FRAMING THE TRUTH

MARK NEVILLE AND THE WEAPONISATION OF ART

IMAGE: 'Bohdanivka, Kyiv Region; the school and the school bus were deliberately targeted by Russian artillery' (Mark Neville, June 2022)

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY FROM DIRECTOR - ANDY DUNN

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN WAR?

British documentary portrait photographer Mark Neville is haunted by this and deeper, more personal questions as he makes powerful and unique new work in the demolished streets of his adopted home of Ukraine.

His life-long mission to empower the subjects of his photographs and his own journey through trauma and displacement have led him directly to this decisive moment in his life and career.

WHAT IS THE FILM ABOUT?

At its heart, this is the story of one man's life-long search for a place to call home and how his own sense of abandonment in his troubled youth has fuelled his desire to bear witness to others, often children, who are in adverse situations of poverty and war and they need to be SEEN.

We don't now how the this story will end…we fear it could end in tragedy - but we pray it has a happy ending.

This film also asks some big questions about *ART*, *WAR*, *TRAUMA* and *HOME*

• What is the "Power of Art"? Can it bring real change in the world? Is it the role of the artist to at least TRY to make the world a better place?

• Can social documentary photography really benefit its subject? Or does it exploit its, often vulnerable, subjects for shock value, and the financial gain of the largely white middle class art world?

• If we can criticise the way war is depicted in the media (and we'll show it is often distorted) , can an artist's lens and approach have greater meaning and influence than a photo journalist's?

TWO NARRATIVE THREADS

1 - PRESENT DAY UKRAINE.

After fleeing Kyiv with his partner Lukeriia a week after the Russian invasion, we first meet Mark in Marseille. He is displaced and still in a state of fight or flight. He is hustling the release of his book **STOP TANKS WITH BOOKS**. The stunning coffee table book receives huge press coverage and his campaign to give away 750 copies to influential world figures has gone well. But of course … it didn't stop the tanks.

SO what next?

Mark feels the pull to return to Kyiv. He's spent his adult life documenting victims of war and social inequality, but now *he* is the refugee and for him, it's no way to live. Lukeriia isn't so sure. She's scared and fears the worst for her beloved Ukraine and for her parents who are sheltering in their concrete basement in Luhansk (FACT CHECK).

Then an email from a wealthy art collector tips the balance in favour of returning to Ukraine. The billionaire financier already has several of Mark's classic photographs in his collection and wants to do something to help Ukrainians in their hour of need. They make a deal.

Mark will go back to Kyiv and set up an aid programme, funded by the collector to supply food and supplies to Ukrainian families on the ground. He'll also embark in a new body of work, making portraits of people he meets along the way. These will be in his signature, formal, flash-lit style, photographed on large format, analogue film. A stark contrast to the numbing stream of digital photojournalism coming from the front line, to our screens, every day.

But even with a plan in place, every day brings moral questions, tough decisions, self-doubt and also the excitement of a new sense of purpose and the documentary subject of a lifetime.

Justin Trudeau receives STWB

Mark Neville

Mark's girlfriend, Lukeriia

TWO NARRATIVE THREADS

2 - MARK'S LIFE AND WORK

As Mark's current project in Ukraine progresses, natural cues will arise to revisit his acclaimed social documentary work and formative moments in his personal life. We'll see how these experiences played their part in creating the artist and the man Mark is today.

THE PORT GLASGOW BOOK PROJECT (2004)
This seminal work took Mark to the West Cost of Scotland, immersing himself in the ex shipbuilding town of Port Glasgow for a whole year. Instead of feeling the resulting coffee table book, he gave away all 8000 books for free, one for every household in the town.

BATTLE AGAINST STIGMA - HELMAND, AFGHANISTAN (2010)
Commissioned by the Imperial War Museum as an Official War Artist, Mark embedded with the PARAS in Helmand for 3 months. His experience was in stark contrast to the sanitised depiction of the war he'd seen on BBC News. Mark himself returned with PTSD and was convinced many of the soldiers were also suffering the same. His decision to use the resulting book of photographs to raise awareness for PTSD found him at odds with the MOD who confiscated half the books on publication.

HERE IS LONDON (2012)
Mark's portraits of a diverse range of Londoners at every level of the social divide was nominated by the New York Times for the Pulitzer Prize.

PARADE (2019)
On the day Britain voted to leave the EU, Mark began a 3 year project photographing the residents of Guingamp in Brittany (Little Britain), France. Blurring the lines between planned and spontaneous photographs, this project was nominated for the 2020 Deutsche Borse Photography Prize

THREE TASTER CLIPS

Filming is underway and some sample clips have been edited to help introduce Mark, his artistic values and his current situation.

They can be found here: **https://www.andydunnonline.com/in-development-2**

1. STOP TANKS WITH BOOKS - Mark Neville…

2. DISPLACED IN MARSEILLE

3. BACK TO UKRAINE - work in progress

THE DIRECTOR

Andy Dunn is a creative and experienced shooting director with a strong track record in arts and music documentary, delivering well written and entertaining films for the BBC, SKY, ITV and the big screen. He's passionate about telling warm, intimate stories with a strong photographic style.

"*Last Stop Coney Island*" his independent feature documentary about photographer Harold Feinstein premiered at DOC NYC in 2018, screened in Curzon cinemas and on Sky Arts in the UK and was distributed by TVF international.

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"Mark Neville has re-imagined what documentary photography could be, should be. Instead of the bland 'deconstructions' that pass so lazily as 'critical' in contemporary art, he makes extraordinary pictures and finds extraordinary ways to get them back to those he has photographed."

DAVID CAMPANY