

The Roamer



OUR COLUMNIST TAKES A LOOK AT LIFE

Haunting, harrowing photographs of children caught in refugee crisis

Today's page strays from the norm due to several photographs that have just arrived in Roamer's mail box, sent from Belfast's Linen Hall Library.

This page strays from the norm only because Roamer's themes tend to be of a reminiscent and nostalgic nature, punctuated with history, mythology and biography, usually with a local slant.

But excepting their geography, the photographs reproduced here today are very much the norm.

Sadly, they're everyday images from the world around us, vividly and tragically depicted in a newly-launched and exclusive exhibition called War-Torn Children which is on view in the library until mid-April.

The photographs are heartrending, harrowing and haunting, chosen at random from an intensely sad selection of scenes collectively described by the Linen Hall's Rachel Wetherall as "a close-up view of the refugee crises."

Along with the main exhibition there are a number of 'side-shows' on the same tragic theme, and various other complementary events and displays which are outlined in detail on the library's website at www.linenhall.com

Rachel told Roamer "the photographs expose the ugly consequences of war on children. The images are powerful, emotional and deeply disturbing."

We've all seen similar images before - regularly.

And there'll be more tomorrow, and the day after, as we peruse newspapers and websites, or news-hop between our mobile phones, radio sets and television screens.

Roamer sometimes wonders - how many photographs do we need to see before there are no children left to photograph?

The images that are reproduced here today show Zaatar refugee camp in Jordan in 2013 and a Mediterranean rescue operation in 2015.

The former focuses from above on a closely-crowded camp, heaving with over 80,000 homeless Syrians



The Zaatar Refugee Camp, Jordan. Inset, a rescue operation in Lesbos, Greece, in 2015.

According to United Nations estimations, it takes an average of 17 years for refugees fleeing on-going conflicts to return home

packed together in huts and tents in what used to be the Jordanian desert but is now the fourth largest 'city' in Jordan.

Approximately 80 babies are born here every day.

There are 'public services', hospitals, mosques and mod cons and there's even a pizza delivery service within the vast expanse of the camp, but schooling, if available, is often difficult, and although the refugees are safe from the effects of direct conflict, there

are high numbers of cases of sexual violence and rape.

Basic amenities come at hugely inflated prices and very young girls are often married off to secure a dowry to purchase everyday necessities.

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Another Linen Hall photograph reproduced here today is entitled Open Arms.

It is the terrified little baby's arms that are opened outwards, towards a world that regularly sees photographs like this.

Last year a child lay dead on a Turkish beach and on countless millions of our front pages and television screens.

That tiny, lonely, lifeless, migrant toddler was washed up, waterlogged and bedraggled, face-down in the Mediterranean sun-seekers' sand and surf.

Today's toddler-picture

from the Linen Hall exhibition was photographed in Lesbos, Greece, in 2015.

The little, clasped, outstretched hands and tiny fingers are in vivid contrast to the aid worker's strong, muscled arms carefully encircling the anguished baby.

Alongside the photographs are a number of complementary events and displays similarly depicting the devastating effects of war on children.

The panic, fear and terrifying repercussions of conflict on innocent youngsters is also expressed in the Linen Hall in a collection of intricately stitched arpilleras - three dimensional textiles

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- and through other exhibits such as posters, newspaper articles, books, letters and items of clothing.

The colourful and expressive arpilleras and wall hangings, originating in South America and Europe, uncover the raw emotions and consequences endured by children caught in the centre, and on the fringes, of wars, both historical and currently on-going. Themes include genocide, landmines, incarceration, displacement and starvation.

War-Torn Children is curated by Roberta Bacic, a lecturer, researcher and human rights advocate.

Roberta outlined the objectives of the hugely moving exhibition - "The pain and horror suffered by children trapped by wars - not waged by them - empowers us to bear witness and explore through textile language, as well as via photos, posters and other memorabilia, what we can still

do. We want to highlight not only the horrors but also the resilience amidst conflict."

There's substantial local input to the War-Torn Children exhibition too.

Irene MacWilliams, from Northern Ireland, was compelled to create her arpillera entitled 'Children on the Edge' after seeing "a picture in a newspaper of a starving and dying child hunched up on the ground, the vultures in the trees above were waiting for it to die."

And there is a selection of letters on display that were sent by students of Gort Convent primary school, Galway, and Beneavin de la Salle College, Finglas, Dublin, to non-violent peace activist Margareta D'Arcy during her imprisonment in 2014 for anti-war campaigning.

War-Torn Children runs until Saturday 15 April 2017. The exhibition is free to visit.

For full information go to www.linenhall.com