50

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS

You Should Know

PRESTEL

12

ELI REED

"I had a lust to see and understand the world, how people endure what they have to endure. I wanted to see beyond the obvious." This curiosity was and is one of the more essential prerequisites that American photographer Eli Reed brings to his photography.

ELI REED

Eli Reed is one of the many renowned and respected photographers to arrive at photography in a roundabout way. He had in fact trained as an illustrator, but he soon turned to photography. It was the late 1960s, a time of race riots and the Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, both of whom Reed sees as role models—not in photography but in life: "They inspired me to be the best in whatever I wanted to be." The subject of race has accompanied Reed his entire career. For his impressive book *Black in America*, he photographed and documented the African American experience from the 1970s to the 1990s. The book's publication in 1997 did not mean he left the subject behind: "Each picture that I take is a plea against racial prejudice. We are all sitting in the same boat. Of course I don't deny that racial differences exist. But I fight against every form of discrimination as hard as I can."

Reed saw the photographs dealing with issues of race in magazines like *Look* and *Life* and noticed that the best of them were invariably taken by photographers from Magnum. Reed himself was shooting for the *San Francisco Examiner* and in 1981–82 began to make a name for himself with his reports on Central America, even receiving a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize. In 1983, the esteemed photographer Philip Jones Griffiths, then president of Magnum, called Reed to ask how he could be convinced to join the agency. So Reed became not only the first photographer to join Magnum directly from a newspaper but also the first black photographer to work for the prestigious agency.

From then on, Reed, like all of his Magnum colleagues, traveled with camera at the ready to the world's important and dangerous flashpoints. From 1983 until 1987, he visited Beirut on repeated occasions to work on an ambitious, long-term study of the city, which became his first book, *Beirut: City of Regrets*. In 1986, he was in Haiti for the ousting of dictator "Baby Doc" Duvalier, and in 1989 he documented US Army operations in Panama. One of his primary concerns has been to show poverty and its crippling effects on people. In 1995, he participated in a Magnum book project on the subject of refugees, taking him to a camp in Tanzania where large numbers of Rwandan refugees were stranded. The body of images from his time there stands among his most powerful and poignant work.

Eli Reed is naturally aware that photographs do not bring about rapid change, but he still harbors the hope that they may cause something to stir in the longer term: "I believe when we address a problem, that's the first step to doing something about the problem. My photos are the way I do that."

James Carter Playing the Tenor Sax During the Filming of *Kansas City*, Kansas City, Missouri, USA, 1995

13

JEFF WALL

Canadian Jeff Wall's large-scale photo transparencies blur the boundaries between photography, film, advertising, and painting. They also helped spur an important regional art movement known as the Vancouver School.

JEFF WALL

1946   Born in Vancouver, Canada

1964–73
Studied art history at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and the Courtauld Institute, London

1976–87
Associate professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia

1977   Began working with photographic transparencies

1978   First solo exhibition in Vancouver that displayed a single work, *The Destroyed Room*

2002   Won the Hasselblad Award for photography

2007–08
Major retrospective exhibits in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Vancouver

"I remember being in a kind of crisis . . . and wondering what I would do. Just at that moment, I saw an illuminated sign somewhere, and it struck me very strongly that here was the perfect synthetic technology for me. It was not photography, it was not cinema, it was not painting, it was not propaganda, but it has strong associations with them all. It was something extremely open."

After many years of studying and experimenting with conceptual art, Jeff Wall decided to stop making artworks in the early 1970s. He needed to find a medium with which he could merge his own interests in modern popular culture, film, and the heritage of the Old Masters. Around 1977, he began exploring the possibilities of photo transparencies—or photographic images made on a transparent surface and displayed with backlighting. For Wall, this illuminated form of art seemed eminently modern. As he said, "In a luminescent picture the source of the image is hidden. . . . The site from which the image originates is always elsewhere. . . . To me, this experience of two places, two worlds, in one moment is a central form of the experience of modernity. It's an experience of dissociation, of alienation."

Wall's first major transparency, called *The Destroyed Room*, was exhibited at the Nova Gallery in Vancouver in 1978. The artist chose to place his work in the gallery's display window, enabling people to encounter the piece as both a work of art and a parody of illuminated "street advertising." The image itself showed a bedroom in complete disarray, with an overturned and torn mattress, clothes strewn on the floor, and a door ripped off its hinges. This deliberately chaotic scene suggested themes of modern urban decay, but its sophisticated composition also had a painterly quality. Wall's *Destroyed Room* would be the first of many transparencies that merged the commercial world and the world of art in new ways.

Another example of Wall's style, shown here, was produced from 1999 to 2000. It is based on a room described by African-American writer Ralph Ellison in the prologue of his novel *The Invisible Man* (1952). The narrator of the novel is shown sitting in his basement where "there are exactly 1,369 lights." Wall's image raises social concerns, such as alienation and racism, that cut across different generations in America. It also reveals the artist's flair for visual drama, with a grand tableau that resembles a movie set. Wall's pioneering work would influence a generation of artists in his home city of Vancouver, inspiring the Vancouver School movement.

After *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue, 1999–2000

A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai), 1993

14

STEPHEN SHORE

After achieving teenage celebrity as a photographer in Andy Warhol's Factory studio, Stephen Shore left New York City for a voyage on the American road. There he made the vivid, richly colorful, and finely detailed images that would illustrate his groundbreaking book, *Uncommon Places*.
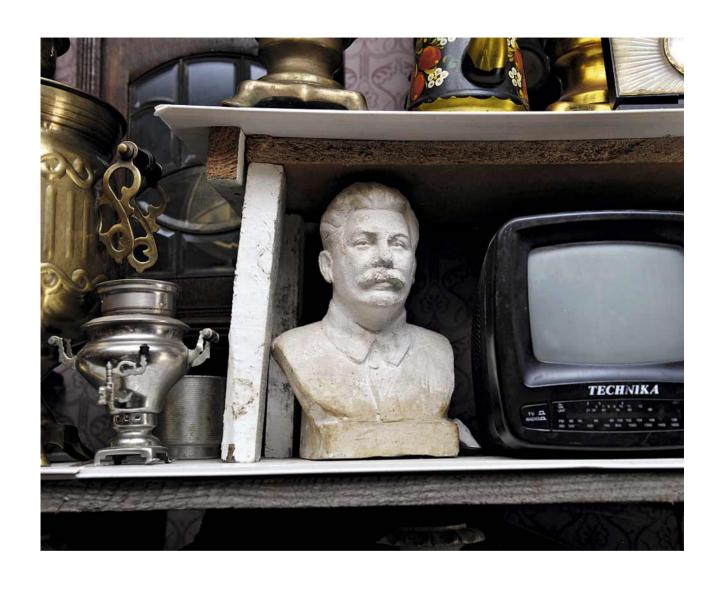

STEPHEN SHORE

"Between 1973 and 1979 I made a series of trips across North America, photographing with a view camera. These were essentially journeys of exploration: exploring the changing culture of America and exploring how a photograph renders the segment of time and space in its scope. I chose a view camera because it describes the world with unparalleled precision; because the necessarily slow, deliberate working method it requires leads to conscious decision making; and because it's the photographic means of communicating what the world looks like in a state of heightened awareness."

As Stephen Shore writes in the 2003 edition of his seminal work, *Uncommon Places*, a photographer can reveal engaging details of the world that are either missed or improperly appreciated by other eyes. Unlike many photographers of his generation, Shore used on-the-job training—rather than a university program—to develop his art. While still a teenager, he was accepted into Andy Warhol's Factory, where he took portraits of studio luminaries. Warhol himself was fascinated by photography and other mechanical art-making processes, and Shore was inspired by the older artist's working methods. "I saw Andy making aesthetic decisions," Shore later recalled, "it wasn't anything he ever said to me. I saw these decisions happening over and over again. It awakened my sense of aesthetic thought."

Shore's early success earned him cultural grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation to embark on an extensive new project. Carrying a bulky view camera with him, he went on a road tour of the US and Canada to capture scenes of rural life. The result was *Uncommon Places*. The vivid images in this book reveal Shore's keen sense of design and his eye for detail. One example, shown here, depicts a quiet street corner in Regina, Saskatchewan, a town in the middle of the Canadian prairie. This image combines the casual feeling of a snapshot with the timeless qualities of a painting. Shore achieves an elegant composition, featuring the sweeping rounded forms of the curb, the traffic light pole, and the buildings' arches. His camera also reveals the soft late-afternoon colors of the sky and the sunlit walls and street signs. These pictures would inspire the work of countless other photographers looking to explore their own ideas about color and form, tradition and modernity.

Broad Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, August 17, 1974

Amarillo, Texas, August 1973

Home of Tsal Groisman, Korsun, Ukraine, July 20, 2012

43

WOLFGANG TILLMANS

Exploring everything from traditional street photography to "abstract" art produced in the darkroom, Wolfgang Tillmans has significantly expanded the definition of "artist photographer." His incredible versatility as well as his facility with light and color won him the prestigious Turner Prize in 2000.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS

1968   Born in Remscheid, Germany

1990–92

> Studied art and photography at the Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design, England

1993   First solo exhibition at Galerie Buchholz in Cologne

ca. 1998

> Began creating abstract works based on photographic processes

2000   Became the first photographer to win the British Turner Prize for art
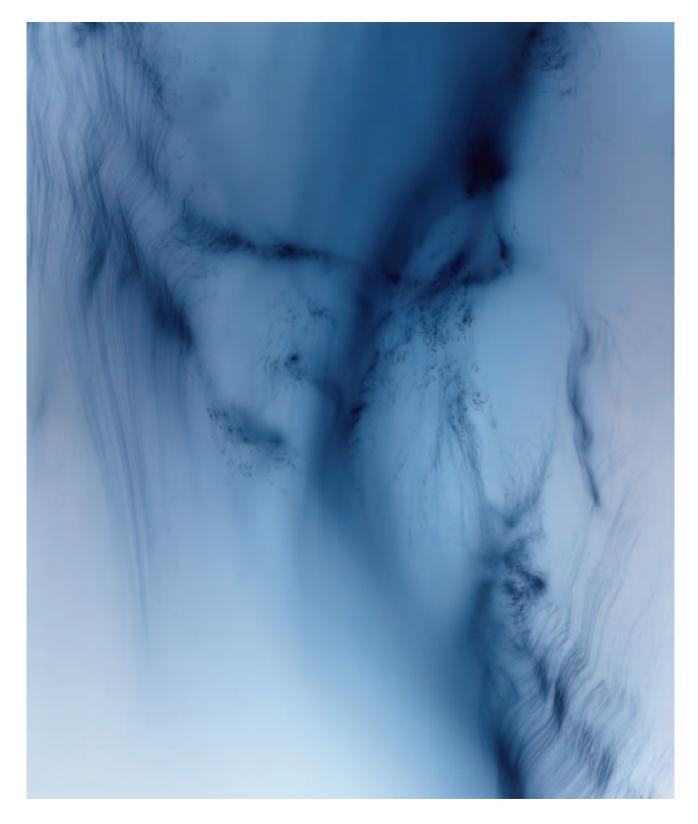
2015   Hasselblad Foundation Award

Wolfgang Tillmans has made art with an impressive variety of styles and techniques. Born in 1968 in Germany, he achieved international fame while studying and working in England. He photographed scenes of London's urban culture that were both spontaneous and precisely detailed. His best-known works from this period include richly colorful still lifes showing plates of food, dirty dishes, and cigarette lighters, scenes that poke fun at the slightly chaotic nature of city living. A later series of London images, this time featuring riders on the Tube, began to shift Tillmans's art toward abstraction. His photos of the London underground scene capture only details: an armpit exposed under a T-shirt or a man's closely cut hair against a denim sleeve. Tillmans stated that these images could be thought of as "mere studies of surface textures." Yet, they also reveal uncomfortable social realities: the "incredible intimacy of people, without them wanting to be intimate with each other."

In the late 1990s, Tillmans began to experiment with the photographic process itself. He produced striking pictures by manipulating photographic paper in the darkroom. One series of images that came out of this process was called *Freischwimmer* (2003–12). These works have the look of abstract paintings, often with thin lines and supple shapes that seem to "swim" across the page.

Tillmans has also experimented with unusual installation methods. For example, he has displayed his photos as part of larger, collage-like arrangements—arrangements that also include newspaper texts, packaging material, and postcards. These installations blur the distinction between photographic and conceptual art. They also give the viewers a chance to assign their own interpretations as to the artist's "meaning" or "intent."

Tillmans's interest in art has also included teaching. He has worked at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg and at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. In 2000, he became the first photographer—and the first German—to win the Turner Prize. Such recognition acknowledges the creativity with which Tillmans has explored "how an industrially produced piece of paper becomes an object of great beauty and meaning with the mere addition of light."

Freischwimmer 199, 2012