



ART BEAT

Veteran Photographer William Albert Allard Helped Change Focus of National Geographic

BY JEFFREY BROWN *December 28, 2010 at 2:10 PM EST*

National Geographic is a mecca for photojournalism. The Society's images capture moments and landscapes that the average U.S. reader will never come close to experiencing first-hand.

But its images weren't always leading the periodical pack. In the mid-20th century, it was struggling to catch the eyes of readers who were interested in photo-friendly periodicals like *LIFE* and *Look*.

When William Albert Allard joined the staff in 1964, all of that began to change. Allard was fresh out of the University of Minnesota when he was hired as an intern. One of his first assignments changed his career and the way the magazine approached photojournalism.

The mission: to photograph an Amish community in Pennsylvania. His iconic picture of a boy holding a guinea pig while staring straight into the lens, helped move the magazine in a new direction. "It had an intimacy that readers of National Geographic were not used to seeing," says Allard.

Allard was not alone, however. The 1960s and 1970s were exciting times for the photographers at National Geographic. There was a competitive spirit, each photographer wanting to earn the respect and admiration of his colleagues (at the time there was only one [female staff photographer](#)). Former editor-in-chief Bill Allen says they were often more concerned with “photographs they wanted other photographers to see”, than what actually made it to press.

Now, Allard is celebrating his nearly 50-year career with a retrospective. “William Albert Allard: Five Decades” is both a [book](#) and an [exhibit](#), which runs through January 8, 2011 at the Steven Kasher Gallery in New York.

Editor’s Note: *Last January, Jeffrey Brown visited National Geographic to see never-before-published images from its archive. [Click here](#) to see a slide show of images, plus interviews with archivists and the current editor-in-chief, Chris Johns.*