

Pedro Silmon The Blog

PHOTOGRAPHY | 1968: POP GOES THE NEWS

By Pedro Silmon, January 5, 2018



In February 1968 a prisoner, identified as a Vietcong officer, was presented to police chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan, who shot him dead. Eddie Adams' photograph of the event was voted World Press Photo of the Year and earned him a Pulitzer Prize. The moment of the execution, seen by so many in their newspapers, became the moment Western opinion about the Vietnam war fundamentally shifted.

A leap year, 1968 lasted a day longer than most. But what did another day matter? Brimful with tumultuous events it was one of the most turbulent twelve month periods of the 20th century. New York's Steven Kasher Gallery is marking its 50th anniversary with an exhibition of vintage black and white news agency photographs – one shot on each of its 366 momentous days. Resembling a series of pop art montages that might have been put together by Richard Hamilton or Andy Warhol, and accompanied by a soundtrack of 1968 pop songs, including bubble-gum and anti-war anthems, the images are arranged in tragic and comic, ironic and histrionic, utopian and dystopian juxtaposition.

The previous year had played host to the summer of love, the first successful human to human heart transplant was performed, the Concorde prototype was shown, Elvis Presley married Priscilla and The Beatles released the Sgt Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band album, but Israel's fiercely fought Six-Day War against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, anti-Vietnam War

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

protests around the world, as well as race riots in America that destroyed parts of cities, most notably Detroit, were strong indicators of what was to follow.

1968 began with Alexander Dubcek's election to first secretary of the Czech Communist Party and his initiation of a programme of liberal reforms causing alarm in Moscow. By August Soviet tanks were rolling into Prague to restore Warsaw Pact discipline. Meanwhile, in February, the world got very excited about Elvis and Priscilla becoming parents to Lisa Marie. On April 5, as looters and roving arsonists wreaked havoc on the streets of Washington DC, Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated. Nine weeks later, Senator Robert Kennedy met the same fate. In May student riots had thrown the streets of Paris, which on the 31st teemed with 200,000 workers demonstrating against the government, into violent turmoil. Held in the aftermath, however, the French general election in June was won by Gaullists with 72% of the seats. In Northern Ireland Catholics were demanding equal rights with Protestants and the ensuing civil rights riots ushered in a state of emergency. Released that summer, Salt and Pepper starring Sammy Davis Jr and Peter Lawford as Swinging London nightclub owners was a box office sensation.

As the counterculture era began in the US, on-going Civil Rights Movement, Free Speech Movement and Anti-Vietnam War protests flared up in cities such as Chicago and at the University of California's Berkley campus. In October, two American athletes caused an uproar by giving the Black Power salute during the medal ceremony at the Olympic Games in Mexico City. In November, The Beatles released The Beatles, also known as The White Album – differences over its production and between the group members would lead to the band's break-up. After nearly 11 months, North Korea, which had captured the US spy ship Pueblo in January, released the 83-man crew in December.

Day by Day: 1968 at Steven Kasher Gallery is displayed in calendar format – each group encompassing the images appertaining to one month of the year.