

## Leptis Magna fascinates famous war photographer

By: Karen Dabrowska

A black and white photograph of the ruins of the Roman theatre at Leptis Magna appeared slightly out of place at the Shaped by War: photographs by Don McCullin exhibition in London's Imperial War Museum.

Don McCullinDon McCullin



McCullin visited Libya in 2010, shortly after he suffered a stroke, exploring the Saharan frontiers of the Roman Empire in North Africa. This was an old interest of his, which had flared into a passion

Albino boy Biafra



Beirut



Sheep to the slaughter

psyche as many of McCullin's more graphic depictions of conflict and carnage. The eyes that stare out beneath the grimy helmet are not staring at the camera lens, but beyond it, into nowhere.

His photographs are accompanied by a newly commissioned film interview, magazine spreads and personal memorabilia. Together, they tell the remarkable story of his life and work, including his most famous assignments in

Berlin, Vietnam, Cambodia, Biafra, Bangladesh and the Middle East. Key periods in McCullin's life including his early experiences of evacuation and the Blitz, his commissions from Berlin in 1961 and Cyprus in 1964 and his most famous work for the Sunday Times are explored alongside more recent projects with Christian Aid and, in the last few years, his photographs of still life and English landscapes at his home in Somerset.

Don McCullin was born in 1935 in Finsbury Park, north London. "I grew up in total ignorance, poverty and bigotry and this has been a burden for me throughout my life. There is still some poison that won't go away, as much as I try to drive it out," he recalled during a recent interview. His career, which began in 1959 has specialised in examining the underside of society

and his photographs have depicted the unemployed, downtrodden and the impoverished.

McCullin's period of National Service in the RAF saw him posted to the Canal Zone during the 1956 Suez Crisis where he worked as a photographer's assistant. He failed to pass the written theory paper necessary to become a

Cambodian  
man





photographer in the RAF and was forced to spend his service in the darkroom.

In 1959, a photograph he took of a local London gang was published in the Observer. Between 1966 and 1984 he worked as an overseas correspondent for the Sunday Times Magazine, recording ecological and man-made catastrophes such as war-zones among them Baifra, in 1968

and the victims of the African AIDS epidemic. His hard-hitting coverage of the Vietnam War and the Northern Ireland conflict is particularly highly regard.

In 1962 the British government refused to grant McCullin a press pass to cover the Falklands War. At the time he believed it was because the Thatcher government felt his images might be too disturbing politically. However it

recently emerged that he was a victims of bureaucracy: he had been turned away simply because the Royal Navy had used up its quota of press passes.

He is the author of a number of books including *The Palestinians* (with Jonathan Dimbleby), *Beirut: A city in crisis* and *Don McCullin in Africa*.

He received the World Press Photo Award in 1964 for his coverage of the war in Cyprus. In 1977 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. In 1993 he was granted a CBE the first photojournalist to receive the honour. Several universities have awarded him honorary degrees among them the University of Bath.





West Hartlepool



During the interview screened in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum's exhibition, McCullin says: "Photography for me is not looking, it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures." He speaks of the adrenaline rush of photography under fire, his personal control and lack of fear. The memories live on,

however, and he now finds peace and tranquillity in photographing landscape. His advice to aspiring young photographers is to learn about their own society and its wars before looking further afield. Don McCullin has been shaped by war, but also by a strong sense of social injustice and his photographs give voice to those who have none - 'I want to become the voices of the people in those pictures'.