

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

October 27, 2006

Denis Cameron

Filed under: [artists](#) — alecsothblog @ 6:15 pm

The other day I came across an [obituary](#) for the photographer Denis Cameron. I'd never heard of Cameron and probably wouldn't have read the story if the first line didn't state he was born in Minnesota. The obit went on to describe him as a 'real-life Zelig':

He seemed to pop up at every event of political and cultural significance for a few decades in the second half of the 20th century – except, unlike Woody Allen's character, Cameron was the one behind the camera. He photographed Hollywood stars and the war in Vietnam; his pictures were the common denominator of the Prague Spring, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Ayatollah Khomeini, Sophia Loren and Errol Flynn in a casket.

Fascinating. But a search on the web turned up next to nothing on Cameron. The little I found seemed to refer to, of all people, Richard Avedon:



Richard Avedon and Gloria Emerson in Vietnam, 1971, photograph by Denis Cameron

This led me to Avedon's book, [The Sixties](#), which has this outstanding image of Cameron, Emerson and translator Nguyen Ngoc Luong:



The Avedon book includes a terrific interview with Gloria Emerson in which she speaks at length about Denis Cameron:

Did I talk to you about the time we went past the checkpoint and they opened fire? Denis and I were driving back because he had a girlfriend who'd come to see him in Phnom Penh and he was very upset because he thought a very smart English correspondent would take the girl away. I don't know who he cared for most, the English correspondent who suddenly loomed up as a rival who he adored as a friend, or the girl who was very decorative and rather a famous English debutante we'd come to Phnom Penh in the midst of all this war. His own particular anguish over two friends in Phnom Penh who might have been, what?...holding hands in an opium den together...was so great he risked our lives. We drove past a checkpoint and I was very cross. It was dark – the North Vietnamese were all over the country – and he slowed down. And then the Cambodians opened fire. The car turned over and Denis and his interpreter got out and started running to a rice paddy to hide. I was slower and tripped and I got caught and I couldn't find my handbag and the firing went on. Finally I got out of the car and thought, "It is simply too late. I won't catch up with them." And I looked and Denis had waited. He'd crawled a few feet and turned around and waited for me to come. And he had his hand out. That was so extraordinary. He had waited. He was furious I took so long but he had waited. We crawled a big and sank in all this God-awful mud and Denis said something about, "You had to go back for your fucking handbad," and then this splendid noble moment was over. We shouted that we were Americans and the Cambodians said in French they were sorry, they hoped we would forget the little incident. But I never forgot it.

Because he waited. Not many people wait for many people, do they? I think one of the great things that you can see someone do is reaching out literally to save you. To show you the way. I'll never forget this long arm going out to me. That may be love. I don't know. Then, again, it might be better than love, don't you think?

I want to know more about Cameron. I want to see his pictures. Does anyone have more information?

11 Comments

1. Alec, what a wonderful coincidence. i was just viewing 'the sixties' at the library yesterday. i, too, am drawn to that image, and have thought to myself "Cameron?".

i'm searching for more information, and images, as well, but coming up empty...

Comment by [ben](#) — October 27, 2006 @ [7:17 pm](#)

2. i remember five or so years ago there being a vietnam photographer's exhibit in chicago...trying to remember where it was (not the cultural center, not a gallery or typical museum space...hmm). but i seem to remember his work was in it and there was additional information (accompanying catalog?) about the photographers and their lives. don't know if that helps or if it adds only makes things "more curiouser."

haven't "met" you formally yet, and really like your site and daily thoughts. so hello there.

Comment by [stacy](#) — October 27, 2006 @ [7:44 pm](#)

3. sad that a photographer could be so in the middle of things and leave no traces.

Comment by [j zorn](#) — October 27, 2006 @ [11:13 pm](#)

4. Dameron distributed through Rex Features Ltd — go to rexfeatures.com and search on his name

Comment by [Kevin Bjorke](#) — October 28, 2006 @ [1:23 am](#)

5. err, "C" as in "Cameron" not "D" as in "Duh"

Comment by [Kevin Bjorke](#) — October 28, 2006 @ [1:24 am](#)

6. 1962. Image. David Cameron Image of John Wayne and Jimmy Stewart, 'The Man who Shot Liberty Valance'.



April 18th, 1964: The Saturday Evening Post. COVER STORY: A season of ELKE SOMMER by Joe Hyams. Some critics deride her acting, but her beauty has won her European fame and a fat Hollywood Contract. Photographs by Denis Cameron.

April 6th, 1973: Laos. Pentagon says 311 pilots reported missing over Laos. North Vietnam forces in Vientiane tell reporter Denis Cameron American pilots shot down over Laos were executed because Pathet Lao had no facilities to use for prison camps.

February 13th, 1974: Officials estimate 139 casualties after yesterday's insurgent rocket attack on Phnom Penh, Cambodia. 10,000 left homeless. ABC reporter Denis Cameron injured.

April 28th 1975: Time Magazine. Cambodia. As victorious Khmer Rouge forces closed in on Phnom-Penh last week, 17 or so foreign journalists passed up the last evacuation flight, electing instead to cover the fall of the capital. It was a perilous decision. ... Among the newsmen believed to be holed up in the French embassy at the end were five Americans [including] ABC News Correspondent Lee Rudakewych and CBS News Stringer Denis Cameron, 44, who stayed behind in a largely futile attempt to organize an airlift of 400 Cambodian orphans [to Australia]. Cameron cabled CBS: "The situation here is unclear and contradictory. Fresh rumors keep arriving to fuel the worry and apprehension. We return regularly to the hotel to compare rumors and feel some small consolation in our togetherness."

1984: Motion Picture 'The Killing Fields', 'Miscellaneous Crew'.

Miscellaneous.

Comment by rg — October 28, 2006 @ [3:32 pm](#)

7. Stacy's note about a Vietnam photographers exhibit may refer to a project called Requiem. Horst Faas edited the book, which features images by photographers who died in Vietnam and Indochina, so Cameron isn't likely to be featured in it. I'm not familiar with him from Minnesota circles, but he's a generation older than I am and may have left the state very early.

Comment by George Slade — October 30, 2006 @ [2:33 pm](#)

8. Search on "*DCA" (please note asterix) at [rexfeatures.com](#) to view his pictures. I am his son – if you'd like more information about my dad please feel free to contact me at marccameron@gmail.com

Comment by Marc Cameron — October 31, 2006 @ [6:33 am](#)

9. Fantastically cool photo of Cameron, Emerson and Nguyen Ngoc Luong.

I NEED a pressed khaki shirt, multiple Nikons, and Michael Caine glasses.

Comment by [guybatey](#) — October 31, 2006 @ [6:56 am](#)

10. [...] Last month I wrote a post about the photographer Denis Cameron. I'd come across Cameron's obituary (he died on October 6, 2006) and was unfamiliar with his work. In response to this post I received an email from Denis's son, Marc Cameron. Along with providing jpegs, Marc sent an additional obituary and an essay written by his father [Notes on a Continuing Life, Leica Magazine, Issue 3, 1980]. Lastly, Marc was gracious enough to answer a few of my questions: [...]

Pingback by [alec soth - blog » Blog Archive » More on Denis Cameron](#) — November 13, 2006 @ [11:23 pm](#)

11. Conocí a Denis hace aproximadamente de 27 a 30 años. Vino a Colombia a haer un reportaje y viaje junto a él y a un compañero de él, camarógrafo iraní, por todo Colombia como traductora.

En esa época trabajaba con France press.
Sí hablamos de la misma persona, lo siento mucho. Dejo una huella profunda en la gente que lo conocimos aquí.

Comment by [denise estefan](#) — February 27, 2007 @ [6:59 pm](#)