

Philip Jones Griffiths

(Wales, 1936)

Born in the Welsh town of Rhuddlan, Griffiths studied pharmacy in Liverpool and practiced in London, while photographing part-time for the *Manchester Guardian*. In 1961, he became a full-time freelancer for the *London Observer*. Griffiths covered the Algerian War in 1962, and then was based in Central Africa before moving to Asia. He photographed the Viet Nam War beginning in 1966, publishing *Vietnam Inc* in 1971. *Time Magazine* called *Vietnam Inc* "the best work of photo-reportage of war ever published," and *The New Statesman* added, "Of all the hundreds of books about [the War,] this is the truest, the most important, the most upsetting." Icons of that era, many of these photographs appear in this exhibit.

In his next book on Viet Nam, *Agent Orange: "Collateral Damage" in Viet Nam*, Griffiths turned to the horrors of chemical warfare in that beleaguered land. Today, in Vietnam and also here at home, the nightmarish effects of chemical combat continue to haunt both the War Generation and its successor. The continuing effects of Agent Orange on Vietnamese and American veterans and their families remains one of the unsettled issues of the War. *The Washington Post* called the book "harrowing," with *The Economist* (London) elaborating, "Three things raise this work out of the realm of the macabre. First is the author's evident talent as a photographer and journalist. Second is his intellectual honesty...The third, and most compelling point, is his compassion." *The Nation* summed it up: "The face of war is in this book."

In this 30th year since the end of the Vietnam War, Griffiths new book, *Viet Nam at Peace*, covers the post-war decades of hardship, progress, change and hope. The work stands as an epilogue to its two great predecessors — warranting Henri Cartier-Bresson's judgment: "Not since Goya has anyone portrayed war like Philip Jones Griffiths."

His coverage of many of the major upheavals of the second half of 20th century has taken Philip Jones Griffiths to more than 120 countries in all five continents.

In 1980, Griffiths moved to New York to assume the presidency of the legendary Magnum Photo Agency, a post he held for a record five years.

Griffiths photographs have appeared in every major magazine in the world.

His movie work includes a documentary for the BBC on the descendants of the HMS Bounty living on Pitcairn Island; a film showing the effects of strip-mining on a valley in South Wales, and a look at the Khao-I-Dang Refugee camp in Thailand for the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees. Another BBC film, *The Ho Chi Minh Trail*, was shown on PBS in the US, while *A Welsh Eye* aired in Britain. His film on Cambodia was shown on ITV in Britain, and in 1999 he put forward his predictions for the new millennium in a one hour documentary, also for ITV.

To Griffiths, "The problem with photography is that you can decontextualize war. What does a picture of a wounded body, or a mother clasping her wounded child mean? Why is it happening? I want to know that. I'm not satisfied just photographing little sorts of visual climaxes to a conflict. I want to know what led up to it and what's going to happen next. I cannot believe in the sort of fireman approach to doing this kind of work — just automatically going to the next war not knowing where you are, what the background or the history is. It's like watching a movie with the house lights on and everybody is talking. It seems to me that you're losing such a valuable opportunity to learn the truth of what's happening."