

AMERICAN CONNECTION

Marissa Roth has worked as a photojournalist for prestigious publications, but she has also created a powerful body of personal work. She talks to Susan Burnstine about looking at war from a feminine perspective.

Los Angeles based photographer Marissa Roth made her mark early in her 20s as an internationally published freelance photojournalist and documentary photographer working for many prestigious publications, including the *New York Times*. Notably, she was part of the *Los Angeles Times* staff that won a Pulitzer Prize for Best Spot News for its coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. In recent years she's been focusing on personal work, including a powerful 31-year photo essay, *One Person Crying: Women and War*.

One Person Crying addresses the immediate and lingering impact of war on women in different countries and cultures around the world. 'Since war is a male endeavour, and reporters and photographers have historically been male, that was the perspective that war was viewed from,' she says. 'I wanted to address war from the women's side, as I felt it was an under-reported perspective on war, and yet it's women who keep the lives of everyone going during a war, while the men are fighting. And in some cases, like during the Vietnam war, there were many women who were not enlisted in any government sanctioned military, but fought brilliantly



and turned the tide of the war in North Vietnam's favour.'

Roth created the images for *One Person Crying* between the years 1984 to 2015, but admits:

'I didn't realise I was in the project for about 10 years. It just came organically, like stringing beads on a necklace.'

She recalls: 'In the first few

years at the *LA Times* I shot everything from Reagan-era balls to opera to gang shootings. I learned a lot and enjoyed it immensely, but there was always something restless in me – I wanted to do more global human interest stories. I went on vacation to India in 1985 and ended up doing some stories for the paper with their foreign correspondent who was based there. This was the turning point.'

In 1987, she moved to the Philippines and became romantically involved with a foreign correspondent in Manila named Mark Fineman. Together, they produced a number of features, but her path forward solidified after she covered a story about Afghan war widows marooned in refugee camps in Pakistan that resulted in a front page piece for the *LA Times*.

In 1988, Fineman was transferred to India and Roth returned to Los Angeles to care for her terminally ill mother. She continued to work for the *LA Times* and wanted to return to foreign assignments after her mother passed away, but life took another turn when she got married to someone else and continued working as a freelancer while focusing on her



book publications. Following a trip to Albania during the bombing of Kosovo in 1999, she decided to take a break from photojournalism. 'It was after I returned from that trip that I formally decided to turn this into a documentary project and basically commit myself to it.'

As this project includes a broad spectrum of subjects from all areas of the world, the connection essentially is Roth. Every image created was inspired by Roth's familial losses in the Holocaust. This part of her family history came to light when she travelled with her family to her ancestral roots in Yugoslavia, which her father fled from in 1938 at the age of 26. During the trip, they returned to her father's childhood home where his immediate family was murdered on the doorstep in 1942, just because they were Jewish. She says: 'Being a child of Holocaust

refugees inspired this rather epic thirty-one year personal odyssey.' *One Person Crying* is currently an international travelling exhibition and will be published as a forthcoming book.

Additionally, her series, *Infinite Light: A Photographic Meditation on Tibet*, will be exhibited at the Phoenix Art Museum from 23 September to 31 December. marissarothphotography.com



IMAGES

- 1 Vietnamese 'Boat People' Refugees. Palawan, Philippines, 1988.
- 2 Sabrie Krasniqi, Wounded Kosovar-Albanian Refugee. Tirana, Albania, 1999.
- 3 Sebanate Berisha and a Boy, Kosvar-Albanian Refugees. Tirana, Albania, 1999.
- 4 Afghan Refugee Women and Children. Peshawar, Pakistan, 1988.
- 5 Eva Brown's Auschwitz Tattoo, Los Angeles, California, 2008.

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EXHIBITIONS
USA

ATLANTA

High Museum of Art

Until 22 October

Paul Graham:

The Whiteness of the Whale

high.org

BERKELEY

Berkeley Art Museum

Until 27 August

Sam Contis: Matrix 266

ampfa.berkeley.edu

CHICAGO

Art Institute of Chicago

Until 25 August

Robert Frank: Photos Books Films

artic.edu

Museum of Contemporary

Art Chicago

Until 14 January

Woman with a Camera

mcachicago.org

NEW YORK CITY

Rubin Museum of Art

Until 4 September

Henri Cartier-Bresson:

India in Full Frame

rubinmuseum.org

Sugar Hill Children's Museum

of Art and Storytelling

Until 27 August

Chester Higgins Jr: Passing Through

sugarhillmuseum.org

ROCHESTER

Eastman Museum

Until 22 October

Eugene Richards:

The Run-On of Time

eastman.org

STANFORD

Cantor Arts Center

Until 18 September

Environmental Exposure:

Photography and Ecology after 1970

museum.stanford.edu

TAMPA

Florida Museum

of Photographic Arts

Until 31 December

By the Yard, Cirkut

Camera Photography

fmopa.org