

News Release

First Major Art Museum Exhibition Dedicated to World-Renowned Photographer

Wild: Michael Nichols
June 27–September 17, 2017

The Philadelphia Museum of Art opens *Wild: Michael Nichols*, the first major exhibition of the work of one of the world’s leading photographers. Keenly interested in the conservation of wildlife habitat, Nichols has collaborated with scientists on groundbreaking projects about great apes, elephants, and big cats, as well as the landscapes of Africa’s Congo Basin and the American West. In this in-depth survey, his photographs are presented along with paintings, sculpture, and other media selected from the Museum’s collection to demonstrate the enduring importance of the wild—those parts of our world that remain untouched by humankind—as a subject for artists across time, offering a unique context in which to understand and appreciate Nichols’s remarkable work. The exhibition coincides with the first biography about the artist, *A Wild Life: A Visual Biography of Photographer Michael Nichols*, authored by exhibition co-curator Melissa Harris and published by Aperture.

Timothy Rub, The George D. Widener Director and CEO, said: “We are delighted to share Michael Nichols’s photography with our audiences and to bring his extraordinary images of animals in the wild and their habitats into a provocative dialogue with works from our collection. It will invite our visitors to consider how artists have understood the ancient and complex relationship between man and nature, and how they have represented the idea of the ‘wild’ throughout the history of art.”

Nichols has always approached the photographing of his subjects with great imagination, using innovative camera trap work and other technology in service of his goal: to photograph the wild without disturbing it, a strategy he calls “not being there.” However he captures his subjects, Nichols insists on being transparent about his methods so that viewers may understand the process.

Wild is organized around two themes that have preoccupied Nichols throughout his career and that form the titles for two of his book projects, *Brutal Kinship* (1999) and *The Last Place on Earth* (2005). *Brutal Kinship* explored the relationship between humans and chimpanzees documenting chimps in captivity, in sanctuaries, and in the wild. Nichols and primatologist Jane Goodall argued that our complex dealings with chimps offer a framework for understanding our interactions with wild animals and places. In *The Last Place on Earth*, Nichols documented scientist Mike Fay’s trek across the Congo Basin—the largest untouched area on the planet—recording its rich biodiversity. An image of surfing hippos in Gabon from *The Last Place on Earth* was included in *Time* magazine’s “100 Most Influential Images of All Time” and is among the photographs on view.

Wild extends into other spaces throughout the Museum, and into the Great Stair Hall, where visitors can encounter Nichols’s groundbreaking images of a coastal redwood and a giant sequoia. Reproduced on 60-foot banners—the largest prints the artist has yet made—they constitute portraits of these monumental trees as extraordinary entities.

The exhibition is co-curated by Peter Barberie, the Museum’s Brodsky Curator of Photographs, and Melissa Harris, author of the new biography of the artist. Barberie noted: “Not only are we celebrating Nichols’s extraordinary achievement as a photographer and storyteller, but also because his activism to preserve the wild is at the heart of his work, the juxtapositions of his photographs with artworks from our collection will enable visitors to reflect on humanity’s ever-changing relationship with nature and our relatively new role as its stewards.”

Melissa Harris said: “Having worked with Nick on his books since the 1990s, and on this biography for the past five years—joining him and his team in the Serengeti and Yellowstone, as well as in his hometown of Muscle Shoals, Alabama—it is wonderful to experience his photographs in this larger context. Artists working in all media have often felt compelled to

explore man's often fraught relationship with the natural world. It is thrilling to see his images in dialogue with selected works from the Philadelphia Museum of Art's brilliant collection—work that speak so eloquently to the essence of wild.”

The exhibition coincides with a major new biography about the artist, *A Wild Life: A Visual Biography of Photographer Michael Nichols*, published by Aperture.

Related programs

Lively discussions include an “In the Artists Voice” talk with Nick on Sunday, June 25 at 2:00 p.m., and a public lecture by Dr. Jane Goodall, on Saturday, September 16 at 2:00 p.m.

Art Splash, presented by PNC Arts Alive, is the Museum's popular family program that runs in conjunction with the special exhibition. From June 27 through September 4, it includes gallery explorations, studio activities, and weekend festivals with musical performances themed to nature. Storytime in the galleries, extended hours on Friday evenings, and tours designed for children on the autism spectrum are just some of the new experiences families can find at Art Splash this summer.

On Friday, July 28 from 5:00 p.m. – 8:45 p.m., programming includes a new dance interpretation of Edward Hicks's painting *Peaceable Kingdom* by Orbiter 3, camp stories in the galleries, gallery tours with a park ranger, and music by a band from Muscle Shoals, Alabama, the hometown of Michael Nichols.

Curators

Peter Barberie, The Brodsky Curator of Photographs, Alfred Stieglitz Center at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Melissa Harris, author and independent curator

Location

Dorrance Galleries and Great Stair Hall

Support

Support for *Wild: Michael Nichols* is provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts with additional support from Leslie Miller and Richard Worley, National Geographic, Lyn M. Ross, Lynne and Harold Honickman, Donna D. and Marvin Schwartz, Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Anderson, Barbara B. and Theodore R. Aronson, The Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Exhibition Fund, Mrs. Susannah D. Rouse, Constance and Sankey Williams, an anonymous donor, and other generous donors.

Art Splash is presented by PNC Arts Alive with additional support from The Women's Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and Mari and Peter Shaw.

About Michael Nichols

Photographer Michael Nichols (b.1952) has committed much of his life to revealing and giving voice to some of nature's wildest creatures and landscapes. As an award-winning photographer for *National Geographic*, he has spent months at a time intimately documenting individual animals—primarily big cats, great apes, and elephants--and their families, behavior, and habitats, and doing so in extraordinary locations—from the Congo Basin, to the Serengeti, to the American West. Nichols photographed for many publications including *Geo* and *Rolling Stone*, and was also a member of Magnum Photos for thirteen years before becoming a staff photographer for *National Geographic* magazine in 1996. His first story for *National Geographic* was published in 1991. Since then, he has completed twenty-six stories for the magazine and was named Editor-at-Large in 2008. In 2007, he founded the annual LOOK3 Festival of the Photograph in Charlottesville, Virginia. Nichols's final work for *National Geographic* was made in Yellowstone National Park, and was published as part of its single topic issue devoted to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in the spring of 2016. Before that, in the summer of 2013, the magazine published his groundbreaking photo essay on the Serengeti lion, focusing on two prides, and a dark-maned male named C-Boy. Nichols currently resides in Sugar Hollow, Virginia, with his partner and wife of forty years, Reba Peck.

The first major art museum exhibition devoted to his work opens at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on June 22, 2017. It coincides with, *A Wild Life: A Visual Biography of Photographer Michael Nichols*, published by Aperture.

About *A Wild Life: A Visual Biography of Photographer Michael Nichols*

The first full-length biography by art photography editor, Melissa Harris, tells the story of the world's most renowned photojournalist in the wild. *A Wild Life* charts Michael Nichols's development from a fraught childhood growing up in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, through his hippie youth, his experiences as a member of the world-famous Magnum Photos cooperative, the evolution of his environmental calling and sensibility, and the great adventure photo stories of his life, first for *GEO* and *Rolling Stone*, and then for the past decades, for *National Geographic*. Museum ISBN# 9781597112512. Price \$35.00. It is available at the Museum store or online at philamuseum.org.

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We are Philadelphia's art museum. A landmark building. A world-renowned collection. A place that welcomes everyone. We bring the arts to life, inspiring visitors—through scholarly study and creative play—to discover the spirit of imagination that lies in everyone. We connect people with the arts in rich and varied ways, making the experience of the Museum surprising, lively, and always memorable. We are committed to inviting visitors to see the world—and themselves—
anew through the beauty and expressive power of the arts.

For additional information, contact the Museum's Communications Department by phone at 215-684-7860 or by e-mail at pressroom@philamuseum.org. The Museum is located on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 26th Street. For general information, call 215-763-8100.