

The Washington Times

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART HOSTS PHOTOGRAPHER MICHAEL NICHOLS 'WILD' EXHIBIT

By Eric Althoff, August 20, 2017



Michael Nichols has seen the entire world through an extremely unique lens. Over decades of work for such publications as “National Geographic,” Mr. Nichols has traveled the planet to film — in stills and video — nature, peoples and otherwise capture images of our planet in a way rarely seen.

If ever.

An exhibition of his impressive catalog of work, “Wild: Michael Nichols,” is now open at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through Sept. 17, the first major exhibition of the photographer’s work.

Lions are caught mid-mating in the Serengeti. Jane Goodall is seen interacting almost preternaturally with her favored chimpanzees. And the horrifying effects of the testing of HIV medicines upon primates is seen in all of its inhumanity. And in another room, show Mr. Nichols exploring the jungles of South America and Africa. Footage captures his hands absolutely covered with jungle insects as he tries to frame a shot perfectly — the lensman scarcely paying any mind to the pests as he works.

At issue in many such photographic exhibitions is the seeming presence of the observer overshadowing his subjects; Mr. Nichols’ camera does not. Rather than capture his human and animal subjects glaring back at his camera, Mr. Nichols provides that rare observer’s eye — Heisenbergian in its ability to watch without interfering. It is only this way that he able to capture a tiger mid-leap in India, a lioness tending to her cubs in the Serengeti, or simply watch as the saturnine forces of nature do their crawl in the ever-present battle between creation and ruination — as in “Grand Prismatic Spring at Minus 10 Degrees, Yellowstone National Park,” a 2014 study from the Wyoming wonder.

Mr. Nichols himself has described this camera aesthetic as “not being there.”

“We are delighted to share Michael Nichols’ photography with our audience and to bring his extraordinary images of animals in the wild and their habitats into a provocative dialogue with works from our collection,” Timothy Rub, George D. Widener director and CEO, said in a statement. “It will invite our visitors to consider how artists have understood the

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

ancient and complex relationship between man and nature, and how they have represented the idea of 'wild' throughout the history of art."

The exhibition is co-curated by Peter Barberie, Brodsky Curator of Photographs, and Melissa Harris, who has written a new biography of Mr. Nichols called "A Wild Life."

"Having worked with Nick on his books since the 1990s, and on this biography for the past five years ... it is wonderful to experience his photographs in this larger context," Ms. Harris said in a statement, adding that man's interaction with nature has been a subject of artists for centuries. "It is thrilling to see [Mr. Nichols'] images in dialogue with the selected works from the Philadelphia Museum of Art's brilliant collection — work that speaks so eloquently to the essence of wild." Mr. Nichols, a native of Muscle Shoals, Alabama, worked for National Geographic until 2016. He also founded the LOOK3 Festival of the Photograph in Charlottesville, Virginia.