

Photos From the Edge
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Mary Ellen Mark, one of the most well-known and prolific photojournalists of our time, has dedicated her life to introducing images that provoke us to think about what it means to be a human being.

Through her images, she informs us of what it is like to be homeless or to be dying in poverty conditions with no one to care for us; to live as a blind person or retarded or with a disease such as leprosy. Her photos also inform us of the dignity that people in these conditions manage to keep intact. She wants to acknowledge them as human beings because, as we can, she does truly care about them.

A collection of her photographs titled “Mary Ellen Mark: 25 Years” is showing at the Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art through Aug. 3 and from there continues on to Milan, Italy. The exhibition features 75 selections from many of Mark’s best photo essays, including “Streetwise, Homeless Families,” and “Mother Teresa’s Missions of Charity,” all of which first appeared in *Life* magazine. The final part of the exhibition is devoted to “Indian Circus,” a photo essay done in 1989 and 1990, which documents, in her words, “The magic and whimsy of the circus, and my love for India.”

Born in Philadelphia in 1940, Ms. Mark studied painting and art history at the University of Pennsylvania, receiving her bachelor’s degree in fine arts in 1962. During her graduate studies at the university’s Annenberg School of Communications, her interest shifted to photography. This was the beginning of her distinguished career.

“All her pictures contain an expression of time: time spent watching, listening and talking,” said Marianne Fulton, chief curator at the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in Rochester, N.Y., which organized the exhibition. “Mark says that the longer she stays with her subject, the closer she gets. And the closer she gets, the more likely she is to find her pictures — pictures that strike at the core of an issue. She feels that she is giving voice to the voiceless.”

Ms. Mark, interviewed by phone from her studio in New York City, explained that through the course of her 25-year career, her motivations have remained consistent.

“I still want to make great pictures,” she said. “It’s not easy to make great images. I want to make images that have an impact on people and that people will remember. I’m just interested in people on the edges. I feel an affinity for people who haven’t had the best breaks in society. I’m always on their side. I find them more human, maybe. I care about them more. What I want to do more than anything is to acknowledge their existence.”

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