

# The Guardian

Delaney, Brigid, “‘You can’t unsee this’: Richard Mosse’s all-consuming plea to save the Amazon,” *The Guardian*,  
September 30, 2022

## ‘You can’t unsee this’: Richard Mosse’s all- consuming plea to save the Amazon

Across a 20-metre panoramic screen in ultra-high resolution, visitors bear witness to environmental degradation – in a piece that overwhelms the senses

- Broken Spectre is showing at the NGV in Melbourne until April 2023

by [Brigid Delaney](#)

Fri 30 Sep 2022 19.16 EDT

You don’t just watch Broken Spectre – you also feel it. The sound travels along the floor and up into your body. Your brain stretches to breaking point trying to take in the images stretched across the 20-metre screen. In a pitch-black room, it’s like being suspended in a black hole, devoid of any distraction.

The immersive new work from photographic artist Richard Mosse [at the National Gallery of Victoria](#) is unlike anything I’ve experienced. One comparison [could be the work of James Turrell](#), which can also plunge you into altered states, playing with your perception and consciousness.

But Broken Spectre is also deeply political and distressing; a layer cake depiction of humanity’s destruction of ecosystems that will stay with the viewer a long time. Stumbling into the interview with Mosse and sound artist Ben Frost moments after watching it, my first question to them was a stunned one: “What the actual fuck?”

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Irish-born, US-based photographic artist Richard Mosse with *Broken Spectre*. Photograph: Eugene Hyland

Recorded in remote parts of the Brazilian Amazon – the focus of Mosse's recent work *Tristes Tropiques* – the footage, directed by American cinematographer Trevor Tweeten, runs across three screens which sometimes merge.

“If you are a storyteller, I feel that speaking about the environment is your duty now,”  
*Richard Mosse*

One shows overhead shots of the destruction of the forest; on another – in black-and-white widescreen reminiscent of an old western – we watch humans, felling trees, riding on horseback, working in an abattoir; and we visit the villages of the Yanomami people. The third screen offers deep close-ups of the forest floor, shot in brilliant colour – it almost looks like cells through a microscope.

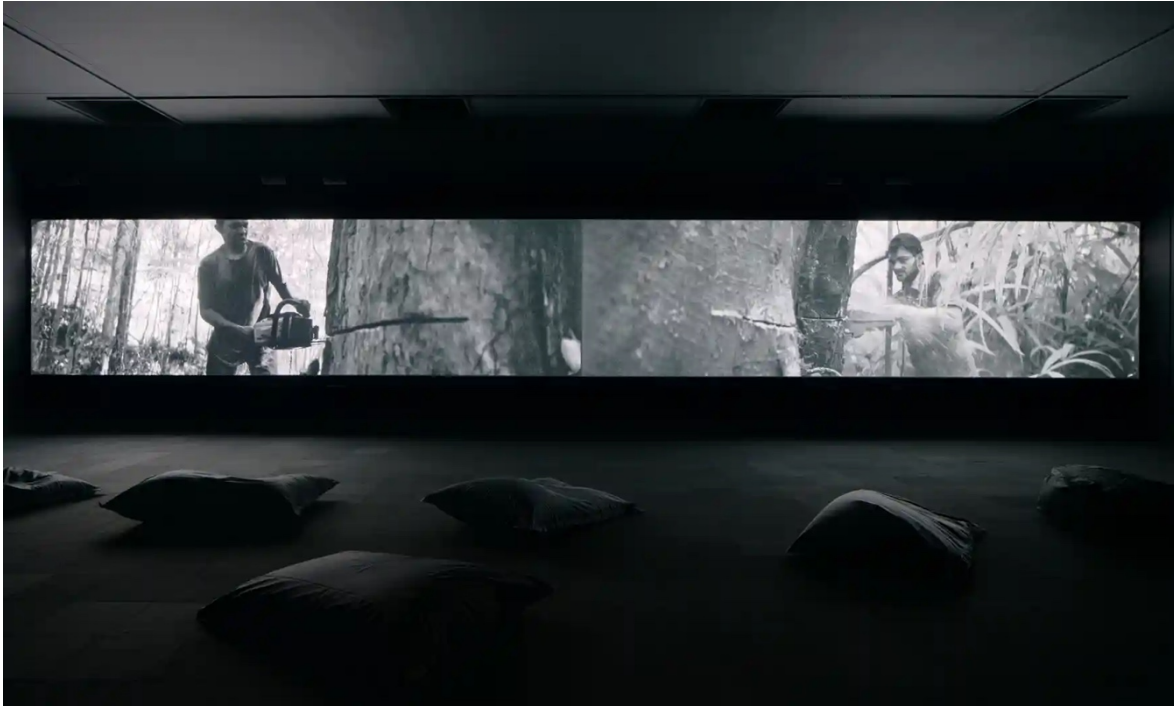
The work, which runs for 74 minutes, is shown in enormous panorama in a dark room at the NGV, with a resolution that the gallery says has never been shown before at an artistic institution.

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Iceland-based Australian sound artist Ben Frost strapped a sound recorder to trees that were being felled, and used ultra-sonic microphones to capture the sound of insects. Photograph: Tom Ross

There is no dialogue – no story as such – but sound is as much a part of the work. Iceland-based Australian sound artist Ben Frost recorded the roar of flames lashing at the forest; of chainsaws and dying animals. He strapped a sound recorder to trees that were being felled, and used ultra-sonic microphones to capture the sound of insects.

Amplified, it sounds like screaming.

Commissioned by the NGV and co-funded by philanthropists, Broken Spectre took three years to make, using a range of scientific imaging technologies – including multi-spectral sensors that measure infrared – to show the scale of degradation caused by deforestation.

“Environmental scientists use this technology to understand what’s going on in the environment and to understand tipping points, how much time we have left,” Mosse says. “It’s also used by agribusiness to exploit the environment. So it is double-edged technology.” The artist couldn’t buy a camera like this on the open market, so had to make his own.

Mosse, who lives in New York, came to [Melbourne](#) to launch the piece – a return to the gallery which exhibited his work, *Incoming*, at the 2017 Triennial.

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Incoming used military grade technology to capture stunning thermal images of refugee journeys, reflecting the professional collapse that defines his practice: on the one hand, a foreign correspondent; and on the other, an artist creating beautiful, surprising images with highly sophisticated gear.

When he began working on Broken Spectre, Brazil was at a democratic and environmental tipping point. “[Brazilian president] Bolsonaro came to power in 2018, and encouraged deforestation on a large scale. When the dry season of 2019 occurred, there was a huge amount of burn – and we decided it was perhaps our next project, and we decided to go down to Brazil,” says Mosse.

“The moral imperative to speak about the environment was very strong,” Mosse says. “If you are a storyteller, I feel that this is your duty now.”



“The forest – it looks so beautiful from the air. But the logistics were brutal.” Untitled 2.4.1., a still from Broken Spectre. Photograph: Richard Mosse/Jack Shainman Gallery

Mosse began shooting in 2019, spending six to eight weeks at a time in the Amazon. Many of the places they shot in were only accessible via light plane.

“That was incredible. The forest – it looks so beautiful from the air,” says Mosse. “But we made it hard for ourselves. The logistics were brutal, gruelling, and the weather was hardcore – even in the dry season there was intense flooding.”

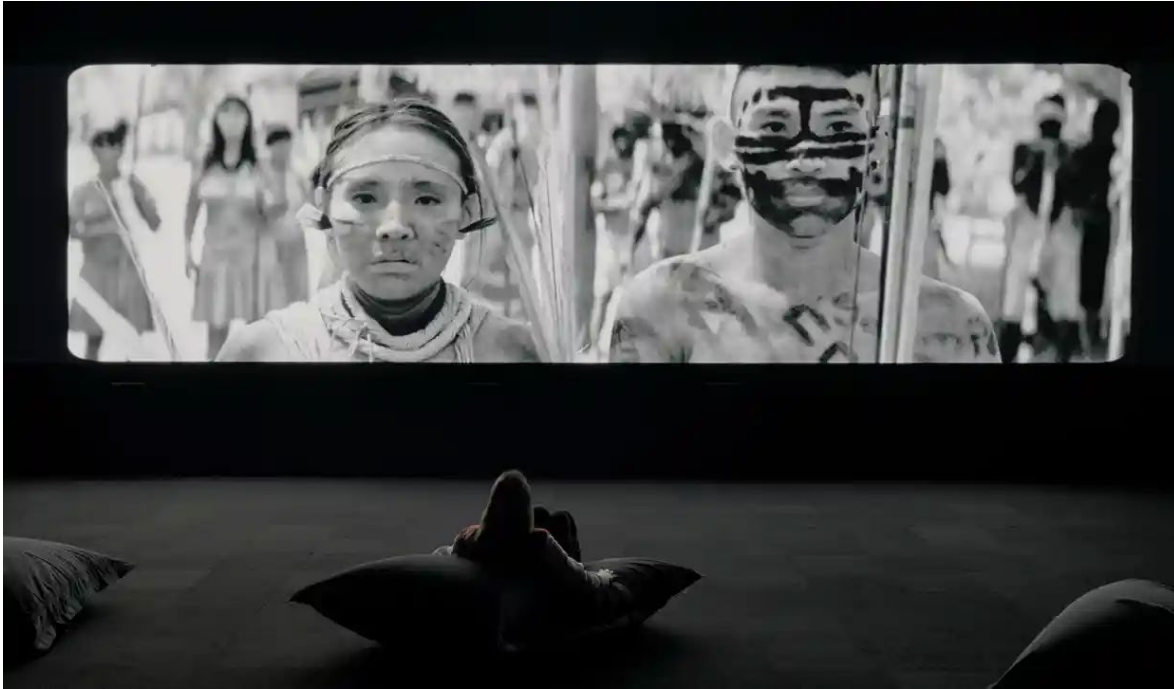
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Images in the film showcase the incredible access his team were granted inside slaughterhouses and First Nations villages. We watch burn-offs in forests up close, and the felling of ancient trees.



‘There’s a huge amount of trust required. You can’t just drop in.’ Photograph: Tom Ross

There are villains as well as heroes in the piece, but Mosse says his work is about “communicating, not condemning”.

“A lot of these environmental crimes are carried out by regular people, and some of them are rather nice. We wanted to carry through that ambiguity in the work – as well as respect our subjects,” he says. “We built relationships and established friendships in the course of making the work.”

Frost adds: “That’s an overlooked aspect of Richard’s work. A huge part of what he is doing is building relationships – there’s a huge amount of trust required to get [that] level of intimacy ... You can’t just drop in.”



Mass burn in Rondonia, a still from *Broken Spectre*. Photograph: Richard Mosse

NGV curator Ewan McEoin commissioned the work and is the largest collector of Mosse's work in the world. This one, he says, is "an important work".

"Richard is contending with the scale of the problem – and the vastness of it. He's putting himself into risky situations," he says, referring to [the murder of Guardian contributor Dom Phillips and Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira](#), who were killed in June while covering the degradation of the Amazon. "The self-sacrifice to produce this is immense.

"I found it a very emotionally confronting work – it's very intense," McEoin says. "You can't unsee this thing."

- *Broken Spectre* is showing at the NGV in Melbourne until April 2023. *Guardian Australia* travelled to Melbourne as a guest of the NGV

# Wallpaper\*

Gladstone, Sophie, "Richard Mosse: when a weapon becomes a tool for storytelling," *Wallpaper\**, September 29, 2022

HOME ► ART ► PHOTOGRAPHY

## Richard Mosse: when a weapon becomes a tool for storytelling

Documentary photographer Richard Mosse's first retrospective charts a career of subverting conventional narratives of war, immigration and climate change



Vintage Violence, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY  
(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

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There is great power in repurposing a tool associated with destruction for creation, something that Irish artist Richard Mosse is well versed in. Often working with technologies originally classified as weapons, he covers challenging topics of conflict, immigration and climate change.

Now on show at Italy's Fondazione Mast, 'Displaced' is Mosse's first anthological exhibition, consisting of more than 70 large-format photographs and two large-scale video installations.

'Richard Mosse firmly believes in the inherent power of the image, but as a rule, he renounces shooting the classic, iconic images related to an event. He prefers to account for the circumstances, the context, to put what precedes and what follows at the centre of his reflection,' says exhibition curator Urs Stahel.

'His photographs do not show the conflict, the battle, the crossing of the border, in other words, the climax, but the world that follows the birth and the catastrophe. The artist is determined to revive documentary photography, bringing it out of the blind alley in which it has been confined. He wants to subvert conventional media narratives through new technologies – often of military-type – precisely to unhinge the representative criteria of war photography.'



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(Image credit: Richard Mosse)



Top: *Of Lilies and Remains*, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, courtesy of the artist, DZ Bank Art Collection. Above: *Thousands are Sailing I, II* Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, courtesy of the artist, private collection

(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

It is these technologies that Mosse breaks out of documentary photography's contentious mould. For *Infra*, he uses discontinued reconnaissance infrared film to register chlorophyll in live vegetation, depicting the verdant Congolese landscape as a rainforest of pinks and reds. It could be a surreal idyll if it weren't for the human skull, or a young, wide-eyed man holding a gun.

In *Heat Maps*, Mosse documents mass migration with thermal imaging. What is warm appears light, while cold is dark. With over 1,500 images stitched together to create these thermal panoramas, the formal framing of documentary is bent further due to time lags between exposures; a person often appears several times in a single composition. This same thermal technology is used for the audiovisual installations *Incoming* and *Grid (Moria)*, which depict scenes surrounding the migrant experience.



(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

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Top: Souda Camp, Chios Island, Greece, courtesy of the artist, MOCAK Collection. Above: Yayladagi refugee camp, Hatay Province, Turkey, courtesy of the artist, Private Collection

(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

In *Ultra*, Mosse focuses on another battle for survival, photographing the Amazon rainforest with a UV-fluorescence technique that creates a luminescent colour spectrum. The endangered biodiverse environment becomes a glittering fantasy, a showpiece that overrides nature's camouflage.

*Tristes Tropiques* zooms out to depict environmental criminality from the perspective of a drone. Working with multispectral film used in advanced satellite technology (and for military reconnaissance), Mosse creates an alarming survey of the destruction of vast expanses of the Brazilian rainforest.

In 'Displaced', viewers gaze into the eye of each social, political, economical storm Mosse is documenting. With the use of these technologies, he brings pause and clarity. For all of documentary photography's complexities, Mosse's shifted perspective is valuable for reflecting on our world's crises.

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*Still from Incoming #27, courtesy of the artist, Private Collection*

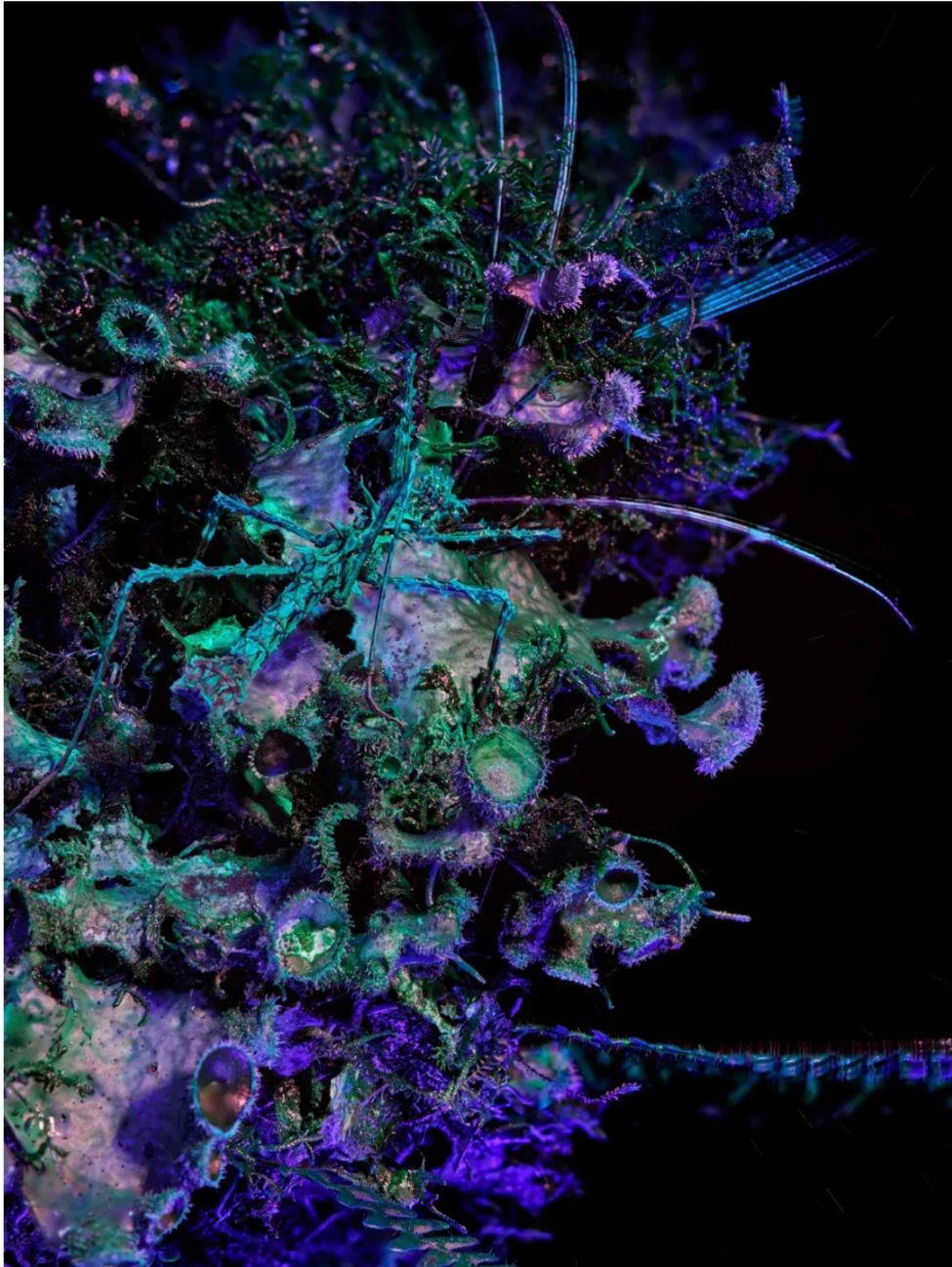
(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

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*Male Parobimus with Fungus*, 2019, courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery and carrier | gebauer  
(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

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*Dionaea muscipula* with Mantodea, Ecuador Cloud Forest , courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery and cartier | gebauer

(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

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*Sawmill, Jaci Parana, State of Rondonia, Brazil, courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery and carlier | gebauer*

(Image credit: Richard Mosse)

## INFORMATION

Richard Mosse, 'Displaced' until 19 September 2021, Fondazione  
Mast, [mast.org](http://mast.org) \*

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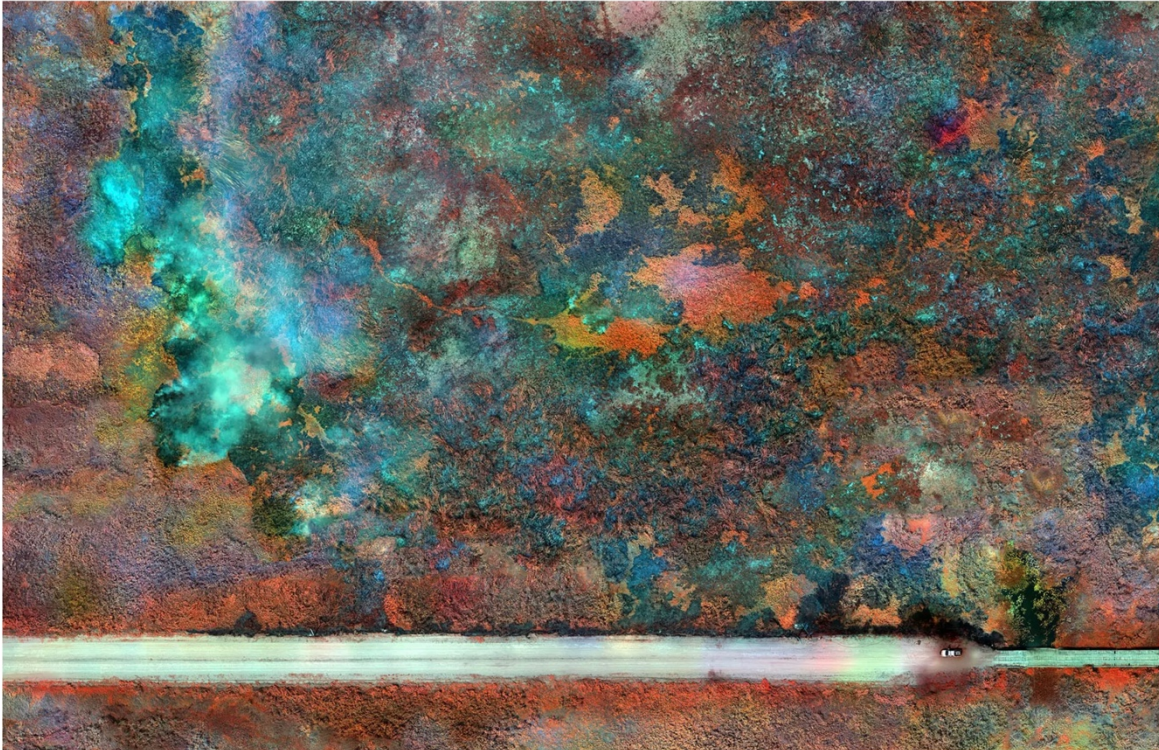
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## **T** THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

Furman, Anna, "Richard Mosse's View of the Amazon," *The New York Times Style Magazine*, September 22, 2022

SEE THIS

### **Richard Mosse's View of the Amazon**



Richard Mosse's "Subterranean Fire, Pantanal, Mato Grosso" (2020). © Richard Mosse 2022/courtesy of Loose Joints

**By Anna Furman**

In "Broken Spectre," a book of more than 300 images taken over the last four years, Irish photographer Richard Mosse documents the unfathomable scale of degradation and deforestation in the Amazon. Scientists have warned that we are nearing a [tipping point](#), after which the rainforest will not be able to recover. This



project, like others by Mosse on the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the [global refugee crisis](#), blurs the lines between photojournalism, documentary photography and contemporary art.

Mosse also takes readers inside the [Pantanal](#), the world's biggest tropical wetland, where a fire spreads underfoot. (Cattle farmers often burn swathes of land for agriculture, logging and ranching, and the region has recently experienced [severe wildfires](#).) The fire is invisible to the human eye, but Mosse's military-grade thermal camera reveals a heat map of rust-orange and brown that appears like a supernova or intricately patinated bronze. It's a mesmerizing pattern that belies the horror of its subject. To create aerial shots, Mosse deploys drones and makes use of geographic information system (G.I.S.) technology. Illuminated by this imaging, the rainforest transforms into an apocalyptic and otherworldly landscape: The canopy layer is magenta, the river system is electric green and milky blue, and fires blaze incandescent. Mosse saves black-and-white film for images documenting the climate crisis up close: a wounded jaguar in recovery; gold miners at work; and Yanomami and Munduruku Indigenous communities speaking out against Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro, who is up for re-election in October. \$57, [loosejoints.biz](#).

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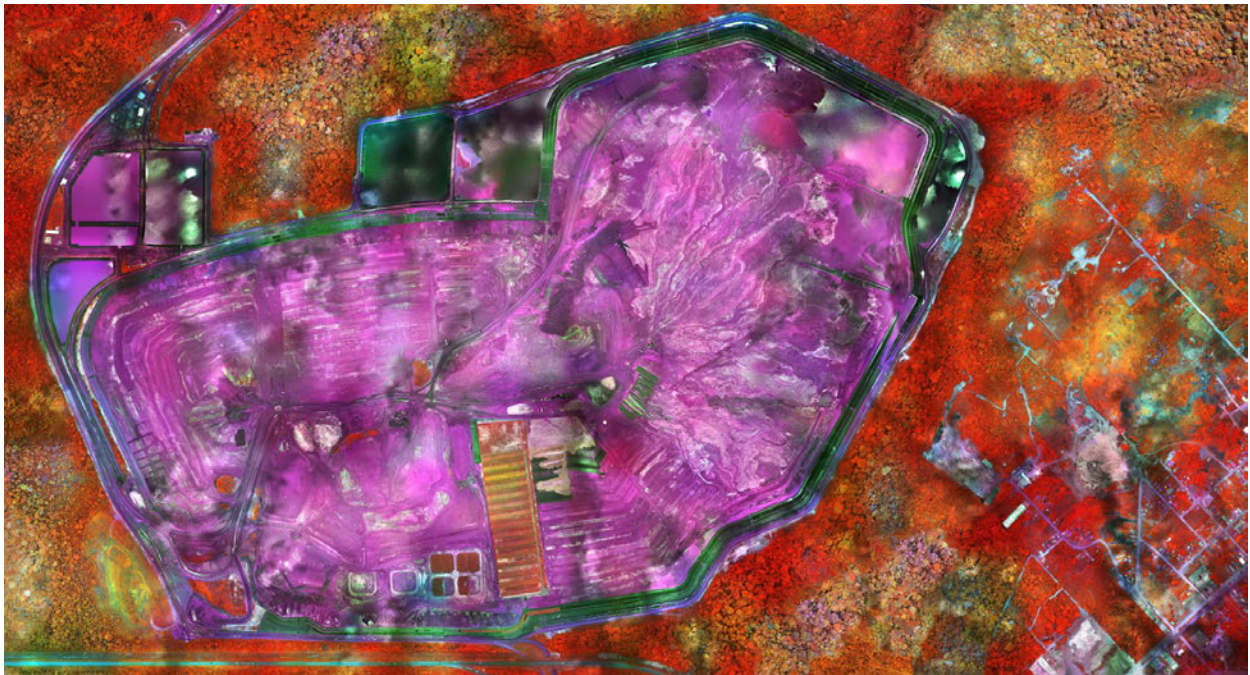
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# Art in America

## CORPORATE PHOTOGRAPHY REVEALS A DEHUMANIZING GAZE

By Shanti Escalante-De Mattei

June 23, 2021 5:36pm



Richard Mosse, Alumina Refiner, Para, 2020

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHIANMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

When it comes to art of the anthropocene, we are often shown the wound and not the assailant. The discourse around ecological crises—and the artistic interventions meant to call attention to them—has primarily been concerned with how to frame their enormous scale. As such, philosopher Timothy Morton’s concept of “hyperobjects”—phenomena which defy our understanding as they exist across such huge swaths of time and space—is useful for

capturing the communication failures surrounding climate change. Instead, the framing of accountability might be a more pressing question. Audiences have absorbed images of destruction for years, but what they haven't seen is who is responsible for all of these crises.

Identifying the malefactors is difficult work. Company men don't hold the smoking gun. They do not start fires with their own hands as they profit from the burning. Yet, as the Latin expression *qui facit per alium facit per se* has it, he who does a thing by the agency of another does it himself. This diffusion of agency makes it hard to represent accountability visually. That which is not seen is not easily otherwise sensed. Photographer Richard Mosse, in his series *Tristes Tropiques*, and—separately—Latin America scholars Kevin Coleman and Daniel James, in their book *Capitalism and the Camera*, offer a scintillating alternative. By probing the imaging technologies used by corporations, we might come to better understand the gaze of the prospectors who benefit from ecological and political harm.

The destructive function of the human gaze seems to be a self-evident fact. Desire for experiences and things drives consumption, turning the wheel of unsustainable extraction at an exponential pace. “Capitalist consumption is a key factor driving global warming,” Kevin Coleman and Daniel James point out in the introductory essay to *Capitalism and the Camera*, which attempts to explain how driving traffic to certain images, products, and activities is the result of a hidden profit motive. “The circulation of images, in turn, drives consumption. The desire to have a certain way of life is curiously first an image and only second a reality.” As easy as it is to shudder at the collective consumptive power of the masses, Coleman and James ask us instead to consider the primary destructive gaze of powerful companies.



An example from the United Fruit Company's archives detailing the effects of fertilizer applications. Honduras, 1953

UNITED FRUIT COMPANY

Coleman and James point to the massive photo archives of multinational corporations as a valuable resource that reveals how photography has been an essential tool in penetrating frontiers of capital accumulation. In reference to the United Fruit Company's collection of 10,400 images held at Harvard University, the authors write, "Here we find that the company used photography to present its work to shareholders and to the public, to control nature at a distance, to scientifically analyze the ripening of bananas and the spread of disease, to convert biodiverse tropical forests into monocrop plantations, and to monitor the health and productivity of its workers."

The photographs document each building in the United Fruit Company's Honduras plantation, aerial views of the land, workers, banana trees, and the social lives of the American expats who lived there. At first glance, the photos seem too opaque to glean the kind of information Coleman and James describe. A picture of the jungle reveals what? But between photos of ice cream socials and blurry leaves, clarity emerges in the thicket of the enormous archive. One photo, Figure XVII from 1953, shows some neat rows of banana trees, a man standing to the right in the shade of some lush fronds. The photo is captioned, "Typical leveled area approximately seven months after applying 550 pounds of nitrogen per acre, sixteen months after planting, shows vigorous growth in contrast to that shown in Figure XVII." Another photo documents the advancement of pestilent red rust thrips across the skins of bananas.

The archive shows us that the local environment and workers were observed as exploitable materials, each photograph a data point to be responded to and molded. Meanwhile, the shining smiles of expats at yet another cookout or their sweaty bodies dressed up for a day of tennis show how they were treated as subjects worthy of respect, consideration, and affectionate attention. The lives of the Hondurans and the complexity of their ecology were not meant to be represented as full subjects because they were never meant to be treated that way.

Richard Mosse's work advances our understanding of the gaze of the powerful by appropriating the imaging technology used by corporations and government entities in their pursuit of capital gains and border enforcement. In a recent exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York and now at Fondazione Mast in Bologna, Italy, images from Mosse's series "Tristes Tropiques" appropriates the data rich photography used by corporations and scientists to depict the various ecological crimes playing out across Brazil, including the attention-grabbing fires of 2020. Mosse used geographic imaging system (GIS) technologies, drones, and multispectral imaging to capture large topographic images of destruction colored in rich hues. Depictions of mining, intensive feedlots, illegal timber production, and the path of intentionally set fires are seen as complex scientific images, showing us something sickly. Cutting-edge technology, which Mosse says is used by both scientists and the "bad guys," allows us to see things we typically couldn't, especially not from afar—the health of plant life, heat signatures, chemical analysis, PH measurements.



Richard Mosse, still from *Incoming*, 2016

Mosse has always had an interest in photographic innovations, especially those developed by the military. When documenting the Congo in his 2011 series “*Infra*,” he used Kodak’s now discontinued Aerochrome film. Developed by the US military during World War II, Aerochrome could be used to detect camouflaged military movement by reconnaissance planes, as the infrared-sensitive film would highlight plant material that gave off infrared light but not the inorganic greens of camo. Mosse would again turn to military grade technology for his film installation *Incoming*, which documented migrations playing out in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa between 2014 and 2016. This time, he would use a surveillance camera that can detect body heat from great distances, hence its primary use in border enforcement. The images are ghostly, horrifying, and not meant for public messaging, though they could make unintended fodder for conservative news platforms. Yet it is through such extreme, almost monstrous representations that soldiers are taught to see migrants. Similarly, it is through the more abstracted, neon-hued, GIS maps of forests that prospectors decide where to plunder for oil and minerals with little consideration of the lives contained within.

But this where other artistic interventions intercept this obliterating gaze. For example, in the graphic memoir of Pablo Fajardo, *Crude*, the influential Ecuadorian lawyer who fought against a Chevron oil spill in the Amazon, the illustrator Damien Roudeau helped bring a hidden history into view. Fajardo describes the first moments that Indigenous peoples in the Ecuadorian Amazon first came into contact with Chevron, when a huge metal bird was spotted in the territory of the Cofán people. Roudeau depicts the scouting helicopter, which was probably fitted with the kinds of imaging technology used by Mosse, breaking through the canopy.

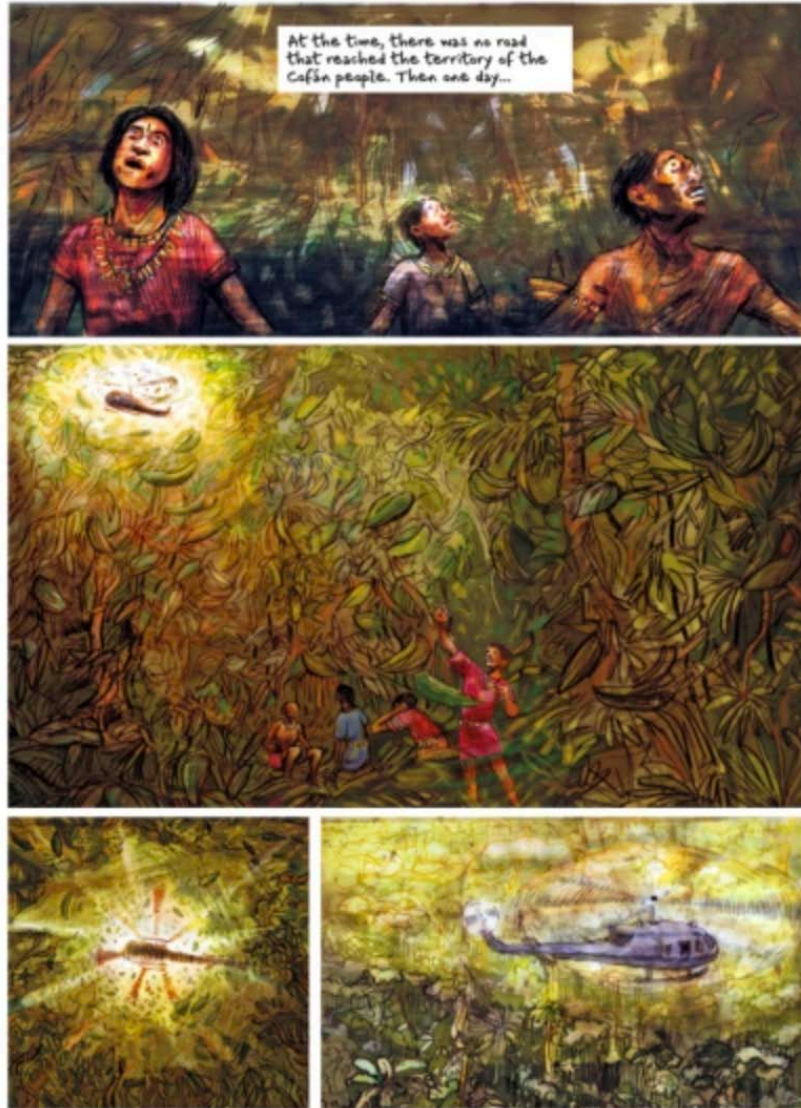
By the end of Chevron's oil mining stint, two Indigenous tribes, the Tetete and the Taegiri, would be pushed to extinction, and countless others died from cancer and other health issues caused by drinking, bathing, and cooking with water soiled by 16 million gallons of oil and another 18.5 million gallons of chemicals. Not to mention the ruination of a primary forest that has yet to receive the billions of dollars of clean-up funds that Chevron owes them. Roudeau's sketch-like illustrations, layered with watercolors, often blur the line between the vibrancy of the forest and the oil that skims its surfaces, displaying the insidious intermingling of poison and life. If Roudeau's illustrations work to illuminate the hidden externalities of resource extraction, Mosse's photographs remind us that all the death that follows the ravaging hand of capital is ultimately reduced to abstraction for those of us who benefit, if distantly and unwillingly, from the exploitation of resources, product, and profit.

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Excerpt from activist Pablo Fajardo's graphic memoir *Crude*, 2020, illustrated by Damien Roudeau.



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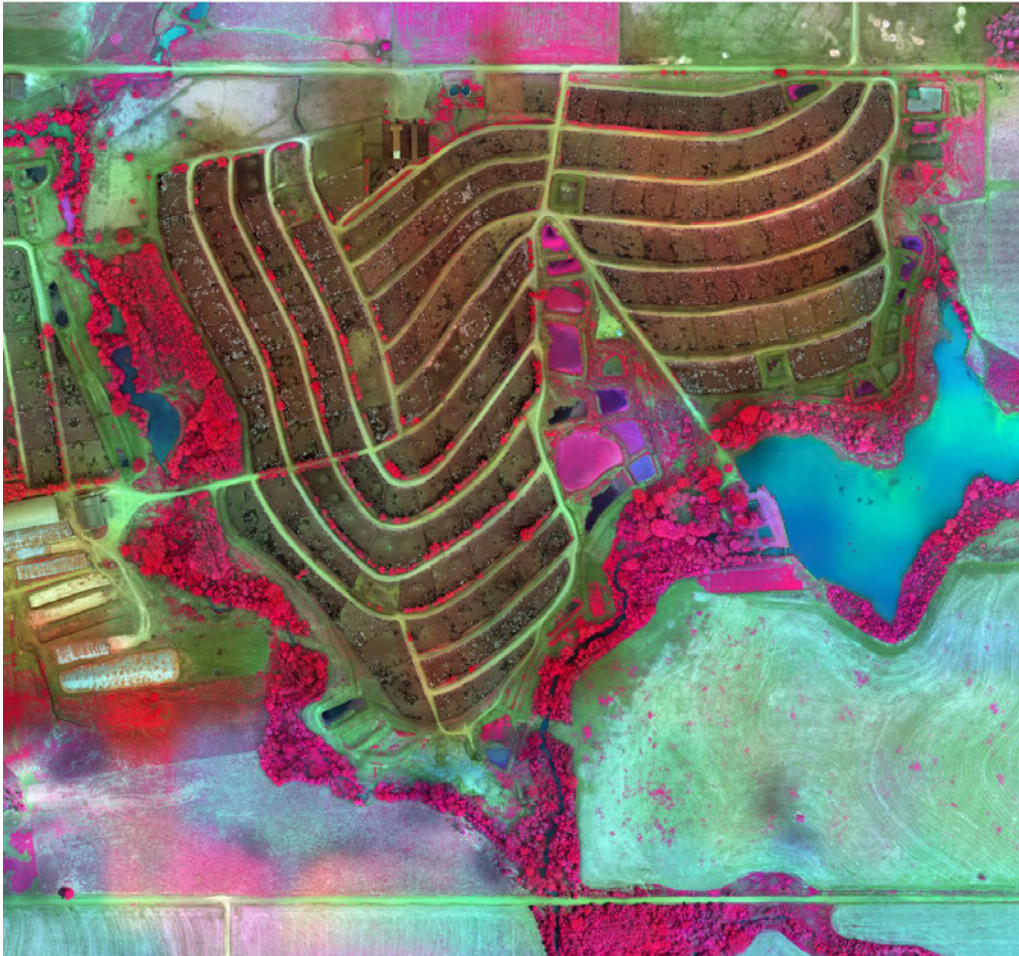
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# The New York Times

Mitter, Siddhartha, 6 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now, The New York Times, April 28, 2021

## 6 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Gerald Jackson's collages; Precious Okoyomon's reimagined ecosystem; Damien Davis's sculptures; Beverly Buchanan's "shacks"; and more.



Richard Mosse's "Intensive Cattle Feedlot, Rondônia" (2020) is an example of his use of multispectral photography to examine how deforestation, mining and commercial agriculture are altering ecosystems in Brazil. Richard Mosse and Jack Shainman Gallery

## **Richard Mosse**

Through May 15. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th St and 524 West 24th Street, Manhattan, 212-645-1701, [jackshainman.com](http://jackshainman.com).

The land is iridescent pink, purple and teal in Richard Mosse's bravura aerial images of the Brazilian Amazon. Elsewhere it recedes into familiar-seeming greens and browns, but with tonal effects that show both the advanced technology used to capture these pictures and the artist's considerable compositional role in their manipulation.

The sites are mainly points on the "arc of fire," from Rondônia in the southwest to Pará in the north, where in dry season fires are set to clear rainforest for cropland. In 2019, these fires reached a decade peak, generating global consternation. Mosse, who is Irish and lives in New York, traveled to Brazil soon after, equipped with a drone-mounted multispectral camera that detects nuances in soil, vegetal condition, and much else beyond the human eye.

Now at Jack Shainman Gallery, his finished images are big — a triptych of the Crepori River, in the Amazon basin, stretches almost 15 feet — and the effect is magnetic. The eye works to decode the landscapes: dull nubs of felled trees; a pond in red, full of lines that are actually caimans; a sudden well-ordered zone — a cattle feedlot. In the pervasive sense of seepage and fragility, Mosse achieves, quite elegantly, a central aim in his work, which is to convey world-changing phenomena beyond the limits of documentary photography.

The technology here is used both by scientists working for conservation and agro-industrial conglomerates that undermine it. In past projects, Mosse has used heat-sensing surveillance tools to photograph migrants and refugee camps, and old military infrared film to document war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The methodology can be a bit sinister, but also illuminating. Up close, depicting human subjects, his work has sometimes verged on the lurid. Here, however — despite the earnest title "Tristes Tropiques," referring to the dated Claude Lévi-Strauss anthropology classic — the work gains from altitude and becomes a welcome project in critical cartography.

SIDDHARTHA MITTER

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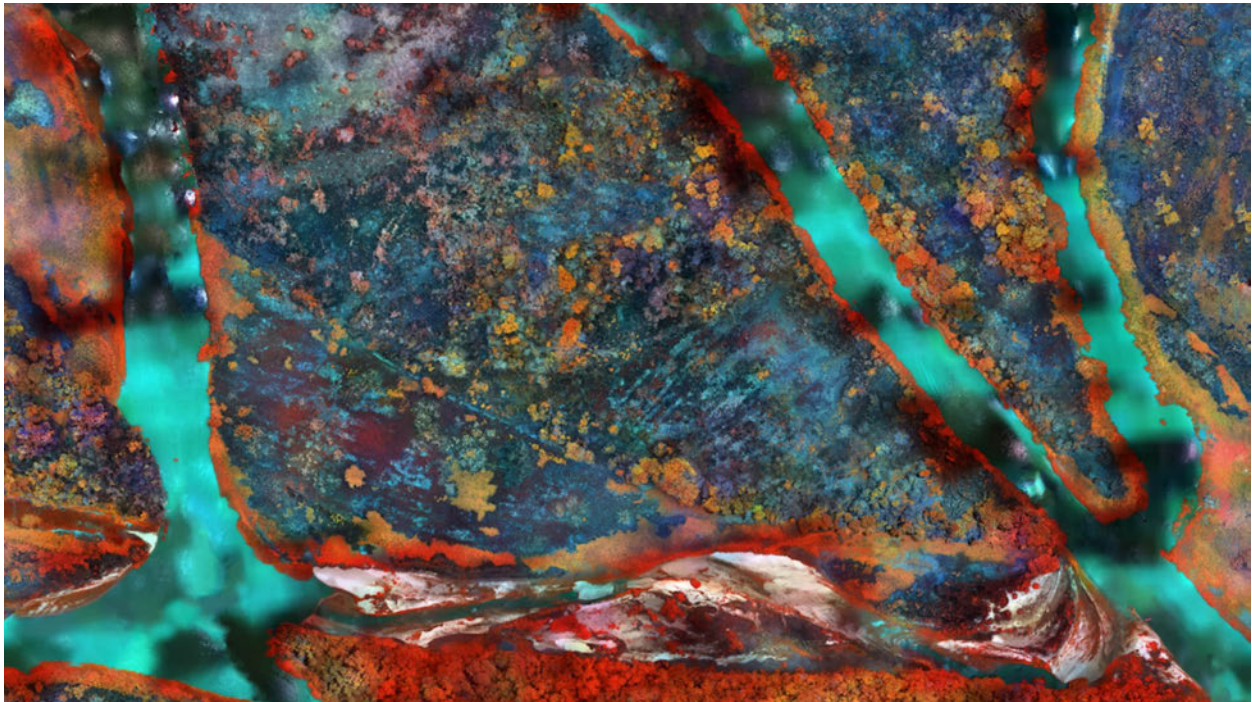
Butler, Gavin, "Infrared Images Capture the Mass Destruction of the Amazon Rainforest," *VICE*, December 16, 2020.

## Infrared Images Capture the Mass Destruction of the Amazon Rainforest

Using multispectral cameras high above the jungle, photographer Richard Mosse documents humanity's suicidal "war on nature."



By [Gavin Butler](#)



ALL IMAGES BY RICHARD MOSSE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

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It's hard to articulate the scale of destruction being wrought upon the Amazon, but here are some topline figures to give an idea.

Between 2000 and 2018, deforestation in the Amazon wiped out eight percent of the rainforest, destroying an area larger than Spain. Since the turn of the millennium, more than 198,000 square miles have been lost—more than 4,200 square miles of which were razed between August 2019 and July 2020 alone, the highest level of deforestation since 2008. And last December, Carlos Nobre, a climate researcher at the University of São Paulo, warned that “if the tree mortality we see continues for another 10 to 15 years, then the southern Amazon will turn into a savannah.”

The reasons for such rampant destruction are manifold, but leading contributions are global warming and large-scale burning—the latter of which can mostly be attributed to the anti-environmentalist agenda of Brazil's far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro's policies are informed by a thirst for development: he encourages deforestation to clear space for agriculture and mining, and blocks the work of environmental groups who might otherwise intervene to protect the rainforest.



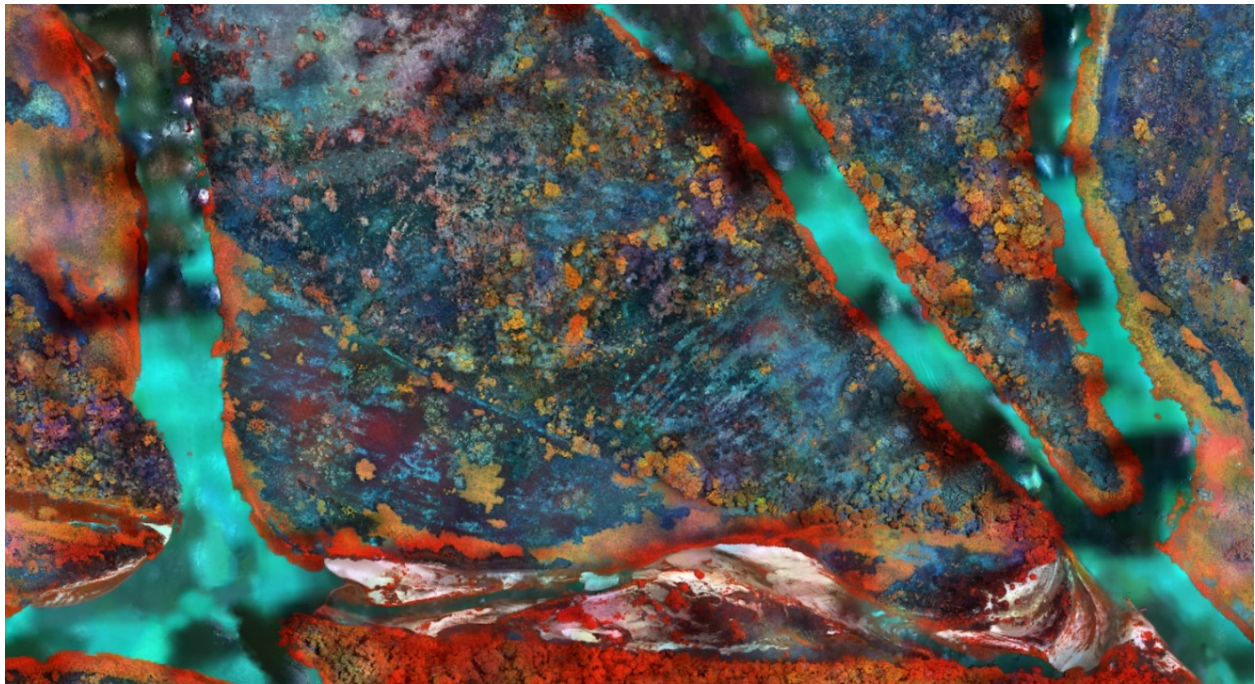
SILVER GELATIN PHOTOGRAPH FROM INFRARED FILM DEPICTING A BUSH FIRE IN THE AMAZON RAINFOREST, PARA STATE, BRAZIL.

This is a problem, for far more than just the obvious reasons. The Amazon is home to about three million species of plants and animals and one million indigenous people. But within its trees it also stores as much as 76 billion tonnes of carbon—making it a valuable carbon “sink” that traps CO<sub>2</sub>, emits oxygen and slows the pace of global warming.

The so-called “lungs of the world” are shrinking, and the implications could be disastrous.

Meanwhile, more fires are tearing through Brazil’s neighbouring Pantanal, the world’s biggest wetland, than during any other year since records began. The UNESCO heritage site has seen a 220 percent jump in blazes from 2019, while illegal deforestation in the biome more than doubled in the first six months of this year. Experts have noted that the degradation of both the Amazon’s and the Pantanal’s biomes are closely interconnected.

Photographer Richard Mosse travelled to the imperilled Amazon and Pantanal in direct response to Bolsonaro’s wanton disregard for the region, following media reports he’d seen in 2019. Armed with a custom-built multispectral camera that captures bandwidths of light otherwise invisible to the naked eye, he set out to tell the story of this ecological disaster in a new and never-before-seen way: going beyond the data to visually articulate the extent of the environment’s ongoing devastation. VICE World News spoke to him about the project.



MULTISPECTRAL MAP INDICATING EXTENT OF RECENT BURNING TO FOLIAGE AND WETLANDS ALONG RIO SÃO LOURENÇO, IN PANTANAL.

**VICE: Hey Mosse, can you tell me what inspired this project?**

**Mosse:** I was very moved and saddened last summer by reports in the media about widespread burning of the Amazon rainforest. At that stage, I had been working in the cloud forests of Ecuador on a separate but related project called “Ultra”, taking highly detailed photographs of a microscopic universe of fluorescent biomass, so I had already spent quite some time looking very closely at what we stand to lose.

A natural progression from there, I felt, was to move from the micro to the macro, to widen the lens, and begin documenting sites of environmental crimes and destruction.

**What are some of the most memorable things you saw while working on this?**

Words fail me. The scale of the burning is unimaginable. The “arc of fire”, as it’s known, spans from Bolivia, through the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso, across Rondônia, into Amazonas all the way to Para, which is about the distance from the northern US border with Canada to its southern border with Mexico.

The arc of fire is not a new phenomenon; it has encroached ever further into the primary forests of the Amazon for decades. But the rate of burning has become exponential, spurred on by a perfect storm of economic and political factors.



A CATTLE FEEDLOT IN RONDÔNIA THAT IS HOME TO SOME 40,000 COWS: ALL OF THEM BEING FATTENED UP FOR SLAUGHTER, THEN PROCESSED AND EXPORTED AS BEEF PRODUCTS.

The scale of it, like so many aspects of global heating and climate change, is in many ways beyond human perception and imagination. It can be more easily described with quantitative statistics and scientific modelling but very challenging to infer qualitatively, as a storyteller or artist.

I can tell you that these are some of the most tragic landscapes I have ever seen—and I've seen more than my fair share. These areas are warzones. As UN Secretary General António Guterres recently declared, "Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal."

Agricultural and mining practices have turned some of the most biodiverse paradise landscapes on Earth into something resembling nuclear winter. The rainforest's intense colours and sounds have been rendered into a dead silent monochrome landscape of ash and charred boughs with the crisped, asphyxiated bodies of primates, sloths and other animals frozen in their attempts to escape. I cannot find the words to do it justice.

What can you tell me about the imaging equipment you used? How did that allow you to capture something that hasn't been seen before?

In my search to find a lens wide enough to take this vast subject in, I realized that environmental scientists use very specific kinds of remote sensing camera technologies that capture numerous spectral bandwidths of reflected light. These cameras, carried in satellites orbiting the Earth's surface, capture large amounts of data that can be interpreted using geographic information systems (GIS) software in order to create maps containing environmental information.

This data is then used by scientists to understand the scale and velocity of deforestation, chart aspects of shifting climate, predict tipping points, etc. And the satellite camera technology that generates the data is called multispectral photography.

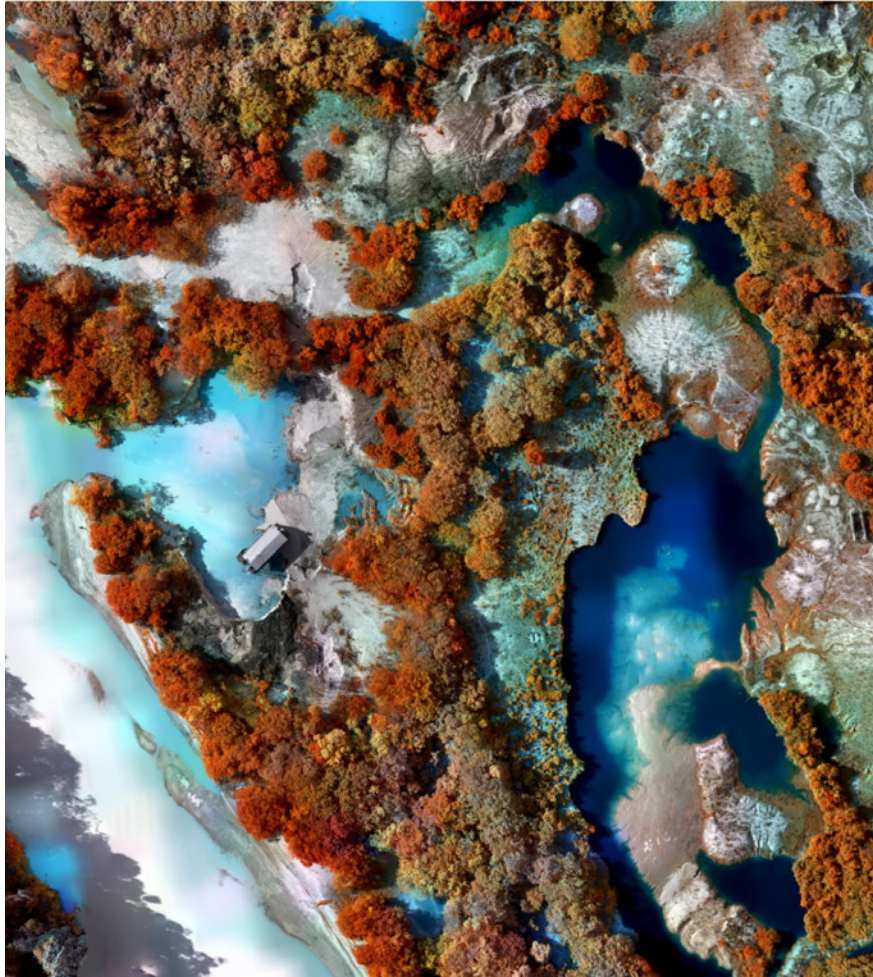
Interestingly, airborne multispectral cameras are also used widely in agribusiness and mineralogy, to reveal the health of crops and drainage patterns, or to pinpoint rare earth minerals in the land. These two industries are responsible for almost all of the Amazon's deforestation. So the medium is simultaneously used to help us perceive the scale of ecological destruction in the Amazon, while being exploited by those invasive industries most responsible for this damage.

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MULTI-SPECTRAL MAP SHOWING A GOLD MINING BOAT AT WORK IN THE CREPORI RIVER IN NORTHERN BRAZIL. THE MINERAL EXTRACTION PROCESS IS EXTREMELY INVASIVE ON THE RIVERBED AND RIVERBANK AND INVOLVES MERCURY POLLUTION.

I wished to try to harness multispectral photography to reveal traces of the Amazon's destruction that a conventional camera may not be able to register. To do this, I have been working with a drone mounted multispectral camera to create orthographic photos that map sites of environmental crimes, or image topographies of ecological degradation. The resulting prints offer a visually expressive way of describing Man's impact on the environment.

**Talk to me about the idea of providing black-and-white portraits of the perpetrators and victims of environmental degradation next to the photos of the degradation itself. Why do you think it's important to add that human element, and to hold individual people accountable for mass environmental destruction?**

Maps feel inherently impersonal, of course. The human figure, if it can even be seen in the landscape, is captured from far above, becoming little dots. But man's trace upon the land is made clear. To balance this, I wished to create a kind of parallel series which is very personal.



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The arc of fire is not a new phenomenon; it has encroached ever further into the primary forests of the Amazon for decades. But the rate of burning has become exponential, spurred on by a perfect storm of economic and political factors.



SILVER GELATIN PHOTOGRAPH FROM INFRARED FILM SHOWING GARIMPEIROS SPRAYING SILT WITHIN A GOLD MINING PIT ALONG THE CREPORI RIVER.

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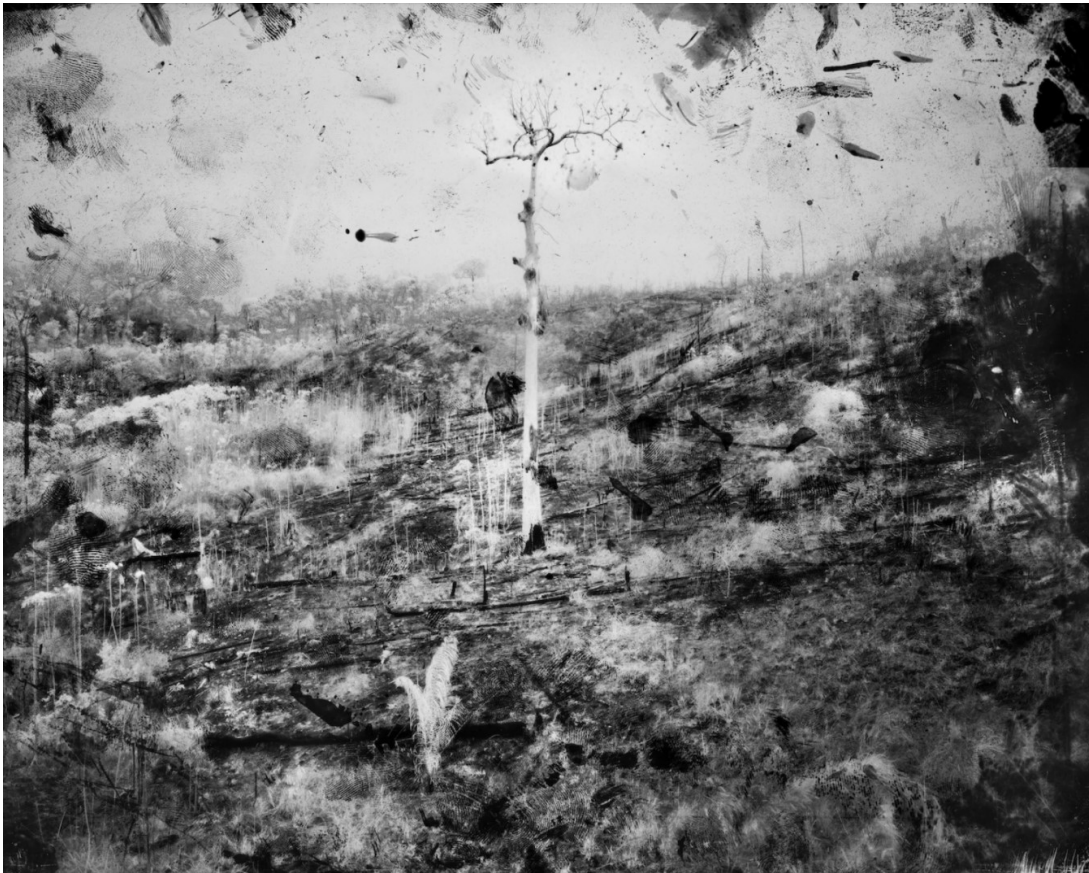
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This monochrome series was captured using a near-extinct kind of black and white infrared film stock named Kodak HIE that is incredibly vulnerable to heat degradation. It felt like an interesting way to try to express visually the phenomenon of global heating. Bringing this film into the extremely hot and humid environment of the Amazon basin to photograph the burning rainforest, sometimes from quite near the flames, was an invitation to allow its highly sensitive photographic emulsion to become materially degraded by these environmental conditions.

The resulting patina of environmental damage—the scratches and tears; the weeping emulsion; the accidental fingerprints; the fogging—is all immensely subjective compared with the more objective scientific elements created by the ten-band multispectral camera.

It's part of my attempt to show the viewer the difficulties, on the one hand, of photographing the vast and abstract narrative of ecocide, while on the other hand showing photography's power to reveal and understand the scale of Man's exploitation of the environment.



SILVER GELATIN PHOTOGRAPH FROM HEAT-DEGRADED INFRARED FILM SHOWING THE AFTERMATH OF SLASH-AND-BURN AGRICULTURAL ENCROACHMENT INTO PRIMARY RAINFOREST, SOUTHERN AMAZONAS.

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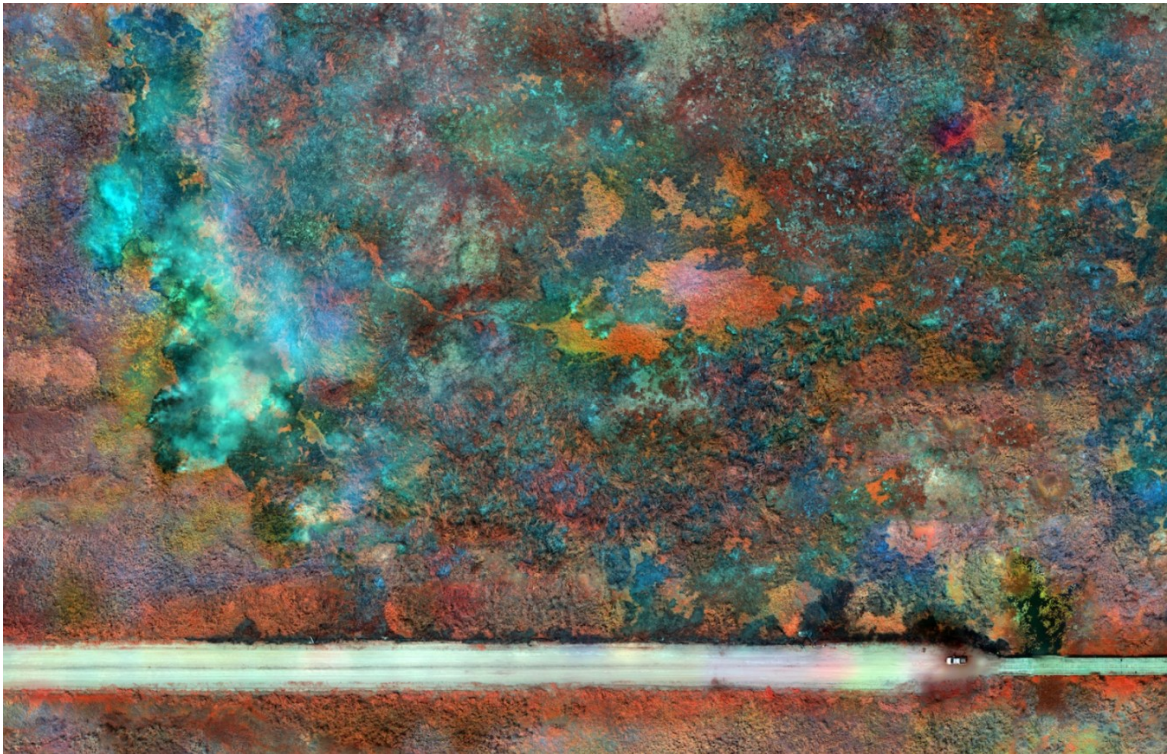
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**When talking about things like environmental devastation and climate change, what is the impact of art and photography as opposed to hard science? Or to put it another way: how important is it to show, rather than tell?**

The stories we tell are absolutely crucial to creating meaningful change. We need only look at how dramatically the narratives of climate denial—stories with little basis in truth—have obstructed our society’s rational response to this exponential catastrophe for decades.

As Naomi Klein points out in her book [This Changes Everything](#), as recently as the mid-1980s both Republicans and Democrats could agree that climate change was real and something must be done about it. But the spin of think tanks and lobbyists funded by gas and oil industry billionaires has fostered an insidious culture of denialism that has split society and obstructed rational emissions regulations.



MULTISPECTRAL GIS MAP REVEALING SUBTERRANEAN FIRE SPREADING THROUGH THE DESICCATED ROOT SYSTEM OF THE PANTANAL WETLANDS. PREFOGO FIREFIGHTERS STRUGGLE TO CONTAIN THE BLAZE.

Decades later, these narratives are widespread in the United States and have, in the interests of a wealthy few, wasted the most precious years we had to turn this around. That’s a result of storytelling.

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We must begin to convey these narratives more powerfully—to challenge climate denialism, apathy and inaction in more compelling, urgent and impactful ways—to make people feel something. Because that's our power, as artists and as storytellers: we have the ability to make people feel things in new and original ways.

The data is in; the reports have been written; the writing is on the wall. This ship has almost sailed.

*More photos below. Interview by Gavin Butler. Follow him on Twitter*

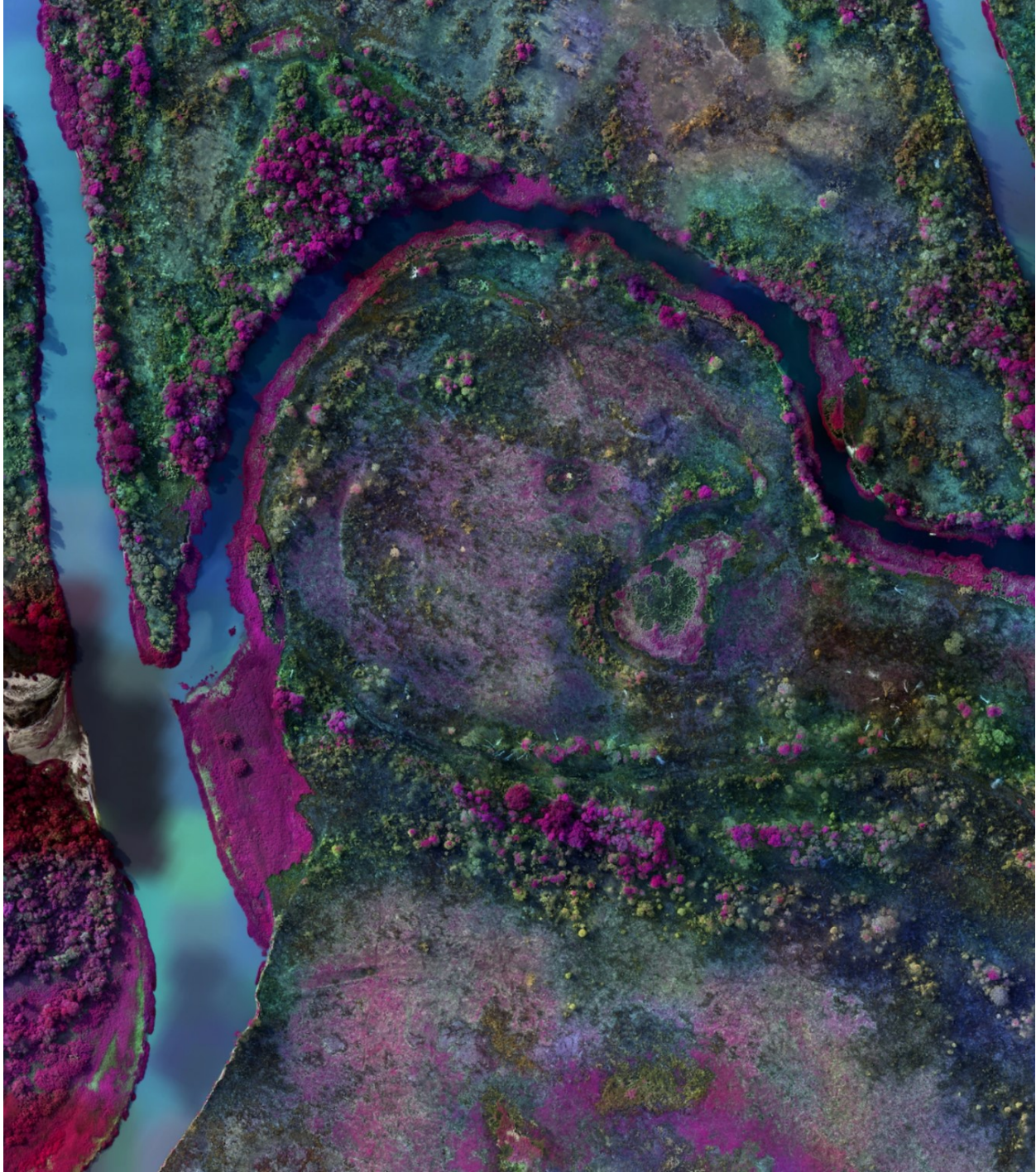
*These works will be the subject of Richard's solo exhibition at Jack Shainman gallery, New York City, from April 8-May 15, 2021*

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MULTISPECTRAL MAP INDICATING THE EXTENT OF RECENT BURNING TO FOLIAGE ALONG RIO SÃO LOURENÇO.

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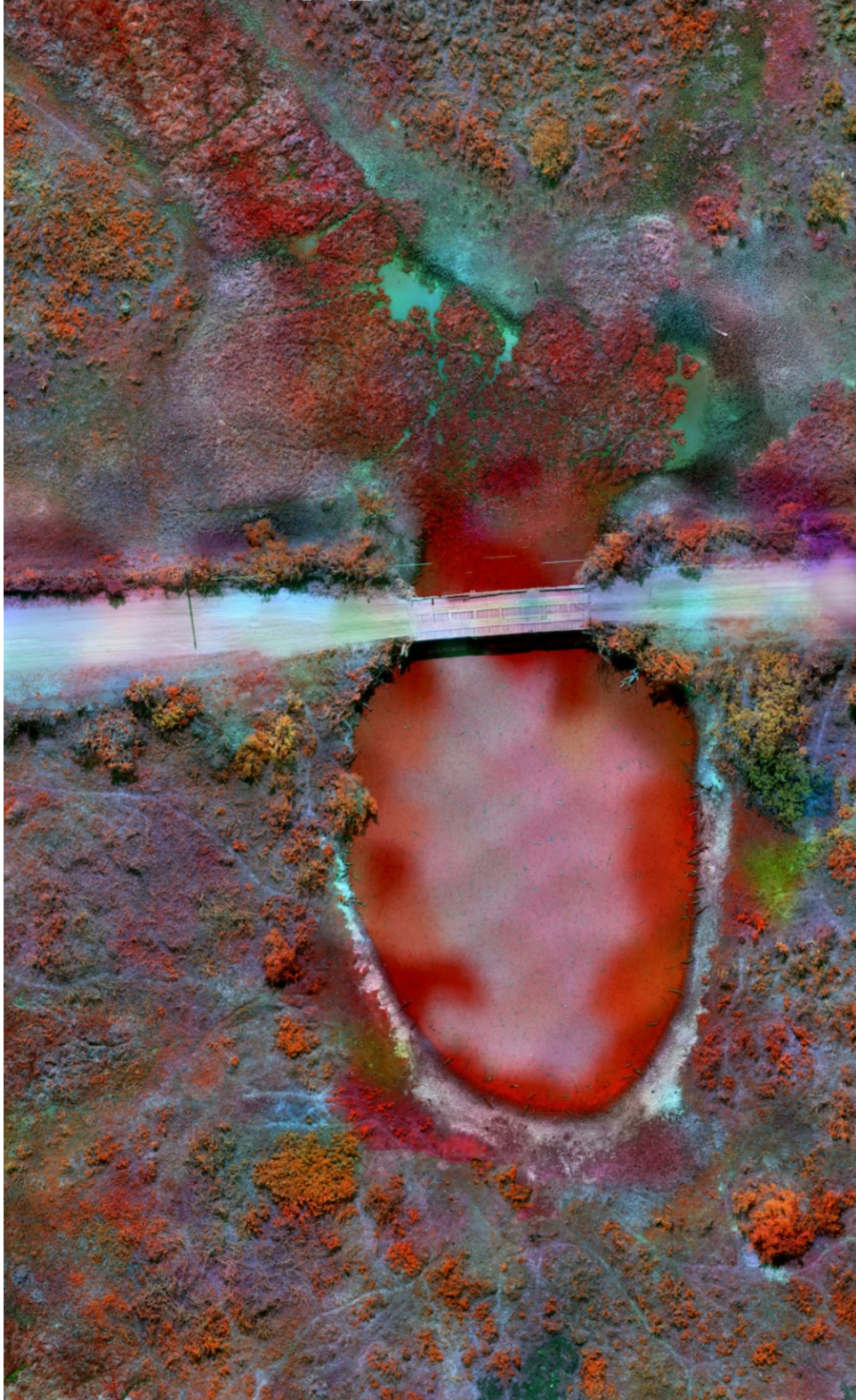
MORE GARIMPEIROS BLASTING SILT IN THE SEARCH FOR GOLD ALONG THE CREPORI RIVER.

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MULTISPECTRAL MAP OF A WATER REFUGE AT THE END OF AN UNSEASONABLY LONG DRY SEASON. THE PANTANAL'S EXTREMELY DIVERSE BIOME, INCLUDING HUNDREDS OF CAIMAN, CONGREGATES NEAR THESE BODIES OF WATER FOR SURVIVAL.

# The New York Times Magazine

Cole, Teju, "When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism. (And When It Still Is.)," *The New York Times Magazine*,

February 6, 2019

## When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism. (And When It Still Is.)

By Teju Cole

Feb. 6, 2019

I first saw the photograph some years ago, online. Later, I tracked it down to its original source: "In Afric's Forest and Jungle: Or Six Years Among the Yorubans," a memoir published in 1899 by the Rev. R.H. Stone. It shows a crowd in what is now Nigeria, but what was then Yorubaland under British colonial influence. The caption below the photograph reads: "A king of Ejayboo. Governor of Lagos on right. For years the rulers of this fierce tribe made the profession of Christianity a capital crime." This description is familiar in tone from anthropological literature of the period, though the photograph is hard to date precisely. "Ejayboo" is what we would nowadays spell as "Ijebu," a subgroup of Yoruba. That catches my attention: I am Yoruba and also Ijebu. This picture is a time capsule from a world to which I am connected but had not seen before, a world by colonial encounter.

By the middle of the 19th century, through treaties and threats of force, the British had wrested control of the coastal city Lagos from its king. They then turned their efforts to improving access to the goods and services in the Yoruba hinterland. The Yoruba were already by that time a populous and diverse ethnic group, full of rivalrous kingdoms large and small, some friendly to the British, others less so.

Stone, a Virginian sent by the Southern Baptist Convention, lived among them — lived among us — for two spells, in 1859-63 and 1867-69, before, during and after the American Civil War. He had this to say about Yoruba people: "They are reasonable, brave and patriotic, and are capable of a very high degree of intellectual culture." It is praise, but must be understood in the context of a statement he makes earlier in his book about living "among the barbarous people" of that part of the world. In any case, the Ijebu in the mid-19th century were largely wealthy traders and farmers who did not want to give the British right of way to the interior of the country; only through diplomacy, subterfuge and violence were they finally overcome.

This photograph was made in the aftermath. The white governor of Lagos — based on the plausible dates, it is probably John Hawley Glover — sits under an enormous umbrella. On one side of him is another high-ranking colonial officer. On the other side is the Ijebu king, or oba, probably the Awujale of the Ijebu kingdom, Oba Ademuyewo Fidipote.

The oba wears a beaded crown, but the beads have been parted and his face is visible. This is unusual, for the oba is like a god and must be concealed when in public. The beads over his face, with their interplay of light and shadow, are meant to give him a divine aspect. Why is his face visible in this photograph? Some contravention of customary practice has taken place. The dozens of men seated on the ground in front of him are visibly alarmed. Many have turned their bodies away from the oba, and several are positioned toward the camera, not in order to look at the camera but in order to avoid looking at the exposed radiance of their king.

**The invention** of the daguerreotype was announced in 1839. By the 1840s, photography had spread like wildfire and become a vital aspect of European colonialism. It played a role in administrative, missionary, scientific and commercial activities. As the Zimbabwean novelist Yvonne Vera put it: "The camera has often been a dire instrument. In Africa, as in most parts of the dispossessed, the camera arrives as part of the colonial paraphernalia, together with the gun and the bible. ..."



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Photography in colonialized societies was not only a dire instrument. Subject peoples often adopted photography for their own uses. There were, for instance, a number of studios in Lagos by the 1880s, where elites could go to pose for portraits. But such positive side effects aside, photography during colonial rule imaged the world in order to study, profit from and own it. The colonial gaze might describe as barbarous both the oba's beaded crown and his regal right to conceal himself. This was one of the repeated interactions between imperial powers and the populations that they sought to control: The dominant power decided that everything had to be seen and cataloged, a task for which photography was perfectly suited. Under the giant umbrella of colonialism, nothing would be allowed to remain hidden from the imperial authorities.

Imperialism and colonial photographic practices both flourished in the 19th century, and both extended themselves, with cosmetic adaptations, into the 20th. In 1960, during the horrific French war on Algeria, the French military assigned a young soldier, Marc Garanger, to photograph people in an internment camp in the Kabylia region of Northern Algeria. Thousands of people had been confined in the region under armed guard, and the French military commander had decreed that ID cards were mandatory. A picture of each prisoner was required. Many of the women were forced to remove their veils. These were women who did not wish to be seen, made to sit for photographs that were not for them. (Photography played a different military role in the numerous aerial reconnaissance missions by the French, which resulted in thousands of negatives mapping the region.)

Garanger's photographs both record an injustice and occasion it. His alternative, not an easy one, would have been to refuse the order and go to prison. His pictures show us what we ought not to see: Young and old women, their hair free flowing or plaited, one face after the other, in the hundreds. They collectively emanate refusal. The women of Kabylia look through the photographer, certainly not considering him an ally. Their gazes rise from the surface of the photograph, palpably furious.

**When we speak** of "shooting" with a camera, we are acknowledging the kinship of photography and violence. The anthropological photographs made in the 19th century under the aegis of colonial powers are related to the images created by contemporary photojournalists, including those who embed with military forces. Embedding is sometimes the only way to get a direct record, no matter how limited, of what is happening in an armed conflict. On occasion such an arrangement leads to images whose directness displeases the authorities, but a more common outcome has been that proximity to an army helps bolster the narrative preferred by the army.

Still, photographic reportage has the power to quicken the conscience and motivate political commitments. Examples abound of photographs acting as catalysts in the public's understanding of vital issues, from the images of Bergen-Belsen in 1945 to the photograph of the Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi in 2015. And yet, perhaps even more insistently, on a day-by-day, week-by-week basis, photography implicitly serves the powers that be. To insist that contemporary photographic practice — and I mean to include a majority of the international news coverage in newspapers like this one — is generally made (and published) for the greater good is to misconstrue history, because it leaves out the question of "Good for whom?" Such pictures aren't for their subjects any more than the photograph in Stone's book was for the Ijebus and their king.

Certain images underscore an unbridgeable gap and a never-to-be-toppled hierarchy. When a group of people is judged to be "foreign," it becomes far more likely that news organizations will run, for the consumption of their audiences, explicit, disturbing photographs of members of that group: starving children or bullet-riddled bodies. Meanwhile, the injury and degradation of those with whom readers perceive a kinship — a judgment often based on racial sympathy and class loyalties — is routinely treated in more circumspect fashion. This has hardly changed since Susan Sontag made the same observation in "Regarding the Pain of Others" (2003), and it has hardly changed because the underlying political relationships between dominant and subject societies have hardly changed.

Without confronting this inequality, this misconstrual of history, photography will continue to describe itself as one thing (a force for liberation) while obdurately remaining another (an obedient appendage of state power). It will continue to be like the organs of the state that "spread democracy" and change regimes. Even when it appears to go against the state, it will only do so selectively, quaintly, beautifully, piteously, in terms that do not question the right of the state to assert power.

**For how long** will these radically unequal societal realities endure? Many affecting photographs have been made during the huge waves of international migration of the past few years. These pictures issue, as usual, from the presumed rights of photographers to depict the suffering of people “out there” for the viewing of those “back home.” But in looking at these images — images of war, of starvation, of capsized boats and exhausted caravans — we must go beyond the usual frames of pity and abjection. Every picture of suffering should elicit a question stronger than “Why is this happening?” The question should be “Why have I allowed this to happen?”



Detail from Richard Mosse's "Moria in Snow, Lesbos, Greece," 2017. From Jack Shainman Gallery

This is what the scholar Ariella Azoulay calls the “citizenship” of photography, its ability, when practiced thoughtfully, to remind us of our mutual responsibilities. When I look at the bewildering photographs of refugee camps in Richard Mosse’s recent book, “The Castle,” I feel indicted. The imperial underpinnings of Mosse’s project are inescapable: Using military-grade thermal cameras, he makes extremely complex panoramic images (stitched together from hundreds of shots) of landscapes in the Middle East and Europe in which refugees have gathered or have been confined. His pictures echo the surveillance to which these bodies are already subjected. But the thermal imaging renders the images very dark, with the humans showing up as white shapes (almost like a negative). The picture conceals what it reveals. We see people, but they remain hidden.

This technique makes for uncanny images in which distressed people move about like the figures you see in dreams, indistinct but full of ghostly presence. At the Moria camp in Greece, it is snowing. We see a long snaking line of people, waiting. What are they waiting for? For some material handout, probably, for food or blankets or documents. But their waiting represents the deeper waiting of all those who have been confined in the antechamber of humanity. They are waiting to be allowed to be human.

Mosse’s images, formally striking as they are, are unquestionably part of the language of visual domination. With his political freedom of movement and his expensive technical equipment, he makes meticulous pictures of suffering that end up in exquisite books and in art galleries. He is not the first photographer to aestheticize suffering, nor will he be the last. And yet, by suppressing color, by overwhelming the viewer with detail, by evoking racial horror rather than prettily

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displaying it and by including in his work philosophical considerations of the scenes he shows — “The Castle” contains essays by Judith Butler, Paul K. Saint-Amour and Mosse himself and a poem by Behrouz Boochani — he does something quite different from most photojournalists. He unsettles the viewer.

Photography’s future will be much like its past. It will largely continue to illustrate, without condemning, how the powerful dominate the less powerful. It will bring the “news” and continue to support the idea that doing so — collecting the lives of others for the consumption of “us” — is a natural right. But with a project like “The Castle,” I have a little bit of hope that an ethic of self-determination can be restored. I have hope that the refugees of Moria, Athens, Berlin and Belgrade will gain a measure of privacy. The women of Kabylia will cover their faces and return to themselves as they wish to be. The oba’s beaded crown will fall back into place, shadowing his face. Photography writes with light, but not everything wants to be seen. Among the human rights is the right to remain obscure, unseen and dark.

Teju Cole is a novelist, a photographer and the magazine’s photography critic. He teaches at Harvard. This is Teju Cole’s final On Photography column and the last “On” column in our weekly rotation.

A version of this article appears in print on Feb. 10, 2019, on Page 14 of the Sunday Magazine with the headline: Photography has the power to record and reveal the world; but not all things can be recorded or should be revealed.



The Photography Annual

# EXHIBITION OF THE YEAR: RICHARD MOSSE'S INCOMING

*By Eliza Williams*

Richard Mosse's *Incoming*, shown at the Barbican Curve from February to April this year, was a thought-provoking look at the refugee crisis happening around the world. It is Creative Review's standout photographic exhibition of the year.

Part-reportage, part conceptual art, *Incoming* challenged viewers to examine their understanding of the refugee crisis, and of how the media can affect our opinion of events. At the exhibition's centre was a 52-minute-long triple-screen film work, created by Mosse in collaboration with cinematographer Trevor Tweeten and set to a specially composed soundtrack by electronic musician Ben Frost. The footage showed the plight of refugees in different settings across the world, including Syria, Lesvos and the 'Jungle' camp in Calais.



*Richard Mosse's Incoming at The Curve, Barbican Centre. Photo: Tristan Fewings*

Everything featured in the film was shot from a distance, with Mosse using advanced thermographic weapon systems and border surveillance imaging technology to create the work, which can detect the heat of a human body up to 30.3km away. The effect of the tech is to give the people featured in the film a bizarre, unique tonality. They remain distinctly human, yet are also 'other': difficult to distinguish as individuals and presented as uncanny. This use of unusual technology is in keeping with a previous series by Mosse. Titled *Enclave*, it was presented at the Venice Biennale in 2013 and won the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize in 2014. *Enclave* showed soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo photographed using discontinued military surveillance film that registers chlorophyll in live vegetation, giving the fighters a stunning and surreal psychedelic backdrop. Like *Incoming*, this is reportage with a difference, raising questions of how successfully photography can present the reality of complex and violent situations.



*Richard Mosse's Incoming at The Curve, Barbican Centre. Photo: Tristan Fewings*

Incoming garnered rave reviews from critics. “To enter Mosse’s vast, triple-screen installation ... is to be transported to a world both alien and familiar; a spectral place where all that we have seen of the refugee crisis in the media – overcrowded boats, rescue teams, refugee camps, lifeless bodies washed up on tourist beaches, discarded lifejackets – is rendered more visceral but more unreal,” wrote Sean O’Hagan in the Guardian.

“Richard Mosse has made a certain terrible beauty his trademark,” wrote Ben Luke in the Evening Standard, while Chris Waywell in Time Out said simply: “It will make you rethink the European refugee crisis.”

### **Weaving narratives**

It is worth noting that while Incoming did feature a series of still images, it is dominated by the film installation, and our choice of this as a ‘photography’ exhibition of the year might ruffle the feathers of those who see the medium primarily in stills form. Yet, at the centre of Mosse’s work is an examination of the genre of reportage. Incoming is a recording of events as witnessed through a camera, yet also an investigation of ‘documentary’ itself. It asks us to consider how the way a situation is presented to us changes our understanding of it.



*Richard Mosse's Incoming at The Curve, Barbican Centre. Photo: Tristan Fewings*

In 2015, Mosse was nominated for membership of Magnum Photos, the prestigious and world-renowned photo agency. Yet he never continued to become a full member of Magnum, in part because of his wariness around the perceived notion that documentary photography was somehow portraying the 'truth'. Significantly though, he still identifies as a photographer. "I do," he said in an interview with Tom Seymour for *BJP* magazine. "But I have a very ambivalent relationship to it. It's almost like self-loathing, because there's something predatory about the camera lens. I can't escape photography but, whichever way you look at, documentary photography is as constructed a way of seeing the world as anything else."

He aims to highlight this constructed element in his work. In using the thermographic camera, which has a primary use of identifying body heat from afar and is therefore classified as a weapon, he hopes to confound viewers' expectations of documentary work.



*Richard Mosse's Incoming at The Curve, Barbican Centre. Photo: Tristan Fewings*

“You have to remember it’s a military tool, it’s not designed for telling stories,” he explained to CR at the launch of *Incoming* at the Barbican. “It’s designed for detecting the enemy. So the fact that it has an extraordinary tonality ... [it’s] an alienation effect almost, to push the viewer into an unfamiliar place, where they can see what happens to be quite a familiar subject in a new and perhaps refreshed way.”

### **Extraordinary equipment**

In practical terms, the camera was far from straightforward. It was large and unwieldy, plus, classified as a weapon, it required government permission to use. Mosse was also limited in where he could take it. One scene in the film, which shows a battle unfolding in Northern Syria, was in fact shot from Turkey. “There’s a lot of mortar fire and rockets, a lot of tracers,” he says. “That’s all totally visible on the camera, and once we were filming that you really realised that this is what the camera is designed for, for battlefield awareness. You could see artillery positions that were hidden, you could see the glow of people behind them.

“We were on a hill just on the Turkish border. Because we really didn’t want to risk our necks. Also, Syria’s one of the sanctioned countries that we couldn’t travel with the camera to. The camera is regarded as a weapon under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations. In other words, if you don’t get the proper export documentation, you could be locked away for weapons smuggling. It’s one more annoying thing about the camera.”





*Richard Mosse's Incoming at The Curve, Barbican Centre. Photo: Tristan Fewings*

The distance the camera had to be used from presented ethical dilemmas too. It is able to record scenes intimately without the subjects having any awareness that they are being filmed. The film contains scenes of people socially interacting in refugee camps but also of doctors performing an autopsy.

“The almost invasive gaze of the very powerful long range capabilities allowed us to create a very honest portrait of people who were completely unaware, they were unselfconscious,” says Mosse. “I would argue that’s not an invasion of privacy because the camera also anonymises the individual, you can’t identify anyone who is imaged by the camera because it doesn’t reveal how their face looks. It reveals how their face ‘glows’.



“There’s a lot of things going on here that we found, the longer we worked with the technology, started to really resonate and create all this tension within the work,” he continues. “That’s what I’m hoping the work will do – it will push the viewer into an uncomfortable space in which they’re not told what to think... They don’t know what to feel and actually the score is constantly misleading the viewer and changing gears along with the edit.”

### **A political artwork**

Even more uncomfortably, the unique visual effect can be dehumanising. “That’s the thing about the camera, it’s designed to detect the enemy,” explains Mosse. “It objectifies the human body in a way that almost strips the individual from the human figure. It turns them into a biological trace or ‘creature’. This is a form of dehumanisation. So there’s something deeply problematic about that.

“But in a way I felt that revealed something about how our governments represent and therefore regard the figure of the refugee,” he continues. “So potentially it could allow a space to think about that somehow.”



*Richard Mosse's Incoming at The Curve, Barbican Centre. Photo: Tristan Fewings*

There are obvious political questions raised by the work, but Mosse does not shy away from this, and in fact is keen that these ideas will reach the viewer and even potentially galvanise them, in a way a more traditional documentary film might not.

“The constant disorientation [forces] the viewer to become the author of the work on some level and to own their interpretation,” he says. “Rather than to be like, ‘oh I saw this great doc about the refugees and isn’t it horrible?’

“But what I really hope people will take away, if nothing else, is this sense of uneasy complicity as Westerners,” he concludes. “This is a technology that is designed for our governments, that is used against the refugees. And we are part of that problem, we are complicit. The whole system that is designed to deal with the crisis is completely inadequate.

“We’re increasingly seeing the slide of liberal democracy into totalitarianism in the West due to the refugee crisis. It’s being used as a trigger by people like Trump and by the Brexit politicians as a way to stoke and create fear amongst us when there was none and there is no need for any. So I think immigration and the figure of the refugee is somehow this figure that creates a crisis in our societies. It’s a very worrying thing because I think with climate change we’re only having the first taste of this crisis.”

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frieze

Lange, Christy, "One Take: Richard Mosse's *Incoming*," *Frieze*, March 2017

ONE TAKE:  
Richard Mosse's  
*Incoming*

A new video installation  
investigates the refugee crisis

BY CHRISTY LANGE



THERE ARE A FEW SCENES in Richard Mosse's new video installation, *Incoming* (2017), where you can see photo-journalists or news camerapeople chasing down the unfolding action or holding their lenses steady to catch the decisive moment. Mosse, on the other hand, spent two years filming the same events with a camera that was too large to hold, had no aperture to see through and was difficult to focus. Designed by a weapons manufacturer, the thermal camera Mosse used to document the migrant crisis for *Incoming* is built to capture heat signatures – in black, white and shades of grey. It weighs 23 kilogrammes, and is meant to be operated remotely by a laptop. As Mosse puts it: 'The camera is designed to stand on a sentry pole in the middle of the desert,' detecting a human body's heat from up to 30 kilometres away for surveillance or targeting. Together with his cameraman, Trevor Tweeten, and the camera's original designer, Mosse adapted an Xbox controller to operate it and an old Steadicam mechanism as support. As an apparatus designed for surveillance, the thermal camera represents part of the spectrum the human eye cannot see and, as such, is an apt metaphor for the vast and ungraspable refugee crisis – the lives that 'register' but are not 'seen'.

The 52 minutes of footage that comprise *Incoming*, slowed down from the camera's 60 frames per second to 24 frames per second, is by turns lyrical and vivid, harrowing and violent. The action unfolds across three large screens – from one screen at a time to two, then all three simultaneously. Much like his previous endeavour, *The Enclave* (2013), which Mosse filmed in the eastern Congo with outdated infrared film, originally designed for military use, the photographic technology presents inherent challenges and unintentional aesthetic call backs. In *The Enclave*, the infrared

film responded to chlorophyll in plants to make the jungle's green foliage look bright pink. In *Incoming*, the thermal camera also works an extra-sensory tool to perceive thermal radiation, rendering it black on white or white on black. It allowed Mosse and his team to detect missiles landing in Aleppo from the other side of the Turkish border, ships sinking in the Aegean Sea miles offshore, and gunmen and refugees being smuggled at night. The otherworldly footage evokes the sense that we are watching the action covertly, as if through night-vision goggles; it's a rare glimpse through the mechanized tools of surveillance used by states and militaries to view us. When we do see close-ups of faces, noses appear like indistinct white blobs and eyes are dark pits. Humans become fleshy targets susceptible to the camera's weaponized gaze. It's a representational device that draws powerful parallels between the act of documentation and surveillance.

Since the camera can't render details in colour or overviews of landscape, the footage in *Incoming* doesn't fully reveal the range of geographic locations in which Mosse filmed. The artist, along with Tweeten and the film's soundtrack composer, Ben Frost, tracked two major flows of human migration. The first – in which refugees flee from the war-torn regions of Syria and the Middle East, through Turkey, across the Aegean Sea to Greece and, from there, into the rest of Europe – ends at an emergency shelter in the former Tempelhof Airport in Berlin. The second follows African migrants escaping wars and the effects of climate change, crossing the Sahara Desert under threat of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb to Libya, then on to Sicily and, eventually, to the infamous Jungle camp in Calais, France. Frost's soundtrack goes a long way towards grounding

All images:  
*Incoming*, 2014–17,  
video stills.  
Courtesy: the artist,  
Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York, and earlier |  
gebauer, Berlin;  
co-commissioned:  
Barbican Art Gallery,  
London, and National  
Gallery Victoria,  
Melbourne.



“  
*In one harrowing scene, Mosse filmed rescue workers attempting to resuscitate drowned refugees: the camera renders their warm handprints on the victims' cold flesh.*  
”

some of those locations, capturing the voices of doctors trying to resuscitate drowning victims on the coast of Lesbos, the echoes of children's screams, the bouncing of ping-pong balls in temporary shelters, the deafening jet engines on the deck of the *USS Theodore Roosevelt* aircraft carrier and the rotor blades of rescue helicopters.

The deliberately attenuated pace of the footage and the camera's constant, eerily slow scanning of its subject, lend sequences of both peace and turmoil an equivalent sense of dramatic tension. Drifting airborne kites or reflections on the sea are as vivid as two boys wrestling or water being wrung from a soaked garment. It's like watching a slowly moving black and white photograph, bringing to mind photojournalist James Nachtwey's wrought, high-contrast photographs of war and famine, which extract an unexpected beauty from horror. In *Incoming*, scenes that might be too intensely visceral to confront in full colour become unfamiliar. In one long sequence, we see close-ups of body bags being shoved into cold steel lockers at a morgue, where pathologists on the island of Rhodes perform DNA testing to help identify those who have drowned at sea. Wearing respirators and protective plastic eye shields, they unzip a body bag and expose the skull of an 11-year-old girl. Using sharp metallic tools, they cut through a white substance that can barely be recognized as flesh: the blood that escapes is not red but black. With a small saw, the pathologist removes a segment of bone, which looks like a glowing plastic rod, making the sight newly horrific. For another harrowing scene, Mosse filmed the attempts of rescue workers to resuscitate the drowned when a boat overloaded with refugees sank five kilometres off the coast of Lesbos. The camera renders their warm handprints on the



victims' cold flesh. 'It was like a scene from hell,' Mosse told me. 'You could literally read the hypothermia through the camera: they weren't glowing black; they were white.'

One of the unexpected threads that runs through *Incoming*, more than the difference between cool and warm or black and white, is the way the thermal camera highlights the high-tech filters and protective gear that separate those who are shielded from the elements versus those exposed to them – those 'helping' from those 'in need of help'. Rescue workers billow in papery white hazmat suits as they lift bare-skinned refugees from the water; the Navy crew of the *USS Roosevelt* don goggles and breathing apparatuses to protect them from the white-hot engines of departing jets; coroners wear respirators and latex gloves to mask the smell of rotting bodies; firefighters on the scene of the Jungle refugee camp, as it is razed by flames, have reflective masks and fireproof uniforms. When compared to the inadequately covered bodies of refugees in life rafts, or the wispy fabric that migrants in a truck convoy struggle to use to protect their faces from dusty roads, or their few garments hung out to dry at shelters, it's a reminder of the physical barriers between those with shelter and those without it. *Incoming* documents a contemporary Odyssey of humans displaced from their homes. Mosse effectively repurposes thermal technology, ordinarily reserved for states and the military, to expose the susceptibility and vulnerability of the human body, and the rights we take for granted as inalienably assigned to it, when those bodies become stateless B

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RICHARD MOSSE is an Irish artist based in New York, USA. *Incoming* is on view at The Curve, Barbican Centre, London, UK, until 15 April. Later this year, it will travel to National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. The accompanying artist's book is published by MACK, with a catalogue published by Barbican Ridinghouse. A complementary photographic series, 'Heat Maps', is currently on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and will be shown as part of the Prix Pictet exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, from 6 to 28 May.

REVIEWS

## Richard Mosse

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Susan Sontag wrote that "photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks." Richard Mosse's unorthodox approach to recording the world—beginning especially with his photo series "Infra," 2010–15, and its related six-channel video, *The Enclave*, 2012–13, and continuing with his new body of work, "Heat Maps," 2016–, recently on view at Jack Shainman's Twentieth Street space—engages with some of the central notions underlying Sontag's well-known dictum, complicating expectations about how photography might be understood to represent and/or misrepresent, and working to mobilize both tendencies to promote the sort of ethical engagement she invokes.

For the earlier two projects, which document the human and physical landscape of the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an area where decades of war have claimed more than five million lives, Mosse used a discontinued type of film, developed by Kodak in collaboration with the US military in the 1940s, that registers

Richard Mosse,  
*Idomeni Camp*,  
Greece, 2016, digital  
C-print on metallic  
paper, 40 ¼ × 120".  
From the series  
"Heat Maps," 2016.



conventionally imperceptible infrared-light emissions in grasses and foliage, rendering the landscape uncanny shades of pink. For "Heat Maps," Mosse has once again repurposed a type of military surveillance technology, namely a thermographic camera with extreme telephoto properties, this time training it on refugee camps and staging areas in Greece, Italy, and Germany. Classified as a defense article under international arms-trafficking regulations, the instrument has been able to detect the presence of a human at a distance of more than thirty kilometers and to identify a specific individual from more than six.

The work on view here—eight large-format photographs of these sites, as well as a handful of smaller stills from *Incoming*, 2014–17, a new video work that uses the same technology to tell more intimate stories about the refugee crisis unfolding across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—intentionally walked a fine line between the clinical and the beautiful. The technology reads heat, so the images, assembled from hundreds of smaller frames into seamless panoramas, have the look of exceptionally fine-grained negatives, with bodies and light sources glowing white amid a world of grisaille landscape and infrastructure. Whether depicting faraway views of encampments set beneath a cliff face in Larissa, in central Greece, or tucked under a highway in Ventimiglia, a Ligurian town on the French border, or capturing more personal details—as in *Idomeni Camp, Greece*, 2016, showing people congregating around tents on muddy ground, the thermographic technology making their faces resemble eerie monochrome cartoons, or *Moria in Snow*, 2017, portraying hundreds waiting in a line that weaves through makeshift buildings in a bivouac on the island of Lesbos—Mosse's images have a cold, austere beauty to them, but one that never tips over into romanticism. Though what he is making is indisputably art, his eye remains always that of a documentarian, one committed to finding new ways of revealing what is hidden by walls and fences, by distance and disinterest.

Questions around the pitfalls of aestheticization obviously shadow images such as these, as they should. But Mosse's brand of aestheticization operates in the strict sense of the word: a technique that heightens rather than dampens (anesthetizes) perception, that instead of softening or euphemizing the situation instead serves to sharpen its contours precisely by estranging it from the familiar, vision-correspondent image world that most documentary photography, even at its very best, often seems to occupy. Just as Mosse's photographic deformation of the physical character of the Congo arguably worked to help viewers better "understand" the situation there, so, too, do these new works manage the remarkable trick of intensifying the viewer's connection to the artist's subject matter by, in some sense, distorting it. If the images ask us to accept Mosse's world as his cameras record it, they also refuse the normative photographic gaze. His technical intervention might seem to be, at least in a conventional sense, one founded in depersonalization, but the depictions it produces are in fact deeply humanizing, emphasizing what we all share instead of what separates us—all of us pools of heat, huddling together wherever we find ourselves.

—Jeffrey Kastner



Genova, Alexandra, "A Dystopian Vision of the Refugee Crisis," *Time*,  
February 15, 2017



Helliniko, 2016.

Richard Mosse

## REFUGEE CRISIS

# A Dystopian Vision of the Refugee Crisis

Alexandra Genova

Feb 15, 2017

The refugee crisis is becoming increasingly politicized; less about the safe guarding of human rights and more about the safe guarding of national borders. Though forced migration is nothing new, the numbers are unprecedented; 65.3 million people around the world are currently displaced by war or persecution, according to the UNHCR. It's a modern problem of biblical proportions and as the figures rise, the individual refugee is increasingly regarded as little more than a troubling statistic.

Photographer Richard Mosse's latest project, *Heat Maps*, offers an unconventional take on a much-dissected subject. The work charts the refugee crisis unfolding across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East using a powerful military grade telephoto camera attached to a robotic arm which detects thermal radiation by scanning landscapes and interiors. The result is unsettling; human flesh is turned a translucent grey, eye sockets are blackened, bodies appear like avatars existing in a virtual dystopia.

The paradox is, life in these refugee camps can be just as hellish and dehumanizing as the photographs imply. "It's a camera that strips people of their identity. It turns them into a creature or a biological trace," Mosse tells *TIME*. "I hope that the camera will reveal the way we in the West and our governments represent and therefore regard the refugee." Deliberately disconcerting, Mosse wants the

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viewer to feel an uneasy sense of their own complicity. “The horrific conditions in those camps are created by our governments. And we vote those people in,” he adds.

Heat Maps isn’t easily classified, perching as it does between factual surveillance, aesthetic ambiguity and the fantasy-world of a Ray Bradbury novel. But it’s supposed to be polyvalent, ambivalent, open-ended. “It’s meant to force the viewer into a place where they have to decide what it is,” says Mosse. “Because with the refugee crisis, everyone has already made up their mind.” Though the photos are revealing of the refugees’ situation, the individual characters technically remain indistinguishable. While Ai Weiwei was refused access photographing the interior of Berlin’s Tempelhof Airport – now Germany’s largest refugee camp – Mosse was admitted, because he could show how the camera left the subjects identities in tact. But taken at long range - as far away as 50 kilometers – there is still a degree of violation. “You’re not quite committing an invasion of privacy, yet you are,” he says.

The photographs are impressive online but humbling in person; the large-scale panoramas take up most of a gallery wall. They evoke the detail of a Bruegel painting but the flatness of a Medieval tapestry; an array of miniature scenes impossibly arranged into one prevailing landscape. The large-scale pieces are technically ‘photo-illustration’ and are constructed from a grid of almost a thousand smaller frames – each with their own vanishing point – painstakingly sewn together.

The work is a surveillance of the grim squalor of the camps but cannot be read as an exact reality. Amid the complex scenes, an occasional figure will stand dismembered – the result of a glitch in the camera’s heat scanning that Mosse decided to leave in. “Being a refugee strips you of the inalienable rights of man, which are subsumed into the idea of a citizen,” Mosse says. “Once you’ve left your nation state due to persecution, conflict, climate change, you lose your human rights.”



Richard Mosse stands in front of the work [object Object] 2016, at the Jack Shainman Gallery, West 20, NYC.

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The violent aesthetic of the images is not without context. Primarily designed for surveillance, the camera can also be connected to a weapons system to target the enemy. The misuse of its intended purpose is another deliberate attempt to subvert the common perception of the refugee. "I'm trying to use these sinister technologies against their original intended purpose," he says. This is ironic considering the call made by German far-right leader Frauke Petry to use firearms on illegal refugees "if necessary." Quoting the work of Allan Sekula, Mosse believes his role as an artist is to try to "brush photography against the grain". It's a method he's adopted before with his *Infra* series; a psychedelic vision of the Democratic Republic of Congo conflict taken with a discontinued surveillance film originally used by the military. Both projects employ the Brechtian 'Verfremdungseffekt' – or distancing effect – which serves to make the familiar strange. "I put the viewer in a space where they have no cues, they don't understand the grammar of the language," he says. "So they have to actually engage with this on an unfamiliar level and as a result, it's fresh."

Unlike the hyper-local *Infra*, Mosse worked across many, dislocated landscapes. "These people are dispossessed, they're displaced," he says. "You can't really predict where the story will flash up next. You have to keep your ears to the ground." Complex logistics plagued the three-year project. Mosse built up a network of volunteers and fixers but access was often difficult, particularly in the Calais Jungle, which they eventually infiltrated right before it was dismantled. Outside Europe, attempting to cross borders was mired in deadlock. When Mosse and his team were trying to reach Timbuktu through Mali, they spent a month – without success – trying to permeate a Swedish battalion, hoping to make use of their convoys. But these stumbling blocks were part of the process and the constant challenges forced Mosse into a space of hyperawareness.

Navigating sticky border control ran parallel to navigating tricky equipment. Attached to the already complex telephoto camera was a tangle of wires and cables that connected to an X-Box controller, media recorder and several laptops. "You really need to earn your chops with [the camera]," he says. "And you constantly feel slightly compromised by what you're doing. But I think that's always a good space to be in as an artist: feeling uncomfortable." Mosse witnessed some horrific scenes, impossible to express through the prism of art. But, he says, once you're looking through the ground glass of the camera you become a machine with a job to do. "I cling to the idea that although 'art is useless', it can be iconic," he says. "It can be culturally resonant without being politically committed."

Richard Mosse is an Irish conceptual documentary photographer. More of his work can be viewed [here](#). *Heat Maps* is on display at the Jack Shainman Gallery on West 20th Street, NYC until March 11.

Alexandra Genova is a writer and contributor for TIME LightBox. Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)

THE  
NEW YORKER

"Richard Mosse's 'Heat Maps': A Military-Grade Camera Repurposed on the Migrant Trail," *The New Yorker*, February 5, 2017

## RICHARD MOSSE'S "HEAT MAPS": A MILITARY- GRADE CAMERA REPURPOSED ON THE MIGRANT TRAIL



*Detail of "Tempelhof Interior," 2016.*

COPYRIGHT RICHARD MOSSE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY.

ther than capturing light and shadow, midwave infrared cameras record contours in heat. Thermal detection allows these devices to photograph through smog and smoke, and certain models are capable of registering the presence of a body from miles away. The technology is used for military surveillance or, if attached to a weapons system, for identifying and tracking targets.

For his series of panoramic images, titled "Heat Maps," the photographer Richard Mosse co-opted these capabilities for a different purpose. In 2016, Mosse visited routes commonly travelled by refugees—from the Persian Gulf to Berlin, and from northern Niger to the now-cleared Jungle camp in Calais, France—and used a military-grade infrared camera to document scenes along the way. (The series will be shown this month at the Jack Shainman Gallery, in New York, in conjunction with an immersive video installation, titled "Incoming," at London's Barbican Center,

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which Mosse created with the cinematographer Trevor Tweeten and the composer Ben Frost.)

This is not Mosse's first time photographing what we cannot see. He is known for the work he made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo using Kodak Aerochrome infrared film, which records light from parts of the spectrum imperceptible to the human eye. Like the unwieldy rig used to create "Heat Maps," the Kodak film was developed for military use; it can identify camouflaged subjects by registering the chlorophyll in grass and leaves in luscious pink tones. Mosse used the film to document the violent conflict between the Congolese Army and rebel groups, shooting intimate portraits of young militants among candy-colored hills and rivers.



*A still from "Incoming," 2016.* COPYRIGHT RICHARD MOSSE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

This time, using a new "weapon of war," as he describes it, Mosse captured encampment structures, servicemen, border police, boats at full capacity, and migrants of all ages. Mosse would spend time in the refugee camps before photographing, and some of the migrants sheltered there helped him to arrange his shots. But in the images his subjects are always seen at a distance, photographed from an above-eye-level perspective. Each "Heat Map" was constructed from hundreds of frames shot using a telephoto lens; a robotic system was used to scan the landscapes and interiors and meticulously capture every corner. In one image, a mass of tents, arranged in a grid, occupies a field at the Hellinikon Olympic Complex. In another, a group of men stands out against the dark blotches of tents and brush at a camp in Idomeni, Greece.



*"Tempelhof Interior," 2016.* COPYRIGHT RICHARD MOSSE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

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By adopting a tool of surveillance, Mosse's photographs consciously play into narratives that count families as statistics and stigmatize refugees as potential threats. He recognizes that operating the infrared camera entails brushing up against the violent intentions with which the device has been put to use. "We weren't attempting to rescue this apparatus from its sinister purpose," he said. Instead, his project acts as a challenge. The people in his images appear as inverted silhouettes, sometimes disjointed, torn by the time passing between individual frames. The thermal readouts rub features out of faces and render flesh in washy, anonymous tones. Someone lays back on a cot, looking at a cell phone. Someone else hangs laundry. We can imagine what these people might look like in person, guess at the expressions on their faces or the color of their skin. Yet seeing them in Mosse's shadowy renderings erases the lines that have been drawn between refugees, immigrants, natives, citizens, and the rest. His camera makes little distinction between the heat that each body emits.



*"Helliniko,"* 2016. COPYRIGHT RICHARD MOSSE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

*The AMERICAN READER*

Wilson, Eric Dean, "What We Can't See: On Photographer Richard Mosse,"  
*The American Reader*, April 2014

# What We Can't See: On Photographer Richard Mosse

By ERIC DEAN WILSON



*Vintage Violence, North Kivu, Eastern Congo, 2011*

In a darkened room of Chelsea's Jack Shainman gallery last month, I watched Richard Mosse's new short film "The Enclave," as the disembodied eye of a Steadicam roved a mountain landscape—pink, impossibly pink—with inhuman sweeps. On a mountain slope the color of cotton candy, the

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camera edged down a gravel road and approached a strange black form in the distance. A truck came hurtling around the corner, close to the mass, and continued out of frame. Slowly, I could see that the form was a corpse splayed in the middle of the road, and the camera swung coldly around it in a circle like a vulture before cutting out.

Before this, I'd seen only a number of large landscape photographs by Mosse. In each, the lush grass and rolling mountains of the Democratic Republic of Congo appear, as the artist describes them, "bubblegum pink," shifting an otherwise straightforward terrain into something Seussically psychedelic. I was surprised to learn these images aren't Photoshopped. They're taken with an infrared Kodak film originally developed in conjunction with the U.S. military for government surveillance in World War II. The green chlorophyll from healthy plants reflects the infrared and appears hot pink; man-made camouflage absorbs the color and appears black. Thus, the camera ferrets the enemy in hiding.

Given the location (east Congo) and technique (military surveillance), Mosse's landscapes suggest not whimsy, but criticism, "an attempt to challenge documentary photography, and engage with the unseen, hidden and intangible aspects of eastern Congo's situation—a tragically overlooked conflict in which 5.4 million people have died of war related causes since 1998."

In photography, documentation has been on trial since the birth of the medium. It rattled around the conscience of war photographers in the U.S. Civil War, when the corpses of dead soldiers were rearranged to appear more emotionally engaging. It consumes the conversation around the depiction of conflict in contemporary journalism. Even outside the context of war, documentary photography is often mistaken for naturalism. To cite a more literary example, the U.S. government hired photographer Walker Evans and writer James Agee to document the dustbowl farmers of the American West. Evans' photographs of the living rooms of the poor raised eyebrows when they contrasted with written accounts of the exact same living rooms by James Agee, who meticulously catalogued and detailed the dimensions of every object. One of them was lying—rearranging the furniture—and it was probably Evans.



*The Enclave, production still, Trevor Tweeten (cinematographer), 2012*

In contrast, Mosse rearranges the furniture in color only. The sky appears blue, the clouds white. The natural green alone has been turned comically pink. Mosse's photographs, however, transcend the simplicity of a middle finger to Truth. (I'm thinking, specifically, of Ai Weiwei's literal flipping off of historical buildings—fantastic, but another animal still.) The photographs and, now, his new film pursue something greater to me, something more than this fine—but rather flat—thought experiment about Truth.



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“The Enclave” is split between six projection screens—four arranged in a central square and two on the outskirts—accompanied by Ben Frost’s unsettling score of radio signals, Congolese field recordings, and electronica. Shot between 2012 and 2013 around Lake Kivu in east Congo, Mosse explores the same territory as his photographs with sound, movement, and—most interesting for me—far more people. We follow the slow, ghostly perspective through displaced person camps, jungles, and town halls, receiving what little narrative Mosse provides in brief vignettes.

The camera wafts through a village where men and women are milling about casually. One man stops and turns to something on the ground—again, it’s a corpse lying in the middle of the plaza. No one appears upset, only puzzled by who or how. This is not an uncommon sight for these men. The camera cuts to a tense march behind an armed fighter walking down an empty road, either side flanked by tall, pink grass. An elephant emerges from the pink and crosses the road in two steps, then vanishes into the pink, a two-second reminder that this is the Congo. In another scene, the camera floats into a church packed with people for a talent show. Two men breakdance. The audience claps along. One man ignites a hoop with kerosene as his friend jumps through it, throwing himself again and again through a ring of fire. Mostly, the audience smiles, unless they look directly at the camera. Then, the look becomes more complex.

What could easily overflow with exoticism and exploitation is soon stoppered: the living stare at the lens of the camera or at the cinematographer behind. They grimace, they accuse, they defy. I’m unclear how the clearly Irish Mosse was allowed to accompany armed rebels, but it’s clear from their expression that the relationship is fraught. With its screaming pink hills in the background, Mosse’s rose-colored footage points to a screaming awareness of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the winded history of white men portraying the Congo. A camouflaged fighter glares at the lens, as if facing off. The breeze blows his cap and he blinks fast in the sun. In a way, his subjects’ fixed stare highlights Mosse as much as it does the landscape, a crucial aspect of “The Enclave,” reminding the viewer that yes, this is not the true Congo—and what is?—but the Congo through a white man’s eyes.

Still, isn’t a knowingly troubled eye better than ignorance?

At times, the screens play the same footage simultaneously. Othertimes, only one screen lights, or all run a different scene. Standing in the center of the four-screen square, I had the unnerving feeling of being watched myself. On a riverbank, three men aim their rifles at the far shore. An armed rebel



*Colonel Soleil’s Boys, North Kivu, Eastern Congo, 2010*

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appears behind me, staring directly at me, then vanishes, only to reappear behind. I would turn around to catch him just as he left the screen and appeared next to me. It's not clear if they're waiting for the enemy—or if the enemy is me.

In another scene, the residents of a village lift an entire wooden house from the foundation. With about fifty men on all four sides, they lift the house and float it several feet down the road. On two separate screens on the periphery, several men prepare a child-sized coffin for burial. Some people are weeping, others are fixed on the burial rights. With all screens playing, I found myself blocking the projector and casting a shadow over the film. The other viewers in the room would glare at me. This happened to nearly everyone—it seemed there was no good place to stand without screwing everything up. In this subtle way, Mosse implicates the viewer as much as his subjects or himself.

We see several corpses, but never any direct violence, exactly. The transformation from human to corpse happens offscreen. The violent images we do see are highly abstracted through color or metaphor—the young man jumping repeatedly through a flaming hoop, for instance. To some, the effect might feel passive, that it ignores the violence or merely observes rather than participates in the conversation, but I think this is a crucial aspect of its significance—and the difference between what approaches work in portraying political conflict and which don't. If Mosse had shown us unbearable gore, we might easily become as immune to these images as we have to the news. It would create nothing beyond a sense of exploitation soon forgotten. The artist, it would seem, has already decided what to think for us, and is now demanding we agree. What kind of conversation is that?

Instead, Mosse sets the scenes at a remove. By pointing to the violence just offscreen, the mind is forced to approach it on its own terms. What we imagine can disturb us profoundly.

I'm reminded of Maggie Nelson's recent *The Art of Cruelty*, in which she offers her own ideas on the depiction of violent images in art. An installation from Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar, *Untitled (Newsweek)*, depicts the covers of *Newsweek* during the Rwandan genocide. Of course, none of the covers mention it, and Jaar includes a card under each cover detailing the concurrent events in Rwanda. The installation left her cold and feeling like Jaar was making an obvious point, that the U.S. had ignored the conflict for months. For Nelson, "space is distinct from alienation. It is fundamentally about volume rather than about distance." The Jaar installation offered no space for Nelson to think and left her distanced from the material. Nelson points out that Jaar "has simply replaced the hierarchy of *Newsweek's* attention with his own." Art should expand the thinking space, not narrow it. The result will draw the viewer closer.

In a similar way, Mosse gives his viewers enough space to meditate on the conflict without blinding them to massacre or numbing them with bloodshed. For example, a group of fighters-in-training lounge around outside, making each other laugh, running around—generally having a good time. They split into two teams and run through a mock battle, racing among each other and miming a rifle blast that sends the opponent tumbling to the floor with a slight smile on his face. If you didn't know better, you'd think it was a game of capture the flag. The scene ends with a small child to the side, watching. He waddles over to one of the "dead" and shakes his body. As we try to understand the conditions that could press humanity toward this cruelty, we watch the child trying to understand.

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Another scene, again, follows directly behind a rebel leader through thick jungle—the result is an explosion of fully saturated pink, darker this time, closer to the color of blood. The tone suggests that this is not a drill. The camouflaged man in front creeps slowly and quietly through the jungle path for minutes. The camera obediently follows behind. Suddenly, he shouts, glances quickly back at the camera, and breaks into a sprint—the camera cuts off and we’re left to imagine what came after.

In these broken scenes, “The Enclave” says as much about humanity as it does about conflict in east Congo specifically. Certainly, the time and place are crucial, but Mosse resists striking the audience with any clear political or emotional blows. The viewer is given space, space to meditate on his knowledge or—in my case—lack of knowledge on the conflict in east Congo and Rwanda, and space to meditate on the impact of violent human conflict in general.

After forty minutes, the film had restarted, and I started to walk out. On two screens behind me, a man with an assault rifle strapped to his back walked calmly into the waters of a lake, presumably Lake Kivu, until he was completely submerged in water. The camera stays on the lapping surface of the lake. Pink hardly appears here. There are no bubbles. The man never resurfaces.



Hudson, Mark, "Deutsche Börse Photography Prize, review: 'four strong contenders,'" *The Telegraph*, April 10, 2014

## Deutsche Börse Photography Prize, review: 'four strong contenders'

The annual exhibition at the Photographer's Gallery, London, is a stunner, says Mark Hudson



Safe From Harm, North Kivu, Eastern Congo, 2012 Photo: Richard Mosse



By **Mark Hudson** 5:32PM BST 10 Apr 2014

Celebrating a significant contribution to photography in Europe, the £30,000 Deutsche Börse prize for become notorious for favouring conceptual experimentation over traditional virtues such as beauty, storytelling and technical skill. Take Richard Mosse's large format images of the ongoing conflict in eastern Congo. Rather than soldiers, jeeps and blasted bodies he gives us hilly landscapes, tinted eye-popping shades of magenta and turquoise that bring to mind psychedelic album covers rather than conventional reportage.

Yet these peaceful-looking vistas, that might pass at a glance for parts of the Peak District, have gained their current appearance through forest clearance by cattle-rearing incomers displacing local farmers; just one of the causes of a conflict involving a mind-boggling array of ethnic militias, Rwandan refugee groups, the Congolese army and the UN that has cost 5.4 million lives since 1998. The combination of this information with the apparent bucolic innocence of the images and the queasily alarming colour – and the fact that the rest of the world has barely looked at the situation let alone done anything about it – creates a sense of silent, yet sinister accusation.

Among four strong contenders, American photographer Lorna Simpson hasn't, at first sight, even taken her own photographs, but presents a series of Fifties archive images of an African-American couple, the woman in an array of cheerily innocent poses recalling the advertising of the period. Among them, Simpson has inserted pictures of herself in similar postures. We are, it seems, being asked to question why it tends to be the woman who is looked at by the man, the passage of time and the provenance of the images. Who are these people and what is their relationship to Simpson herself?

Alberto García-Alix's is at first sight the most conventional of the contending displays: an essay on the dissipated life of a Spanish poet and photographer over four decades. We see this sad-eyed, tattooed Al Pacino-lookalike urinating, injecting morphine and staring wistfully into the camera against the blearily bohemian backdrop of an unnamed Spanish city. The twist is that the subject is the photographer himself, and like many narcissists he is all too willing to tell us about his condition.

German photographer Jochen Lempert creates contrasts between textures and processes that are so fugitive you could easily fail to notice them or even bother to look at his work at all. Sand placed directly onto the photographic paper creates a sense of random quasi-atomic diffusion that is echoed in a grainy image of rain falling on water. A deadly nightshade berry appears beside a squirrel's eye that appears near identical. A series of images of four swimming swans chronicles Lempert's attempts to capture them in a perfect square formation.

Lempert trained as a biologist and there is an air of eccentric quasi-scientific experimentation to these deceptively modest works, each of which is a unique object, taped to the wall rather than framed. If Mosse's are the most immediately striking images here, I veered finally towards Lempert's monk-like minimalism which for all its apparent avant gardism harks back to the early days of photography and a sense of innocent curiosity about what the medium can do.

**11 April – 22 June. [thephotographersgallery.org.uk](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk)**

# AnOther

Wrigley, Tish, "Culture Talks | Richard Mosse: The Enclave," *AnOther*, June 4, 2013

## ART & CULTURE

### Culture Talks | *Richard Mosse: The Enclave*

— June 4, 2013 —



Richard Mosse, *Safe From Harm*, South Kivu, Eastern Congo, 2012 *Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York*

The palette of war photography has long been established as green, brown, black, red. Camouflage, dirt, guns, blood. **Richard Mosse**, in his installation for the Irish Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale, chose to shine a new light on the coverage of conflict, literally. Using an infrared film developed by Kodak and the military for the detection of camouflage, Mosse's moving image work **The Enclave** explored the war zone and humanitarian disaster currently taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo, rendering its scenes of horror, despair, bravado and destruction in vibrant magenta, scarlet, puce and purple.

Mosse first worked with this film in his photography project *Infra*, describing *The Enclave* as the culmination of this work. The effects are at first mesmerisingly beautiful and seductive, landscapes and people glazed in a surrealist wash of shocking pink. Yet as the truth of the subjects push through the pink, the colours become less fantastical, more grotesque and terrifying. A boy in a headdress of leaves loses his Peter Pan charm as the deadliness of his rifle becomes the focus. Candyfloss trees behind throw the skeletons, ragged tents and tombstones into sharper relief. This is a world without rules – not even of colour – and Mosse's fairytale patinas force the reality to the surface more profoundly than the established tropes of war coverage that we are often so inured to.

Here, as the dust of the Biennale settles, Mosse talks to AnOther about the inception of The Enclave and the pursuit of the sublime amid the horrors of the Congo.

**Infra is an extraordinary mixture of beauty and violence - can you describe how the project came about? What took you to the Congo?**

In 2009 Kodak announced the discontinuation of a certain type of infrared film, which was originally designed for camouflage detection, and used by the military for reconnaissance. I was fascinated by this medium's ability to register an invisible spectrum of light, and felt compelled to use it to examine the forgotten humanitarian disaster in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Described as the African World War, Congo's cancerous conflict has claimed at least 5.4 million people since 1998, according to the International Rescue Committee. That is a huge number of deaths, yet many of us have never even heard about this war.

***"I've put everything I have into this. It's all there. The landscape's radiant beauty and the volatile, turgid climate, married to such an unstable conflict situation, have put me in a very peculiar place."***

**It is extraordinary how the seemingly simple act of altering the palette of the landscape shocks and alters our perceptions of these situations. Do you think it is necessary to provoke in order to create strong reactions to situations that we are perhaps inured to by their proliferation in our daily lives?**

I go to great lengths to keep my work as open as possible in terms of signification, trying especially hard to avoid didacticism. So the viewer can bring whatever they like to the work, and its unusual colours. I suppose for me, though, the colours are deeply emotional, as I have developed a strong affinity for eastern Congo over my many journeys in the region. So, for me, it's a deeply personal response, rather than a deliberately didactic provocation. If people are moved by the work to take a longer look at the humanitarian disaster in eastern Congo, that is superb.

**The Enclave pushes the aesthetics of Infra from stills into moving images - why was this move important for you?**

The Enclave is the culmination of Infra. The work has evolved a good deal since I began in January 2010. Throughout 2012, I have been working with my collaborators, Trevor Tweeten (cinematographer) and Ben Frost (composer/sound designer) to bring this body of work to a devastating conclusion, and to do justice to my extreme experiences from Congo.

It is quite different to my earlier photographs from Congo simply because motion picture and still photography are such extremely different animals. Motion picture strikes the heart immediately, rather like music, while still photography is more reflective, more endless, yet less proximate. The Enclave is deeply visceral, sometimes terrifying. You can't really achieve that with still photographs in the same way. They are a slower burn.

I've put everything I have into this. It's all there. The landscape's radiant beauty and the volatile, turgid climate, married to such an unstable conflict situation, have put me in a very peculiar place. Travelling in Congo, I feel at once deeply lucid yet entirely lost in my imagination, in my waking dreams, often verging into nightmare. As these journeys have evolved, and the deeper into the conflict that I have found myself,

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this state has pushed me further out. It's a pursuit of the sublime, a very personal one, but dressed in the tidy uniform of the documentary photographer.

The Enclave describes an escalating conflict situation in North and South Kivu throughout 2012. The camps of the internally displaced, a child's lullaby that describes finding piles of bodies in the bushes, rebels being blessed with bullet-proof potion by their prophet, dead bodies left to rot on the road, a rebel propaganda rally in which children jump through a burning ring of fire, footage of actual conflict captured while mortars were landing all around, the radiant landscape during rainy season, glowing a nauseous pink. These are the subjects, and they are represented through a crystallization of styles and transgression.

## **How has your experience of Venice been so far? What have been your highlights and what are you looking forward to?**

I've been working on the Irish Pavilion in Venice since February 2012, and feel I know Venice fairly well over the four months I've been here. The city itself is a fascinating organism, especially in the winter months, when the damp cold gets into your bones and the smelly water choughs onto the footpaths. Living here has been wonderful. I have actually been working too hard to see any of the rest of the Biennale yet, so I can't speak yet about what's hot. Now that the Biennale vernissage has finished, and I am absolutely exhausted, I am planning to travel to Greece to find some peace, and begin to think about future projects.

*Richard Mosse: The Enclave will show in the Irish Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale until November 24.*

Text by Tish Wrigley

*Tish Wrigley is the AnOther editorial assistant.*