



# No Heroes

The photographs  
of Roger Hutchings

For Sammy

# **No Heroes**

The photographs  
of Roger Hutchings

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Essay text © Stephen Mayes

Photographs © Roger Hutchings

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# Conflicts of Interest

Roger Hutchings is renowned for the many years he spent reporting human rights issues and documenting conflicts across the world. This work is passionate, often angry, and primarily concerned with the plight of ordinary people caught up in situations far beyond their control. It is notable for its visual complexity as well as its intimacy and deep sense of empathy with the people photographed. Hutchings is normally regarded as a photojournalist, a field in which he has been internationally lauded, but his most interesting work transcends the simplistic and functional imagery that occupies the pages of most newspapers and magazines.

This journey through Hutchings' archive traces the development of an individual photographer's vision, from early freelance commissions, through his self directed projects on the Kurds and Bosnia, his witty and pointed documentation of the fashion industry, via the more distanced and emotionally cool work in Berlin to his recent colour images which investigate the mundane. It traces a process of visual evolution from the objective to the elegiac, from the photograph as descriptive record to the photograph as metaphor and allusion. As his vision evolves, the original aspirations of balance and journalistic distance are replaced by an impassioned but intelligent partiality. The simplicity demanded in newspaper imagery is replaced by a complex, multi-layered photography that requires more of the audience and repays rereading. The later work is more opaque in meaning and more poetic in aim.

Documentary photography has had a clear influence on recent fashion photography and these days Hutchings is as likely to be photographing the collections in Paris or Milan as undertaking more traditional photojournalistic assignments. What is intriguing about this selection is the unexpected interplay between images of fashion and images of conflict. Many of the former have a clear political dimension whilst several of the latter would not be out of place in a contemporary fashion spread. Together on the wall or in the pages of a book they echo and reinforce each other.

Central to Hutchings' work is a deeply held political perspective that emerges in the most mundane moments and in the gentlest images of ordinary people. He is also committed to exploring new ways of making photography work, striving to avoid lazy stereotypes and communicate more complex ideas and feelings. Whether taken in Bosnia, Berlin or Kurdistan, these photographs work primarily on an emotional level, through the responses they elicit and the dark, often claustrophobic, moods they evoke.

In a photograph from Sarajevo, three women are doing each other's hair on the street. It is one of Hutchings' most domestic images from the besieged city, the apparently banal activity of people looking after their appearance. Taken during the height of the Serbian bombardment, it is also profoundly political, portraying a group of women expressing the deepest solidarity by publicly refusing to surrender their self-esteem and be cowed by the shelling.

In another image a photographer contorts himself to point his lens up a model's legs. The model's calves are thin and her heels high, the photographer's clothing is drab and practical and his camera delightfully nerdy. It contrasts the unreachable fantasy of glamour with tawdry reality, a wry comment on the voyeurism of the catwalk.

This collection questions how photographers experience and portray the world we inhabit and how viewers make connections between images of fashion and images of conflict and repression. Ultimately it questions how we read and attribute meaning to photographs.

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This is not the story of a photographer but of the world. Here is a raw wisdom told in the mosaic reflections of daily life, sometimes familiar and sometimes exotic, sometimes privileged and sometimes impoverished but always authentic. The diverse strands are spun into a rough yarn by the photographer's lens, a thread that ties us all in the shared experience of daily life; there are no heroes and no superstars, only the common fabric of life.

Hutchings engages with the core of human experience but it is not a cosy vision. It is a grey, hard world. Like an everlasting winter's day the horizon stretches around us, cold and unyielding. We scratch the essentials of life and each of us grasps for comfort where we can. This is not a story of "them and us" but only of "us", a profound interpretation of shared humanity whose common thread is survival. It is a view of the world that is hard yet not without joy. Pools of light and colour relieve the landscape in moments of recognition as we see how others have dealt with their problems. Wit, humour and beauty emerge in understated studies of hairdressing, dancing, loving and living even in the most unforgiving environments. Although set in a bleak landscape, the recurring story is uplifting: we all want to be free. We try to make the best of what we have and we all struggle with our appearance.

Roger Hutchings describes the world as a poet would. Although working as a documentary photographer the wisdom of his observation is not in the descriptive narrative but in the manner of its telling. The individual images are collected from hundreds of scattered adventures covering wars and fashions, combining acerbic comment and utter whimsy caught sometimes in fleeting glances and sometimes in lingering studies. Each varied excursion brought a new story yet the accumulated works combine as a coherent collage, woven together by the photographer's levelling eye and his appreciation of beauty and absurdity in every corner of human experience.

The peculiar technology of black and white photography creates an appropriate mirror for the world that Hutchings surveys. Although sculpted

from reality, black and white imagery is distinctly unreal as it hews the world into rigorous rectangles of silver halides, reconstructing reality as formalised graphics and colourless tones of light and shade. Black and white photography is powered by the imagination of the viewer creating emotional responses more profound than the simple recognition of the scenes portrayed. The full richness of the black and white image is best viewed in its original form as a photographic print, where the depth of silver on paper fulfils the image that has been constructed by the photographer.

Hutchings makes full use of the medium's formal and emotional qualities. He delights in the photographic surface, using flint-edged grain to reconstruct his hard-focused vision. It is a steely silver mirror that bleaches vain colour, levelling the players in an egalitarian world where only character and attitude distinguish the good and the bad. He uses photography to flatten the physical world and fills the frame with alternative dimensions that map the social and psychological conditions of the human world. However, there is little comfort in these human dimensions. Life, as Hobbes famously observed, is "nasty, brutish and short" and Hutchings allows no disguise of this truth. Whether photographing the world's highest paid models in the rarefied world of fashion and luxury, or refugees with barely even hope to keep them going, Hutchings cuts to the core to reveal the common elements of human experience.

One photographic trait demonstrates this with particular power. Although often working with people in extremes of duress, there is an astonishing absence of animated facial expression in Hutchings' photography and this is a key to understanding his work and through it to understanding the human condition. The face is as much a disguise as a window and Hutchings' refusal to be seduced by the apparent transparency of dissembling expression eliminates superficial storyline and focuses instead on the underlying circumstance. All too often, the split-second sampling of fleeting expression is solidified as total truth rather than an ephemeral glimpse, and by denying

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this Hutchings concentrates on the common experience of existence rather than the specifics of individual activity. It is a curious and seemingly unconscious phenomenon of Hutchings' photography that he consistently subverts the "decisive moment", using documented moments to describe an existential condition. It is an edifying approach to reportage photography.

There is a liberating consequence of this approach, which levels all people in a shared humanity. While some photographers seek to make heroes of the ordinary person Hutchings takes a contrary approach and instead he makes heroes ordinary. Whether rich or poor, the haves and the have-nots all have something in common: we share the same world and the same physical and emotional imperatives. Our value is not defined by what we are given but by what we do. Hutchings fastidiously eliminates overblown drama and in the same way that sentimental optimism and the romance of heroism are stripped from the bad situations, so also faux glamour is stripped from the high-life.

Dispassionate yet compassionate, amused by ironies, angered by injustices and horrified by tragedies he does not attempt ineffectual exercises in blame but rather studies how people deal with their circumstances. Pathos, bathos, wit, irony, wry humour and above all, intense seriousness suffuse these pictures in a rich weave of conflicting experiences. This contradictory miscellany is of course unerringly consistent with the real experience of life, allowing the viewer to identify with the war-torn, the world-weary and fashion victims alike.

Which of us lives our life in a coherent storybook narrative, free from conflicting emotions and inconsistencies of behaviour? We can rationalise our intentions but we cannot control our environment nor our reactions to events. It is a crazy world and Hutchings revels in the wildness of it all, and through his lens we can share his quiet reflections on the bustling noise of the world.

The still distance of Hutchings' vision has matured in his more recent colour work. There is a surprising coherence between the event-driven imagery of his early work for newspapers and the more recent abstracted colour studies made as self-assigned reveries. All the imagery demonstrates the photographers' curiosity in the human world, exploring relationships between the people and the environments. These scattered glimpses of individual lives and fragmented studies of colour, place and experience weave together as one coherent overview of the world and our place in it. This survey of Hutchings' work is a collage constructed from diverse scenarios harmonised by his attitude and expressed in a distinctive photographic style.

Hutchings' expressive ambition is seemingly in conflict with the demands of his chosen media. The pressures of producing metaphysical reverie on deadline contribute to the distinctive tension in Hutchings' work, which lives twice: firstly as taut emotional news pictures and secondly as studies of the human condition. This mid-career review forces a pause and a re-evaluation of work that was first seen bolted down with factual captions and thrown at us amid the clamour of news pages. Now floating in the quiet context of a gallery and isolated from the world from which they came by the covers of a book the pictures live a second life. These scenes are drawn from the world but the representations are abstracted from reality by their photographic expression now repositioned outside their original journalistic context. This distilled vision approaches the true spirit of Hutchings' work, revealing the troubled existence that starts with every birth and is fulfilled in the pains and joys of every life.

What we see is a dark beauty.

Wiltshire, 1986

New-age traveller children watch the County Sheriff serving an eviction order on their illegal campsite.



Early Work

London, 1988

A nurse addresses striking colleagues about fair pay.



Early Work

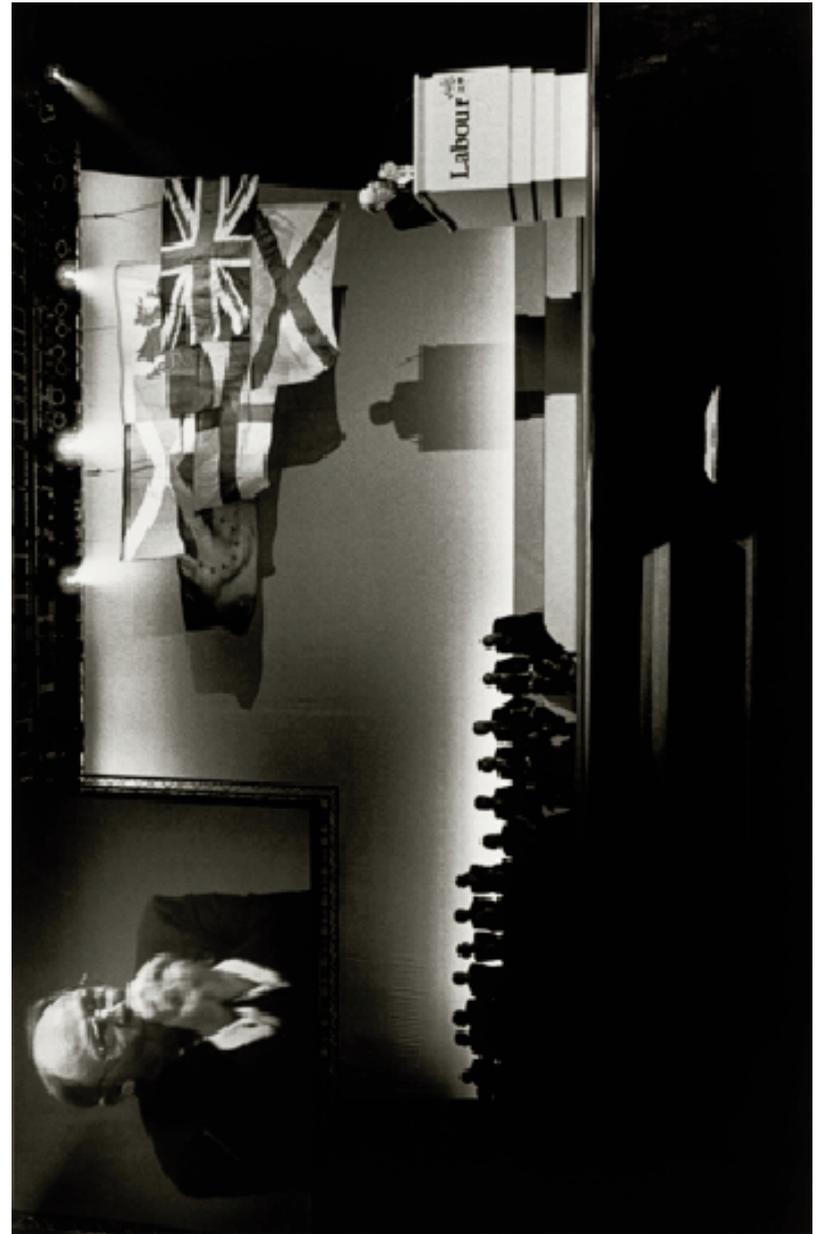
Somerset, 1986

A new-age traveller huddles close to a campfire.



Sheffield, 1992

The infamous Labour party rally: the pompous presentation was badly received and Labour lost the election it had been tipped to win.



London, 1985  
Police shield the South African embassy  
during an anti-apartheid demonstration.



Kurdistan



Diyarbakir, 1994

Police protect a Turkish politician at an election rally.

Diyarbakir, 1994

Election posters: Kurdish candidates withdrew from the poll after intimidation.



Kurdistan



Ankara, 1994

The courts of law where MPs were on trial  
for speaking Kurdish in parliament.

Kurdistan

London, 1995  
A demonstration against the invasion of  
northern Iraq by Turkish army units pursuing  
PKK guerrillas.



Kurdistan

Diyarbakir, 1994

A 90 year old Armenian woman who had witnessed the genocide of her community as a child.



Kurdistan



Bismil, 1994

A police checkpoint on the road to Diyarbakir.

Travnik, 1993

A refugee from ethnic cleansing collapses  
on arrival at a reception centre.



Vitez, 1993

A mass burial of Moslems following a UN negotiated amnesty between Croat and Moslem forces.



Sarajevo, 1994

A young woman, killed during a mortar attack, lies in the Kosovo Hospital morgue.



The Balkans

Sarajevo, 1995  
During the siege, cars were abandoned as  
fuel ran out.



The Balkans



Travnik, 1993

A man, shot by a sniper, writhes on a hospital bed.

The Balkans

Sarajevo, 1993  
Jewish Sarajevans are evacuated from the city.





Sarajevo, 1993

A group of women do their hair during a lull in the shelling.

The Balkans



Sarajevo, 1994

Many inhabitants risked their lives exercising their pets during the war.



Sarajevo, 1995

New Year's Eve following the implementation  
of the Dayton Peace Accord.

The Balkans



Banovici, 1995

Sanilla, a girl who had escaped from  
Srebrenica where all her family perished.

The Balkans



Banovici, 1995

A refugee from Srebrenica, whose husband and father were killed by the Bosnian Serb Army.

The Balkans



Kluc, 1995

A shop window in the strategic town contended  
by the Bosnian and Serbian armies.

The Balkans



Sarajevo, 1995  
Bus shelter.

The Balkans



Bihac, 1995  
Farmers at the first corn harvest following  
the ceasefire.



Belgrade, 1996

Blind woman at an anti-Milosovich  
pro-democracy demonstration.

The Balkans



Belgrade, 1996

A couple watch government security forces  
round up anti-Milosovich demonstrators.

London, 1996

A fashion reporter takes notes during Fashion Week.





Milan, 1998

A group waits to model clothes by the Italian designer Krizia.

London, 1998  
Modelling clothes by the designer Owen Gaster  
in a snooker hall.





London, 1996  
A photographer at Fashion Week.

The Fashion Industry

Milan, 2001

A make-up artist preparing a model for an Armani fashion show.



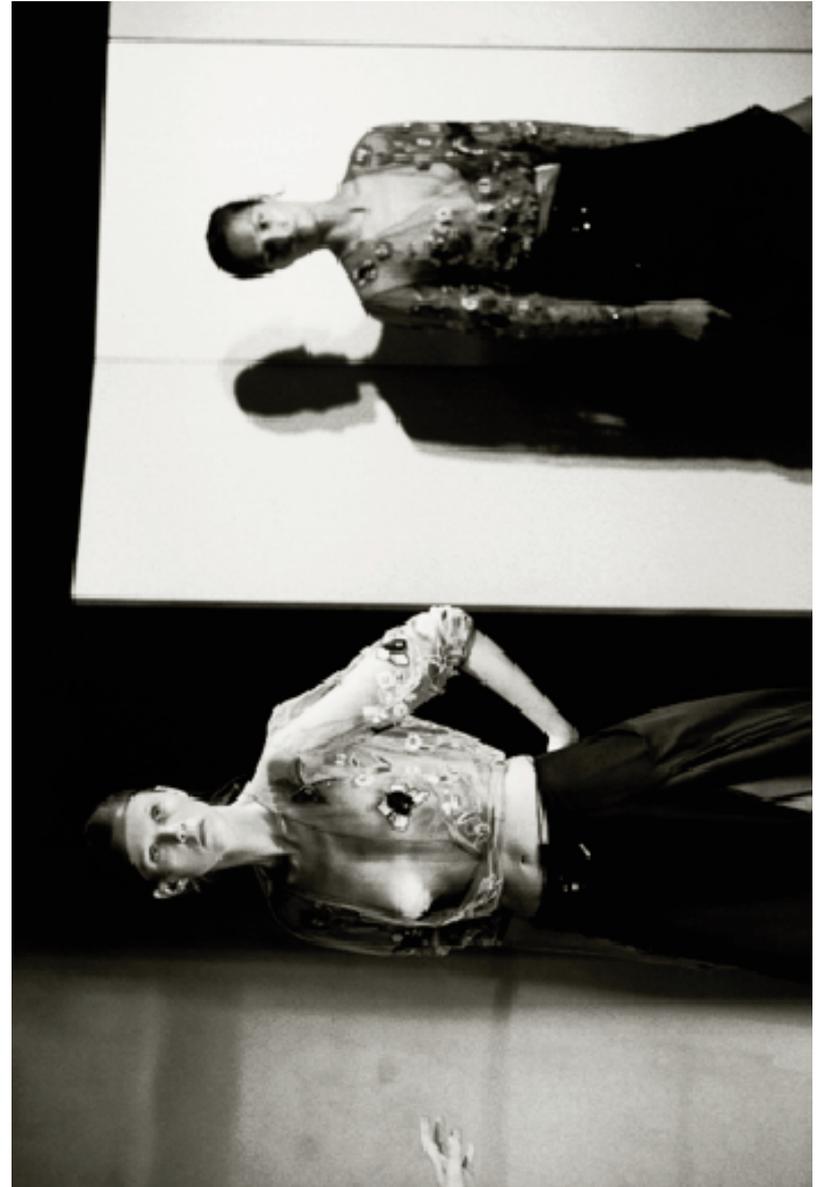
Milan, 2001  
Guests leaving a Giorgio Armani fashion show.



Milan, 2001  
Posing for Giorgio Armani.



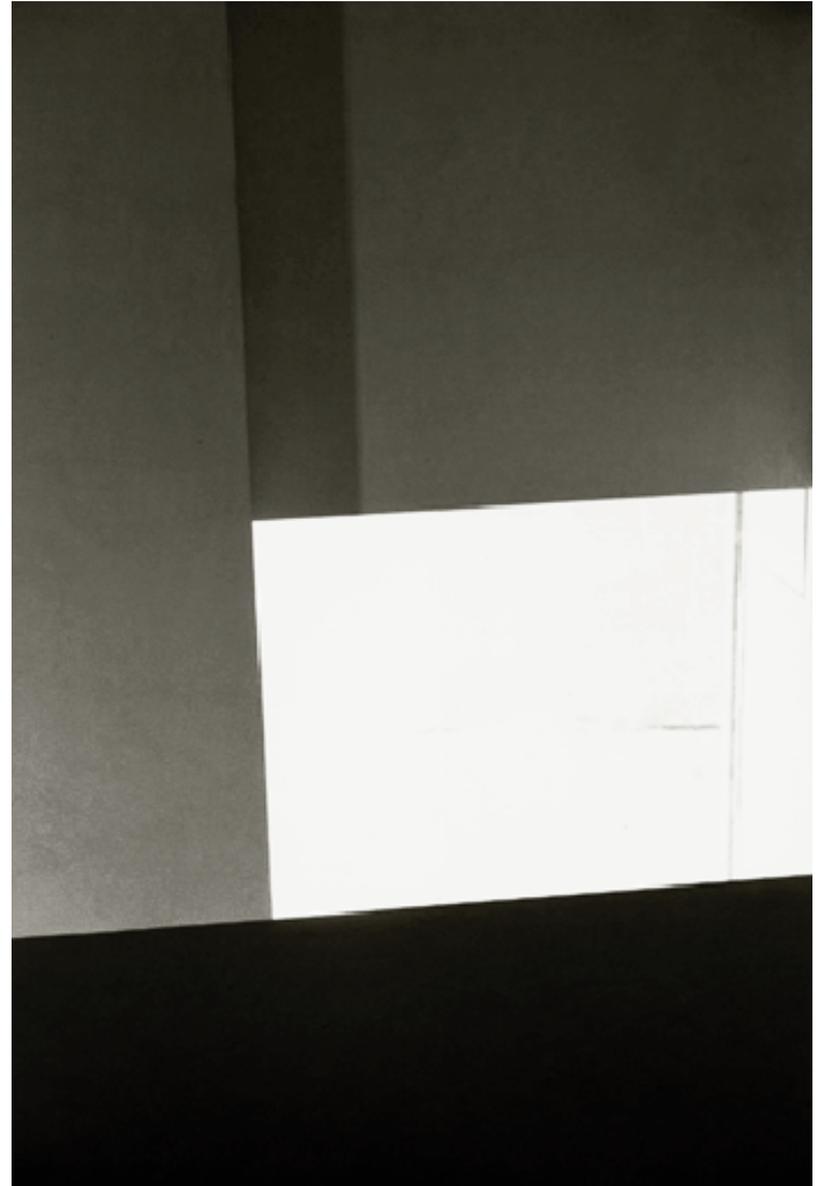
Milan, 2001  
Armani fine tunes his spring fashion collection.



## The Fashion Industry

Milan, 2001

The Teatro Armani, a building designed by Japanese architect Tadao Ando for Giorgio Armani.



Berlin

Berlin, 1999

The Holocaust Museum designed by the architect Daniel Libeskind.



Berlin



Berlin, 1999  
Museum of the Berlin Wall.

Berlin



Berlin, 1999  
Ostkreuz, in the former East Berlin.

Berlin



Berlin, 1999

A wall in Mitte in the former East Berlin.

Berlin



Berlin, 1999  
Migratory rooks circling over Checkpoint Charlie.

Berlin



Berlin, 1999  
Civic reconstruction around the Reichstag.

In Colour



East Germany, 2002

In Colour



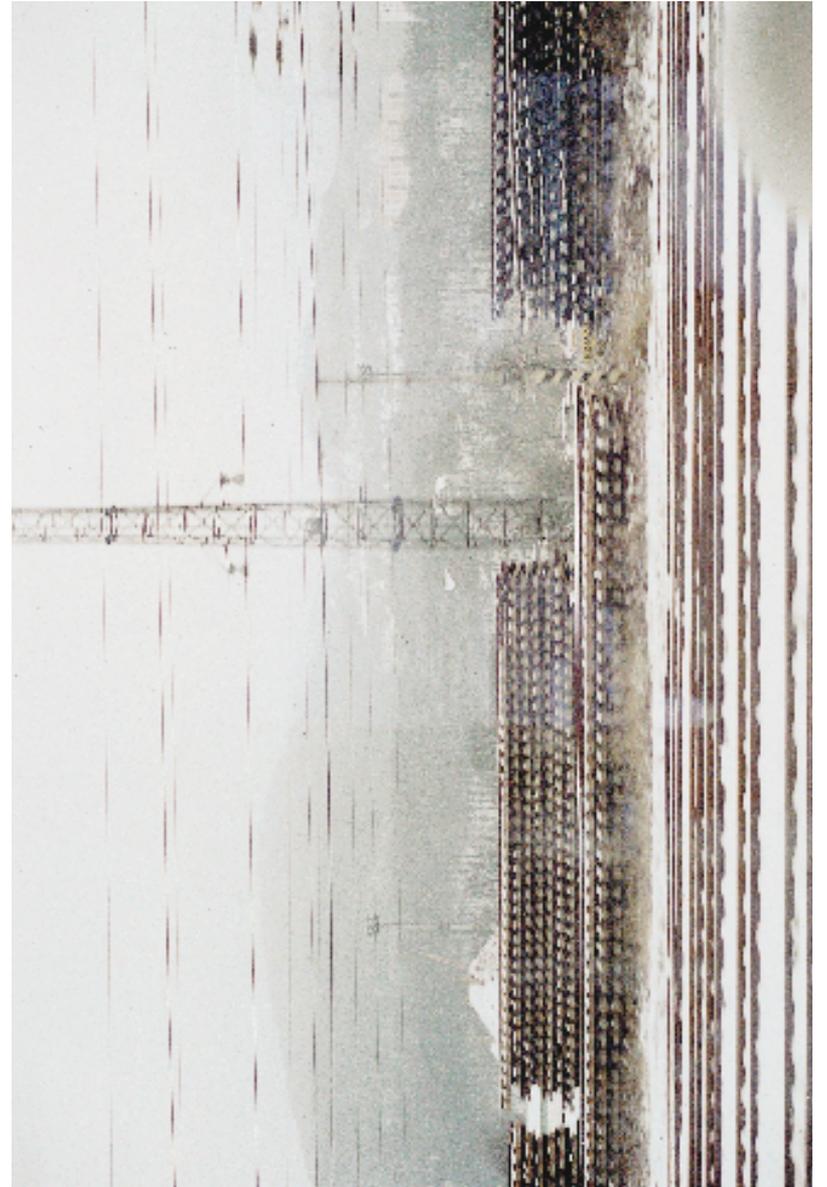
Montenegro, 2000

In Colour



Calcutta, 1998

In Colour



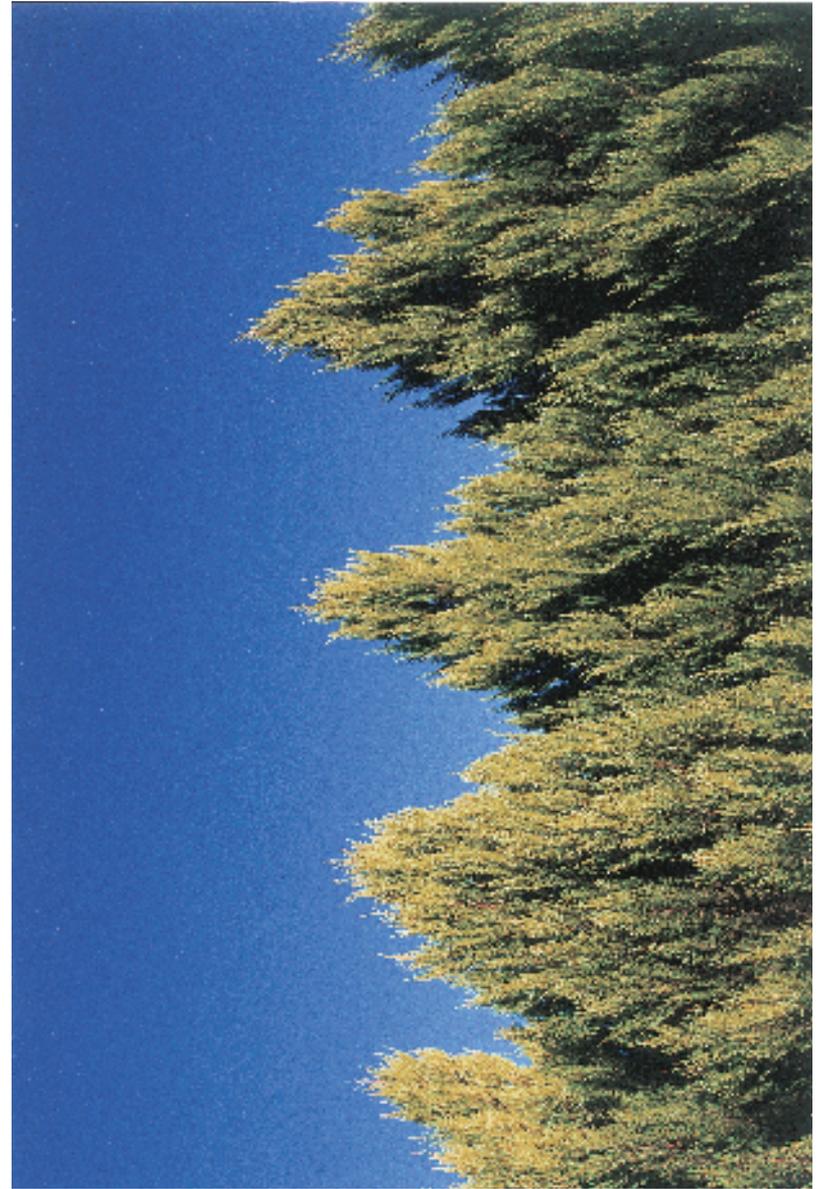
East Germany, 2001

In Colour



London, 1999

In Colour



Israel, 1999

In Colour



London, 2002

In Colour



Italy, 2002

In Colour



London, 2002

In Colour



Berlin, 2002

In Colour



Sardinia, 2002

In Colour



Italy, 2002

In Colour



Gibraltar, 2002

In Colour



Italy, 2002

# Biography

- 1952 Born in Winchester, England.
- 1980-2 Studied documentary photography in Newport, Wales.
- 1983 Began freelancing for The Observer.
- 1984 Joined Network Photographers.
- 1986 Photographed the civil war in Sudan.  
Photographed the Polisario Front fighting Morocco in the Western Sahara.
- 1987 Photographed the civil war in Sri Lanka.  
Photographed Haiti's first election after the fall of the Duvalier family. (The election was nullified because of the extreme violence used by right wing groups to intimidate voters).
- 1988 Worked on a story about social change amongst the Masai in Kenya.  
Followed the election campaign of Benazir Bhutto and the enfranchisement of women in Pakistan.
- 1989 Covered the Velvet Revolution in Prague.  
Documented the consequences of the collapse of the Berlin Wall.
- 1990 Photographed the Gulf War in Saudi Arabia.  
Documented Hindu/Moslem communal strife in northern India.
- 1991 Worked on a story about bonded labour in India.  
Photographed the Karen rebels fighting the military junta in Burma.  
Photographed the collapse of the Mengistu regime and the fall of Addis Ababba to Tigrayan and Eritreian soldiers.

# Biography

- 1991 In Cambodia for the country's attempt to return to democracy following the return of Prince Sihanouk.  
In Cambodia working on a story about landmines.  
Nikon Photo Essayist of the Year.  
Photographed the flight of the Kurds in northern Iraq during the Gulf War.
- 1992 Nikon News Photographer of the Year.  
Photographed the Tamil Tigers and the civil war fought in the Jaffna Peninsular of Sri Lanka.
- 1992-97 Undertook the first of nine trips to Bosnia documenting the civil war.
- 1993 Worked on a story based on Graham Greene's *'The Comedians'*, documenting poverty, injustice, corruption and violence in Haiti.  
Began working for a range of international publications on longer projects.
- 1994-96 Undertook eight expeditions, over three years, in south eastern Turkey, photographing the war between the Kurdish PKK and the Turkish army.
- 1994 World Press People in the News first prize.  
Amnesty International Award for Photojournalism.  
Finalist for the Infinity Award at ICP, New York.  
City of Prague Award for Humanitarian Photography.  
"Sarajevo", group exhibition at Arles, curated by Robert Pledge.  
"Drawing the Lines", group exhibition at the Zelda Cheatle Gallery, London.  
"Bosnia" exhibited at the Rotterdam Biennale, Rotterdam Institute of Photography.
- 1995 Media Natura Award for reporting the developing world.
- 1996 Nikon News Photographer of the Year.  
Documented the demolition of nuclear installations at Almaty Ground Zero in Kazakhstan.
- 1997 Nikon Arts Photographer of the Year (London fashion).  
*Ataturk's Children* published by Cassel.  
Documented the campaign for the eradication of polio in India.
- 1998 Photographed the problem of arsenic poisoning in the Ganges Delta.
- 1999 Began moving away from traditional market-led photojournalism.  
*Berlin* published by Federico Motta.  
"Inghilterra Thatcheriana", solo exhibition at the Biennale Internazionale di Fotografia, Turin.  
"Berlin", solo exhibition at the Grazia Neri Gallery, Milan.
- 2000 Member of the jury of the World Press Photo Awards.  
"Berlin", solo exhibition at the Biarritz Festival of Photography.  
Tutor for the World Press Masterclass.
- 2001 Visiting Tutor at the Toscana Photographic Workshop.  
"Bosnia", solo exhibition at the Carla Sozzani gallery, Milan.  
*Bosnia* published by Federico Motta.
- 2002 *Armani Backstage* published by Federico Motta.  
Chair of the World Press Photo Awards.

### Author details

Patrick Sutherland works both as a documentary photographer and as a photojournalism lecturer at the LCP. His photographic projects have been published and exhibited internationally. His current research interests include the documentation of Tibetan communities in north India.

Stephen Mayes has worked with photography, art and journalism for 20 years as agency director, creative director and curator. He has written and broadcast extensively on the ethics and realities of photographic practice.

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Patrick Sutherland

