conventional gelatin silver prints. McCullin's technical preferences amplify the humanity expressed by his photographs: 'This work is therapeutic,' he says. 'I couldn't be happier than when I am standing in the cold on Hadrian's Wall, waiting for the right light. The platinum prints are the essence. They are as far as you can go with what I am trying to do and say.'

In addition to images of McCullin's travels throughout the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the English countryside, Hauser & Wirth's presentation brings together McCullin's indelible visual record of the construction of the Berlin Wall and the conflict in Northern Ireland. A few of McCullin's remarkable photographs of the Vietnam War will also be exhibited here on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the bloodiest year of that conflict.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an installation in the Book & Printed Matter Lab, comprising archival materials from the photographer's six-decade long career, including video footage, ephemera, and, most notably, his camera with a bullet hole that quite literally saved his life.

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About the Exhibition

The exhibition begins with photographs of Northern Ireland, Berlin, and the Vietnam War that capture the human suffering McCullin witnessed. Growing up underprivileged in 1930s London and experiencing the ignorance, poverty, and bigotry associated with his own socioeconomic circumstances, the photographer is driven by a profound empathy for those less fortunate – a defining characteristic in his work.

Innately drawn to deep-seated conflicts, McCullin has spent decades documenting horrific situations around the world for an audience that might otherwise remain unaware. Harsh and bloody truths are revealed by his extensive documentation of the Vietnam War, where McCullin risked his life alongside those in combat. While many of his photographs from Vietnam bear witness to the daily atrocities against civilian, the images on view at Hauser & Wirth focus upon American soldiers and the physical and emotional impact of war on their bodies and soul. 'Wounded Soldier against Wall, Vietnam, 1968' reveals McCullin's uncanny ability to frame subjects within religious and art historical visual tradition: this image of a wounded Marine, supported by two of his comrades, recalls the deposition of Christ from the cross, thereby generating a deep sense of spiritual communion with McCullin's subject.

Similarly, the composition of 'US Troops, Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, 1961,' references the architecture of Orsanmichele in Florence, where statues of saints and patrons of various guilds ornament niches circumscribing the building's exterior. McCullin's photograph substitutes the saints for US troops on the lookout in the empty windows of a vacant building, forever frozen in contrapposto poses. The dramatic perspective of this shot, combined with the subtle reference to Renaissance Christian iconography, suggests his sympathetic reverence for the soldiers' sacrifice.

Through all of his assignments, from the Vietnam and Biafra Wars, to the conflict in Northern Ireland, the Lebanese Civil War, the Belgian Congo crisis, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, and the fall of Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, McCullin has faced countless challenges and setbacks: wounded in Cambodia, he fell from a roof in Salvador during a gun battle and was imprisoned by the Idi Amin dictatorship in Uganda. He also contracted cerebral malaria in West Africa.



The exhibition further unfolds with images from McCullin's travels to Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Libya, Lebanon, Syria, and the Sudan – locations where he documented local rituals, festivals, architecture, and people, enabling Western viewers to meditate on the expansiveness of world culture and daily praxis. 'India, The Great Elephant Festival, The River Gangak, 1993' depicts a crowd under a leafy canopy decorated with flowing fabrics illuminated by afternoon light. People encircle a central female figure turning toward the camera and away from the festival underway. The photograph exemplifies McCullin's ability to engage his subjects' gaze, transforming mere documentation into a direct dialogue with the viewer.

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Among works on view are McCullin's images of the English countryside and of his home in Somerset, England – more pastoral photographs that in their stark contrast to the images depicting violence, remind viewers that war and peace are forever in opposition. Over the last two decades, McCullin has turned his eyes to the world immediately surrounding him, citing the sweeping rural landscape as his greatest salvation and his final ode to a life of dearly wished-for peace.



About the Artist

Don McCullin (b. 1935, London, United Kingdom) has dedicated his life to documenting major conflicts. He is celebrated as a master of black and white photography and possibly history's greatest war photographer. McCullin has witnessed some of the most harrowing humanitarian disasters of the last half-century. His lifelong dedication to photojournalism addresses the complexity of human experience from Africa and India to the English countryside, through the deceptively simple yet poetic means of his profoundly contemplative photographs.

McCullin holds a Commander of the British Empire medal, and is only the second photographer to become a Knight of the Realm. Major exhibitions include: 'Hearts of Darkness,' Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England (1980); Barbican Center, London, England (1998); La Maison de la Photographie, Paris, France (2002); 'Shaped By War,' Imperial War Museum, London, England (2012); Gracefield Arts Centre, Dumfries, England (2017), a part of the Tate's highly celebrated Artist Rooms.

'Don McCullin' will be on view at Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles daily from Tuesday – Sunday, 11 am – 6 pm from 23 June through 23 September 2018.

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Gallery hours:
Tuesday – Sunday
11 am – 6 pm

www.hauserwirth.com
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Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, 1961
2018, Printed by the artist
Gelatin Silver Print

The Great Elephant Festival at the River
Gandak, near Patna, India, 1987
Printed in 2015

A boy from the Surma Tribe, Southern
Ethiopia, 2003
Printed in 2015
Platinum Print

Cranmore, Somerset, 1990s
Printed in 2016
Platinum Print

The Road to the Somme, France, 2000
Printed in 2015
Platinum Print
Photo: Ken Adlard