
The horrific events of September 11 demanded of Americans a new connection to parts of the world that had previously seemed at a safe remove. On television and by computer, in newspapers and magazines, we witnessed the enforced mobility that defines much of modern life; all at once, over there became right here.

Sebastião Salgado’s Migrations: Humanity in Transition attests to the current unprecedented economic and political displacements, alarming both in number and scope. Salgado spent seven years traveling to 35 countries to document this undeniably important phenomenon, and the daunting result is a far-reaching series of occasionally stunning, always accomplished images that were shown at the International Center of Photography this summer. Yancey Richardson Gallery also featured selections from the ICP show, some of the images in smaller formats, and Aperture, which published a book of the photographs, has also sponsored the traveling exhibition, which is on view at the Marion Center for Photographic Arts in Santa Fe through December 9 and travels to the Berkeley Art Museum and the Kornhaus in Bern, Switzerland, this winter. In the aftermath of the attacks on New York and Washington, the locations—Asia, Africa, Latin America, the former Yugoslavia, and particularly Afghanistan—took on an urgent immediacy.

For sheer thoroughness, Salgado gets full marks; the show is both exhaustive and disturbing, no small trick in such an inclusive survey. Among the most affecting images are the teeming urban scenes. Salgado well understands the hive many cities have become; like his earlier work on goldminers in Brazil, his photographs of the train station in Bombay and the mosque in Jakarta practically buzz and hum. Shantytown dwellers in Bombay scramble across a great intrusive gash of pipe in their midst; their “street” conveys putrid water to wealthier neighbors. Salgado has a sharp sense of how quickly humans (especially children) surrender to adverse developments. These straightforward photographs—of homeless Filipinos sleeping amidst headstones, of unattended Brazilian toddlers on a roof, or slightly older children eagerly sniffing glue—unsettle the viewer.

In the best documentary tradition, they expose lives in which the aberrant has become ordinary, in which survival is constantly in question.

One room at ICP was given over to portraits of children, their only identification the detention camp or itinerant refuge in which they lived. The images bear a troubling resemblance to the earnest faces that gaze forth from Benetton advertisements. Unsmiling, sincere, and posed, they look less like young people than hokey icons. Despite the wall text assertion that these photographs show the children “as they chose to be seen,” the portraits never quite achieve a presence or originality, only a hamfisted symbolism: singles standing for a multitude.

To the relatively prosperous tourist, the dominance of English, and virtually instantaneous visual and verbal reportage all make the world appear smaller. Salgado’s sweeping achievement in Migrations is to restore a certain grandeur to the planet. His comprehensiveness doggedly reminds viewers that the world bristles with elaborate and devastating social problems. But Salgado also ducks the violence inherent in these constraints, his virtuosos images always in something good taste, even beguilingly beautiful. In place of real scuffles, he offers witty drama, the results often mawkish, with a whiff of show-biz. The work has a Cecil B. DeMille quality. Salgado’s
cast of thousands a necessary element of, but subordinate to, his vision. Though timely and important in their content, the Alighiero photographs, only rarely escape the imprisoning of a Sebastiao Salgado Production.

—Megan Ratter

See America First: The Prints of H. C. Westermann. The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, Chicago.

It's been a long time since Chicago's museums mounted a major tribute to one of the city's own, and Horace Clifford Westermann came home to rest the summer in grand fashion. In conjunction with a landmark retrospective of the artist's sculptures at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum assembled the first exhibition and catalogue raisonné of Westermann's complete graphic works, produced from 1962 to 1977.

Though not technically a native son, Westermann—who studied at the School of the Art Institute and resided in Chicago for nearly 15 years before moving to Connecticut in 1961—casts a long shadow over the city's indigenous art landscape, from his early associations with the Monster Roster to his subsequent influence on such artists as Jim Nutt and Roger Brown (whose prints were featured in a concurrent, unrelated exhibition at the Smart). While both retrospectives are traveling throughout the United States, Westermann's progressive impact was particularly felt here, in a city where the distinct legacy is, coupled with an abiding interest in Outsider Art, continues to inform generations of artists who traffic in ironic existential commentary and idiosyncratic representational styles.

Westermann's printed oeuvre comprises linocut, woodcut, and lithography, the latter explored in three cycles produced at Kansas City Art Institute Impressions (1967, printed with Jack Lemon), Tamarind Lithography Workshop (1968), and Lemon's Landfall Press (1972). These collaborative endeavors were framed by earlier, discrete relief prints and a final suite of woodblocks, The Connecticut Ballroom (1975-76), all of which the artist produced and editioned himself, sometimes rubbing impressions with the back of a wooden spoon. The prints and sculptural work share common concerns: the artist's acute memories of wartime service, his fascination with Hollywood and science fiction, his reverence for handicraft, his suspicion of technology and its threat to the American landscape and psyche, his identification with the "angry young man" who sees the world's ills from its margins, and above all, his dark humor (some of his earliest linocuts, loosely serialized as "Disasters in the Sky" served as Christmas greetings to friends). However, with the exception of his recurring Death graphic wallop to his sardonic puncturing of the American ethos.

Special praise is due curator Richard Born and Dennis Adrian, who made the most of their access to the estate of the artist's late wife, Joanne Beall Westermann, by including wood- and lino blocks, working notebooks, ephemera, preliminary drawings and watercolors, cancellation proofs, and samples of the artist's extensive color tests, offering important insights into Westermann's methodological technique. For all his "outsider" particularities, and the seemingly un schooled nature of his craftsmanship, Westermann was far from spontaneous, and far from naive.

—Kristen Brooke Schleifer
SEBASTIÃO SALGADO’S ELEGY TO UPEHAVAL

"I shoot globally and I want to show globally," says Sebastião Salgado of "Migrations: Humanity in Transition," his latest major exhibition of photographs. "Each of my stories is about globalization and economic liberalization: a sample of the human condition on the planet today." Indeed, at times the scope of Salgado’s work can seem as large as globalization itself, skipping from Shanghai to São Paulo with remarkable ease.

For almost 30 years, the renowned Brazilian photographer has traveled the world recording its indigent and powerless peoples. Salgado’s last major exhibition, "Workers: An Archaeology of the Industrial Age," concentrated on coal miners, plantation farmers and shipbreakers—the sort of third-world Everymen who toil at the lowest rungs of the global economy. With "Migrations," on view from June 22 through September 9 at the International Center of Photography (ICP), Salgado suggests that given the current world economy, mass geographic dislocation is inevitable.

The exhibition, consisting of over 250 black-and-white photographs, some of them large-scale mural prints, takes up both floors of ICP’s newly renovated midtown space. "It’s quite an epic journey unto itself as an exhibition experience, moving through the major areas Salgado has explored in terms of the diaspora of peoples across the world," says Edward Earle, organizing curator of the show at ICP. (The exhibition itself, which has already shown in Brazil, Paris and other countries, is curated by his wife and collaborator, Lélia Wanick Salgado.)

Loosely organized by geographic region—Africa, Latin America and Asia—the images depict people displaced by many things: war, ethnic conflict and drought, but most often by economic forces. "You see this transition from agrarian to urban; from the countryside and self-sufficiency to the urban experience and dependence on the urban process," says Earle.

While shooting workers for his last project, Salgado noticed that not only was the labor of the third world transforming, but so was its traditionally sedentary way of life. "By millions, workers are put out of work by mass production, pushed out of the fields, from regions to other regions," Salgado says. To an American audience, this transition is sometimes familiar, as in one extraordinary image of a lone migrant sprinting back to Mexico as a U.S. border patrol truck speeds toward him. At other times, the migrations seem almost otherworldly. Images of

"Mosque of Istiqial, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1996."
Sudanese refugees fighting high winds on a desolate plain feel irrevocably distant.

Still, there is a certain uniformity to the photos of "Migrations," a way in which the world's freshly displaced are uncannily alike. "At times I would forget where I was," writes Salgado. "Cairo? Jakarta? Mexico City? Everywhere there are those same islands of wealth amidst the poverty, like the green areas of Manila that are private clubs instead of public parks."

One of the most exhibited living photographers, Salgado has by this point become a sort of postcolonial Lewis Hine, the very paragon of the socially concerned photographer who aggressively targets the injustices of his day. But if his work sometimes spills into mawkishness, it never loses its precision.

"So many of his images work beautifully in formal terms. They're almost like paintings," says Yancey Richardson, whose gallery is showing about 30 photos from the "Migrations" series. Richardson says the show, which runs from June 28 through August 24, will "focus on the most powerful, transcendent images. I think what distinguishes Salgado is that a lot of images transcend being just a document of a certain event or a place in time. They conjure up references to ancient history, to other artists' work. And those to me are the really iconic images."

Although Salgado, an economist by training, sees "Migrations" as a continuation of his "Workers" project ("the second chapter of the same story," he has said), there is undeniably something more fatalistic in these portraits of homeless migrants. "There was an aspect of 'Workers' that was not exactly celebratory, but it embraced and celebrated the striving of man to work, to shape his world around him," says Richardson. Some of that sense of redemptive possibility has been lost. "This work about the refugees and the exiles is very sad. It's heartrending," she continues. "I think his view is rather pessimistic. It may be epic, but there have been some epic tragedies in the last decade."

—Andrew Zipern
There is often an awkward wave of silence that sweeps through the room when the topic of Sebastião Salgado is broached among photography aficionados. His work is so universally revered that the professional critic is left with no alternative but fumbling to complicate the self-evident. In that moment of stunned silence we are all secretly thanking God — for the sake of our own humble careers — that there is only one Salgado.

Following its Italian debut in Rome this summer, the latest project of the world’s premier photojournalist has now touched down in Milan, at the Palazzo dell’Arengario exhibition space on Piazza Duomo. “In Cammino,” or “Migrations” as it’s known in English, is the fruit of a six-year odyssey — through over 40 countries — spent documenting our planet’s dire growing pains. From the Balkans to the Middle East, Honduras to Hong Kong, Salgado has been running alongside those individuals, families, and entire communities that have been forced for economic or political reasons to flee their homes in search of a better life or, in some cases, simply to survive.

Today there are more desperate people on the move than ever, as annual estimates have surpassed the one hundred million mark. Though the West has remained largely indifferent to their plight, the surging number of immigrants seeking to force the gates of our sanctuaries of affluence have obliged governments to reconsider the situation and begin looking for solutions.

The fifty-six-year-old, Brazilian-born Salgado, who has made his home in Paris for the past three decades, addressed journalists at his Milanese press conference with the soft-spoken but intense conviction that comes of firsthand experience. When this American- and French-educated Ph.D. in Economics speaks of a country’s projected GNP or expounds on the underlying economic causes of ethnic strife, his opinions are not taken lightly. “In prosperous countries like Italy,” Salgado cautions, “where the people are protected from the poverty that afflicts much of the rest of the world, one can easily run the risk of assuming that this wellbeing extends out across the planet. This is clearly not the case, as nearly 80% of the world’s population lives in conditions all too similar to those I’ve documented in this exhibit. I also believe that if we begin to concentrate on looking for the solutions to problems closer to home, in Italy, that it might lead to more significant steps being taken abroad.”

Italy, like the rest of western Europe, has begun to feel the heat in recent years of surging legal and illegal immigration, especially from north African and the Balkans. In the exhibition’s opening section — Migrants
and Refugees: The Survival Instinct — Salgado makes a stop in the heel of the Italian boot, Apulia, to photograph the tribulations of newcomers who have faced the dangers of an Adriatic crossing in hopes of a better, safer life. Many of these immigrants seeking political asylum carry no documents, which hampers the public officials’ ability to determine who has the right to stay and how best to integrate them. The Arengario exhibit unfolds in three more sections that address the lives of immigrants and refugees in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The fourth and final section — Portraits of Children on the Move — is being hosted in a separate space, the Istituto Milanese Martinni, where there are also special activities organized for visiting school groups and a video projection produced in collaboration with Italy’s Tele+ cable station.

Though the photographer rejects the claims made by those who consider his work to be fine art as well as “concerned” reportage, it cannot be denied that many of the 300 black & white documents on view are also stunningly beautiful images. A viewer’s feelings of compassion for these peoples are more often than not accompanied by a keen sense of admiration for Salgado’s ability to identify a given situation’s emblematic episodes and successfully translate his experiences into photographic imagery.

Communicating these impelling international dramas in such visually striking terms has kept the world’s picture editors lined up at his door. Originally a member of the prestigious Magnum agency, Salgado the economist understood that if he wanted to organize and execute projects on this scale, he would have to maintain tighter control over his freedom of movement and the licensing of his images. In 1994 he founded an agency for the promotion and distribution of his work alone, Amazonas Images, represented in Italy by Contrasto, which coordinated the Milanese “Migrations” exhibit and its collateral events. Apart from a bit of advertising work — Salgado’s campaign for the two
local airports is coincidentally now on billboards all over town — he was able to finance most of the trips he's taken for this project with the photo assignments he receives from news publications and a handful of international relief agencies. The photographer has also experimented successfully with several fund-raising promotional tools, like the sale of poster shows of his previous "Workers" project to those smaller communities that were interested in showing the pictures but unable to sustain the costs of hosting the "real" exhibit.

The Palazzo dell'Arengario stop on the "Migrations" world tour is accompanied by a commercial exhibition of Salgado's vintage prints at the Seno Gallery in via Giovasso. This was coordinated by Denis Curti, the young director of the Italian Foundation for Photography, who hopes to at least partially address the hearty demand for these prints on the part of local and nationally-based collectors. Mr. Curti, who also worked closely with Contrasto to bring "Migrations" to Milan, is thrilled with the response the exhibit has elicited thus far: "On the very first Sunday of the exhibition's run there were 1,200 visitors at the Arengario, which is an attendance record for that space. 30% over the top numbers the show was drawing in Rome this summer. The preceding Friday, Corriere della Sera, Milan's daily, had come out with an illustrated article not about but by Salgado on the front page. It's a historic event for the photographic arts in Italy."

Sebastião Salgado sums up his intentions in a statement to be found on the "Migrations" website (http://www12.terra.com.br/sebastiao_salgado/): "My goal is to provoke a debate, so that we can discuss the human condition looking from the point of view of displaced people around the world,... I hope that the person who comes into my show and the person who goes out are not quite the same."

David Crosby
Images courtesy Sebastião Salgado/Amazônas/Contrasto
YANCEY RICHARDSON GALLERY

The New York Times
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Can Suffering Be Too Beautiful?

By MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

"S

SENTIMENTAL voyeuriism" is
the latest jab, this one from
Jean-François Chevrier, a
French art professor, in Le
Monde. Clearly it's tough be-
ing the world's most famous photojournalist.

Even people who sympathize with what
Sebastião Salgado does — and what sane
person would not? — complain that his pic-
tures are too beautiful, which is not some-
thing you might normally complain about
when you look at photographs, especially
unforgettable ones.

But the key word is "normally," the 58-
year-old Brazilian-born Mr. Salgado not be-
ing a normal photographer. He is a superstar
in the Robert Capa, Clém and Henri Carrié-
Bresson tradition, and what he photographs
is not what most of his audience, or at least
most of the audience for his latest exhibition
at the International Center of Photography in
Midtown Manhattan, would regard as nor-
mal life.

One hopes not, anyway. These pictures
come from his latest book, "Migrations." It
is the product of seven years of travel to
more than 35 countries (including Afghani-
stan, Rwanda, the Balkan nations and pretty
much every other troubled and terrible spot
you can think of), documenting what he calls
"the reorganization of the human family" that
has come about partly through the shift
from "majority rural to majority urban."

Having previously borne witness to
widespread starvation in Africa and chroni-
cled manual labor all over the world, Mr.
Salgado here turns his immense energies to
the millions of refugees, exiles, orphans,
landless peasants, homeless families, boat
people, interviewers and others who today en-
dure incredible hardships to escape even
more extreme circumstances.

This is a sprawling, frequently gra-
some story — the scale and the gravity of it
should speak for themselves — and if the
suffering doesn't prompt guilt, indifference
to it will. That's how emotional blackmail
and effective moral photojournalism work.

Mr. Salgado practices both as well as anyone
does these days.

The greater the suffering, the grander
his artistic ambition, naturally. His is the
paradoxical situation of being a celebrated
artist of forgotten people, which is a starting
point for much of the carpeting.

But let's dispense with petty criticisms
first. The show, like the book, includes too
many photographs that aren't up to his best.

Even great journalists need editors. Mr. Sal-
gado's wife, Lola Waniek Salgado, oversaw
the exhibition. It has a superbly executed,
melodramatic video of pictures accompanied
by music. The photographs are accompanied
by explanatory captions that are sometimes
vague and not helpful. There is no sense of
independent oversight.

Resistance to the work, which after all
exists ostensibly to gain recognition for ove-
l look-ded masses of destitute people, is fueled
by signs of vanity. It is also fueled by the cult
of appreciation around Mr. Salgado, which
has tended to equate doubt about the photo-
grahs with lack of sympathy for their sub-
jects, if simply because of the sanctity of
its praise for him. It's a tricky business to get
people to look at other people they may have
spent a great deal of time trying, consciously
or otherwise, not to notice.

That said, the good photographs are so
stupendously gorgeous that they make you
forget everything else while you are looking
at them. They bespeak uncanny formal intu-
ition, a ready repertory of apt allusions to art
history and peerless timing (and some luck
may be, too, which all great photojournalists
have). This applies whether the image is a
panoramic blur of festering commuters at a
Bomby railroad station, wherein a visual cliché of modern travel is transformed into a minor miracle of geometric and textural subtlety; or the fearful, glass-eyed glare of three refugee babies captured through a slit between rough blankets; or the silent labor of people dragging a massless skill over glossy sand under leaderless skies, an image screaming with Christian symbolism like so many of Mr. Salgado's pictures. You would have to be blind or dead-hearted or immune to aesthetic pleasure not to be at least occasionally bowled over by such improbable skill.

But by now it should go without saying that Mr. Salgado is astonishing. Still at issue are what you might call the mechanics of his astonishment: the part beauty. “Exploitation of compassion” is another phrase from the essay in Le Monde. “Exploitation of compassion” is another phrase from the essay in Le Monde. “Exploitation of compassion” is another phrase from the essay in Le Monde. Should pictures of suffering ever be so beautiful?

Mr. Salgado's supporters have always responded that the beauty of the photographs lends dignity to the people in them, which is a good point, but the question demands a more elaborate answer.

It was one thing to try to make humanity up to suffering in the world via photographs from the early years of the last century through the golden age of photojournalism in the 1930's and 40's, when most people saw distant places and learned of faraway disasters through photographs, but it is another thing to try to do so now, when the number of images that flash across television and computer screens diminishes the value of any single image you may see. Photographers deal with this problem in different ways, but above all by struggling to make beautiful pictures; what causes any image to stick in the mind, aside from shock content whose impact tends to be brief, are qualities like pictorial integrity and compositional originality, which are fancy terms for beauty.

And yet, perhaps it happens to be the dysfunctions of people and their suffering, then those people and that suffering become your composite devices.

Beauty takes many guises. A century ago, apropos of another show by Mr. Salgado at the center, Ingrid Sischy in The New Yorker held up Walker Evans as a preferable alternative. Mr. Salgado’s work fared less well because, “the unrelenting application of the lyric and the didactic to his subjects,” while Evans’ “is appealingly poutant and clinical. It’s an interesting point. Evans’ iconic tenant farmers are memorable because they do things by cutting out all charm and anecdote. We stare level-eyed at people who squat back at us, refusing, as Lionel Trilling once put it about Evans’ famous portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs, “to be an object of your social consciousness.” He adds, “She refuses to be an object at all.”

But this neutrality rubs two ways. For another exhibition this year, the center curated an exhibition of photographs of impoverished Southerners made in the 1930’s by eugenicists who wanted to prove the biological inferiority of the poor, and the pictures looked shockingly similar in format and tone to Evans’.

As always with photographs, what we see in them is what we want to see, unless the photographer, like Mr. Salgado, is explicitly didactic. Evans’ pictures, lean, laconic and deadpan, are great works of ambiguous art, their ambiguity being a sign of respectful communication, one of great art’s basic traits. Evans resolved the beauty problem by maintaining a fascination with suffering toward his subjects. Mr. Salgado, a concerned journalist, produces reportage and propaganda, an honorable ambition but different from Evans’.

Of course his photographs are exploitative. Most good photojournalism is. As Cartier-Bresson once said: “There is nothing more important about photographing people. It is certainly some form of violence. So if sensitivity is lacking, there can be something barbaric about it.” Mr. Salgado chooses to sentimentalize his subjects — all those beautiful children staring back at us and small boys despite their horrific conditions — to avoid seeming barbaric and to demonstrate his sensitivity toward them. He is conveying some essential faith in humanity, too, in the respect, his work is sentimental voyeurism and unabashedly manipulative (but not hectoring, which is important). And that is why people respond so strongly to it, for better and worse.

We respond not only because of the voyeurism and the manipulation but, again, because of its formal beauty. Two thousand years of Christian art is based on the premise that of course suffering can be beautiful. Mr. Salgado’s allusions to Western art, to the point of their becoming a tic in his work, use art history to provide bona fides, both formal and moral. Moroccan refugees huddling in a flaming motorboat on rough seas, caught in the spotlight from a Spanish helicopter inspecting them while trying to cross the Strait of Gibraltar, immediately brings to mind Delacroix’s “Christ and the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee.” Vietnamese peasants, in silhouette against a vast landscape, mimic Millet’s “Gleaners,” which has its own biblical pedigree.

“Beautification of tragedy results in pictures that ultimately reinforce our passivity toward the experience they reveal,” Ms. Sischy argued years ago. If that were true, then the whole history of Christian art would have been a failure. But she is on to something. Mr. Salgado’s work is ultimately separated from its art-historical references by its specificity: there are not ancient martyrs, apostles and saints but modern-day fellow world citizens — real, specific people, whom Mr. Salgado endeavors to make into generalized saints and apostles, except that we know they are not. Maybe the most striking photograph in the whole show is a straight, comparatively simple image of abandoned babies on a rooftop in Brazil, one of them, surrounded with adults, no adults, no one else, in sight. The picture is affecting precisely because we know the babies are there on the roof, and we urgently want to learn how they got there, what’s being done for them and who they are.

(May the idea never enter God’s sublime head to marry one day to this land to see for himself whether these people who survive here on the brink between life and death are satisfactorily serving out the punishment that at the beginning of the world he handed out to the father and mother of us all.” Jose Saramago, the great Portuguese novelist, wrote about Brazil in the introduction to a different book of Mr. Salgado’s photographs, conveying an irony, we might note, that Mr. Salgado rarely uses.)

At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, there is a popular display of photographs of Jews killed by the Nazis, pictures rising up the walls of a room shaped like a smokestack. It’s theatrical. Nobody in the photographs is identified. At the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, many of the photographs are accompanied by names. It’s a small difference, but crucial. Names make people into individuals.

Some of the most beautiful, loving photographs in Mr. Salgado’s show are portraits of children he took almost casually, before he would gather around to watch him work. They volunteered to have their pictures shot in exchange for “allowing the visitor to work in peace,” explains the wall text accompanying a group of these photographs. “We can only guess what they are feeling,” the text continues. “Yet here at least we can see them as little human beings seen in the universe of the photograph, they stand alone. And perhaps for the first time in their young lives, they are able to say, ‘I am.”’

Perhaps. Still, it would be nice if Mr. Salgado had told us their names.