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SA 134B Digital Photography

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Congo/Women Exhibit

The Congo/women exhibit gave an image to a scream that is widely unheard in the world. The social unrest and abuse go unknown in people's lives. The pictures give much needed perspective. The exhibit's proper title is Congo / Women, Portraits of war: The Democratic Republic of Congo, Photographed by: Lynsey Addario, Marcus Bleasdale, Ron Haviv, and James Nachtwey in New Haven. The pictures are important for the message. I picked one photograph in particular that touched me deeply. Marcus Bleasdale photographed the body of an eight-month-old baby in Mungbwalu in 2004. The child had died of anemia. For me, the picture symbolizes the state of innocence and the condition of the child in the Congo. It also exhibits death as a sort of peace and escape from the tragedy of the people's lives.

The obvious focus of the picture is the child's body. It is drastically lighter than the hands washing it. The water being poured over the limbs enhances the light on the child making her body shine. The hands washing the child are in constant movement. The darkness and movement create chaos. The child is the only thing at peace. The size of the photograph in the exhibit is large. The large scale of it drives the image home. It is not something you can simply glance at or miss. It is large scale for its powerful message. The photo is in black and white. It creates a more haunting image. Instead of the child being a

light brown, it is nearly white. This adds a feel like the child is an apparition. It seems in a different plain than that of the people surrounding it. And in a way, it is. The hands around the body are calloused and weathered. There are many sub-patters in the background. The hands are dry. The child and the tub it is in are smooth. There is a massive discrepancy between the child and outer corners of the picture. The space is use in this photo to maximize attention on the subject. The edges of the photo are very concentrated with movement and shadow. Everything is balanced by the negative space around the baby and on it's skin. The movement of the hands around the child's still body shows chaos outside of the eternal peace the child has. The light is used to focus on the child. It aluminates the body while the rest of the picture remains in shadow. It is very obvious in the composition what the photographer was trying to say. He was not beating around the bush. The purpose of this photograph was to show the fate of childhood and innocence in the Congo. The child's body is center.

Compared to the other pictures in the gallery, this one had a very different feel to it. This difference drew my initial attention. While the others seemed painful and chaotic, this picture was serene. When I read the description something solid fell down by stomach. I love little children. I love to see them smile and laugh. This child will never laugh or smile, it probably barely did when she was alive. That thought was so heavy, and the picture so calm. I felt that she lucked out somehow, which was even more terrible. I cried. Not tears or outwardly cried. But inside there was a tug when I saw this picture. I felt lucky, and ashamed that I take my life for granted. A surreal weight seemed over my head.

All of the focus in the picture surrounds the child's body. The contrast in light compared to the rest of the picture creates a feeling like the baby isn't part of the world the rest of the hands belong to. She seems more at peace. The child is innocence. And the feeling that it doesn't belong and has passed on represents the destruction of childhood in the Congo.

The photographer's statement is that the problem in the Congo destroys innocence and childhood. The photo is charged with a surreal sadness. The child looks peaceful but will never experience life. There is a reverent mood; a delicate feeling around the child and the shine that the water creates. It almost makes the baby look like a doll. They are washing the body and preparing her for burial, the only appropriate feeling is gingerly reverent. The photography is very photojournalistic. It is a hybrid of art and journalism. It is a very effective vehicle for messages and stories. Images are much easier to take in than words.

The Congo/Women exhibit really touched me, in more ways than one. It reminded me of how powerful and influential art is. How moving it can be. I found a new appreciation for my life and how privileged I am. It also made me want to do something to help. I am even more anxious to get abroad. I have been interested in photojournalism for some time. After seeing these photos, I am taking the idea more seriously as a career. I want to get out and bring the world back to the people who seem so closed up in their own lives. This photography isn't tactful; it goes straight to the point of the matter. However blunt, it is the truth. And that is what people need.