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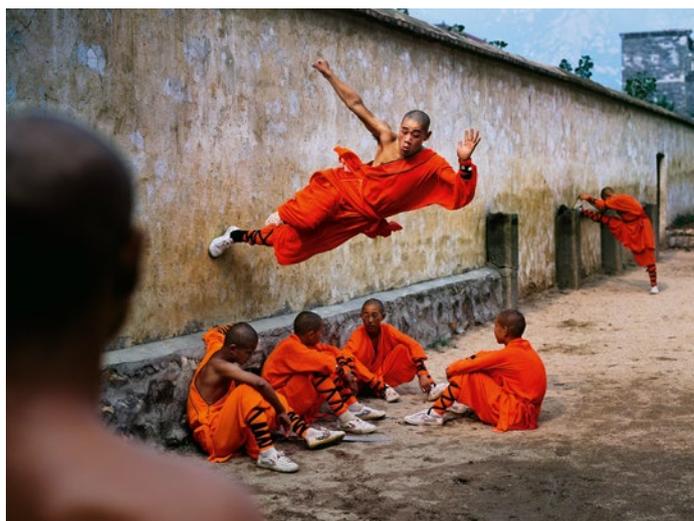
## THIS UNSTILL LIFE

Steve McCurry, the legendary photojournalist behind *National Geographic's* 1985 "Afghan Girl" cover, captures moments of conflict and quietude in a landmark exhibit at the Ayala Museum

WORDS BY PAYAL UTTAM / PHOTOS BY STEVE MCCURRY

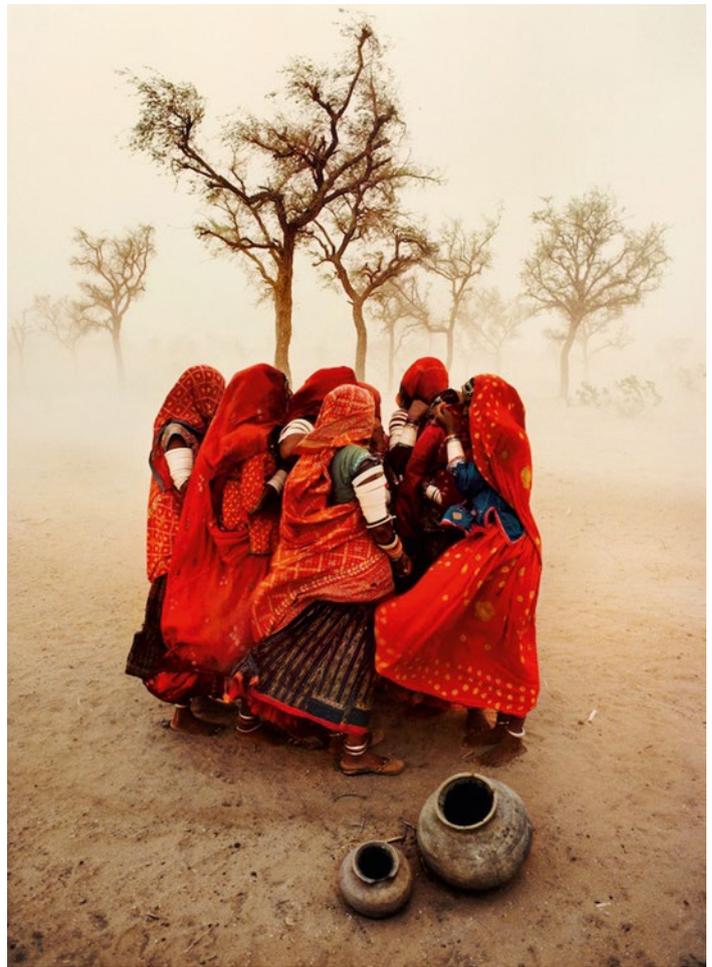
**MORE THAN 30 YEARS** have passed, but everyone still remembers the "Afghan Girl" with her piercing green eyes and haunting gaze. The photograph, published on the cover of *National Geographic* in 1985, spread across the globe and put a face to the Soviet-Afghan war. The man behind the camera was the young American photojournalist Steve McCurry, who has since built his name with probing portraits of conflicted regions and vanishing cultures worldwide.

Now 65, he still has the hunger and drive of a young war photographer traveling non-stop to build his archive of award-winning work. From February 17 to March 27, the Ayala Museum will be showcasing a series of McCurry's photographs during Art Fair Philippines. The exhibition, organized in partnership with Sundaram Tagore Gallery and Collective 88, is titled *The World We*



### HABITS AND VEILS

**From top:** Jodhpur Fruit Vendor, India, digital c-print, 40" x 60"; A young monk runs along the wall over his peers at the Shaolin Monastery in Henan Province, China, digital c-print, 40" x 60". **Opposite, left to right:** Girl with green shawl, Peshawar, Pakistan, digital c-print, 60" x 40"; Dust Storm, Rajasthan, India, digital c-print, 20" x 60".



*Live In: Through the Lens of Contemporary Photography.* It features his images from the Philippines, Afghanistan, India, Lebanon, and Turkey, alongside a selection of work by other noted photographers. The show comes on the heels of a major exhibition at Sundaram Tagore Gallery in Singapore showcasing 53 iconic works handpicked by the artist.

Born in Philadelphia, McCurry studied cinematography before he began working at a newspaper. After a couple of years of freelance work, he set off to explore India. He eventually made his way to Pakistan, where refugees from Afghanistan smuggled him across the border into their country. Donning traditional garb, he followed Mujahideen fighters and militia groups often traveling by foot at night to stay out of view of Soviet helicopters. Weeks later, he emerged with precious rolls of film sewn into his worn clothes and brought the world the first images of the Afghan-Soviet conflict. His intimate, empathetic photographs of the rebel groups earned him the prestigious Robert Capa Gold Medal Award in 1980, and he soon signed with the famed Magnum picture agency.

This insightful exhibition reveals that alongside Afghanistan, McCurry forged a deep relationship with the Philippines that stretches back to the 80s, a formative period of his career. He first traveled to the country on assignment for

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Magnum photos to cover Ferdinand Marcos and the People Power revolution, as well as to work on a project for *National Geographic*. Venturing into remote regions of the country, he captured dramatic landscapes and scenes of everyday life with the hope of recording what he described as lost moments of culture. The works on display range from ancient emerald-green rice terraces in Banaue to a raw portrait of a young fisherman's daughter with a steely expression adrift on a boat in the Sulu Sea. "It's a strikingly beautiful country with beautiful beaches, mountains, and so many

different islands. I was fascinated with the culture and the music," says McCurry. "I was looking at social life, religious life, economic life—I wanted to see and explore everything."

The same desire to memorialize the landscape and culture of the Philippines can be found in his series on India, a country he traveled to more than 80 times and one that continues to exert a pull on him. Earlier this year, Phaidon released a lushly colored photo book entitled *India*, featuring several of the photographer's unseen works. On view at the Ayala Museum is breathtaking work from 2010, which captures the electrifying blue-tinted buildings of Jodhpur as well as an intimate portrait of devotees outside the Golden Temple of Amritsar.

Among other highlights of the show are unguarded images of children peering out from the trunk of a taxi in Afghanistan. Presenting a striking contrast to the solemn-faced figures in this scene is a photograph of lively children near Beirut who had leapt onto a large anti-aircraft gun to investigate the weapon. The latter is a poignant work revealing the fortitude of the human spirit, showing how even in the most dangerous situations, children continue to play. Indeed, each of McCurry's images share a similar tenacity and enduring quality and, like "Afghan Girl," are likely to linger in our collective memory for decades to come. ■