

# MOVING

For 20 years, the Visa pour l'Image international photojournalism festival in France has showcased

# PICTURES

the work of female photographers from all over the world. Katie Breen talks to eight of the best



**"BEAUTY COMPETITIONS BRING GLAMOUR INTO THEIR LIVES"**

Irish-born Deirdre Brennan studied at Dublin's National College of Art and Design. She lives in New York and has worked for *The New York Times* since 2000.

I was photographing a neighbourhood party for a local newspaper when I first met Dotti-Dawn (centre). Her mother told me she was entering her in a beauty contest, and so I asked if I could follow them on their journey to the competition. It was a journey that lasted two years.

This photo was taken in September 2000 as Dotti-Dawn, 6, and her little sister, Jewel-Joy, 2, leave their home in Greenport, New York, to join the neighbourhood parade. This image really captures how these girls live. They come from a working-class background – their father is a truck driver and their mother a bus driver – and the world of beauty competitions brings glamour into their lives.

When these photos were first published, many people were shocked by the feminine caricature imposed on the little girls. For me, these images are strange, but not shocking. As a photographer, I am attracted to marginalised situations, both funny and unusual.

In my work, I like to strip back society and show it as it really is.

HELENE DAVID/COLLECTIF ARGOS; DEIRDRE BRENNAN/REDUX



**"DURING MY VISIT, THE HOUSE ACTUALLY COLLAPSED"**

Award-winning photographer Hélène David is a graduate of France's Louis Lumière College. Her work focuses on the relationship between humans and the environment.

In 2004, I found myself in Shishmaref in Alaska on two separate occasions. I met Maïna on my first visit, and she invited me to eat and talk about her house and childhood with her grandparents. The house she grew up in is now completely ramshackle thanks to the icecaps thawing.

During my second visit, the house actually collapsed, and it was here that I

took this portrait. For us, to lose our home is terrible. For them, it is catastrophic because they're in danger of losing their community. The government wants to rebuild several of the villages in the interior of the land, but this is what locals fear most and it means their community will be torn apart. They want to stay tied to their fishing and hunting community. ▶



"I HEARD THEY CUT OFF THE HANDS OF A 10-YEAR-OLD GIRL"

For more than 30 years Christine Spengler has travelled the world covering wars, primarily from the points of view of women and children. She began her career after travelling through Africa with her fashion photographer brother, when they stumbled upon rebels shooting at French helicopters. Taking her brother's Nikon camera – the same one she uses today – she captured the chaos, and so began her photography career. Her autobiography, *Une Femme Dans La Guerre*, was first published in 1991.

It was late 1996. I had decided to leave for Afghanistan when I heard on the radio that the day the Taliban entered Kabul, they had cut off the hands of a 10-year-old girl because she was wearing nail polish. My heart stopped. Soon afterwards, armed with accreditation from an art magazine, I arrived in Kabul to take pictures from the sidelines. Kabul was ghostly; women were no longer allowed outside, and the Taliban had ordered all windows to be painted black so women could not see the sky or look at their surroundings.

Completely covered up, I travelled through Taliban country. At Herat, I learnt from the director of World Medicine that 200 women were coming the next day to have their children vaccinated. The hospital was the only place the Taliban could not enter, so I was able to photograph several "Afghan Madonnas", holding their swaddled babies as if to say, "Here embodies hope and life."



"I BELIEVE IT'S IMPORTANT TO SHOW FEMALE CIRCUMCISION"

Award-winning US photographer Ami Vitale is famous for not just reporting stories, but living them. In 2001, she spent six months in Guinea-Bissau, western Africa, and has also lived in Kashmir, India, where her photos depict daily life in a region torn apart by 60 years of conflict.

This picture, taken in 2001, shows a young girl, Awa Blade, crying a few hours after being circumcised. Her face is covered in dust and so her tears have left a clear trail across her face. When I took this photo I was living in a small village

among the Fulani people and spent my days with the women and children.

I was fascinated by the strength of these people; they opened my eyes to Africa's beauty and greatness, something which few people talk about. Yet at the same time they also showed me the hardship and sadness of their lives.

I believe it's important to document the horrors of female circumcision, and I'm convinced the best way to eradicate it is through giving these girls an education. That way, change should come from the community itself – not be imposed from outside. In Guinea-Bissau, village leaders have denounced female circumcision, but the government has not outlawed it – 2000 are still circumcised every year. ►



AMI VITALE; CHRISTINE SPENGLER



**"I WANT TO FIGHT AGAINST THE MARRIAGE OF YOUNG GIRLS"**

US photographer Stephanie Sinclair started her career on the *Chicago Tribune*, where she worked for five years. After covering the war in Iraq, she left her job and moved to the war-torn country. She has won numerous awards, including the World Press Photo in 2004 for her work on women's self-immolation in Afghanistan. Her work on child brides has been published in more than 30 countries, and she received the UNICEF Photo of the Year award in 2007 for this portrait.

I did a series on Afghan women who set themselves on fire and noticed that many of the women trying to commit suicide in this way had been married at a very young age, sometimes even before puberty.

Here you can see Faiz Mohammed, 40, and Ghulam Haider, 11, on their engagement day in 2006. Ghulam had wanted to become a teacher. She didn't talk much about her marriage, except to tell me: "I am too sad."

I want to continue the fight against the marriage of young girls. The practice exists in more than 50 countries and the consequences include depression and complications in pregnancy.

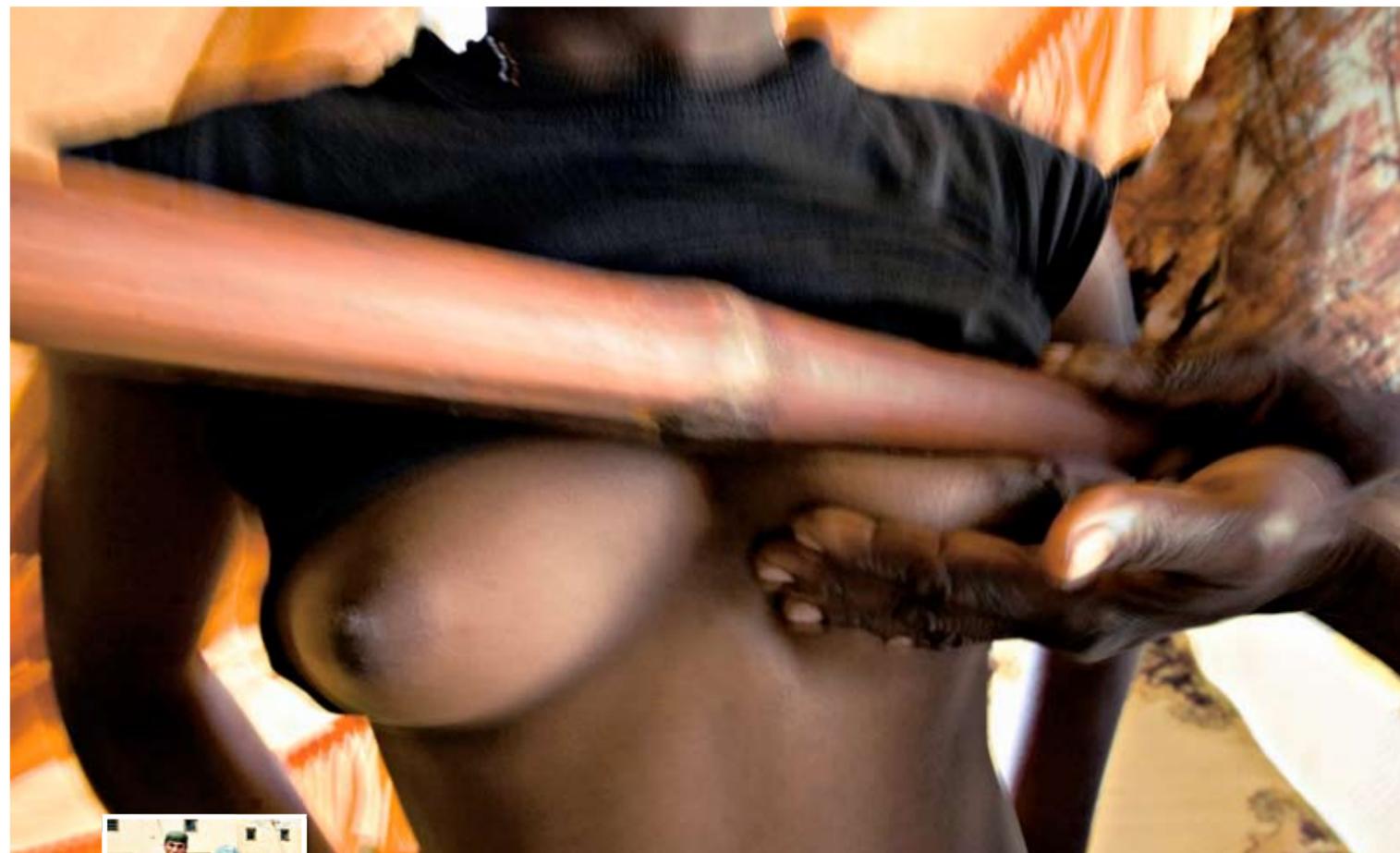


**"I'VE SEEN WOMEN ON THE GROUND, BEATEN AND IN TEARS"**

France's Lizzie Sadin is renowned for tackling powerful subjects. She won the Visa d'Or feature award in 2007 for her work on child prisoners around the world.

In 1996, few people spoke about abused women. I worked for three years on this issue before I could capture any images. Finally, the police and emergency service commission in France agreed to help. I spent hours with police and shared their tension as they arrived at the scenes of abuse. I have seen women on the ground, beaten and in tears; men frothing at the mouth and children panicked, and yet so tender with their mothers.

In this picture you can see a young boy trying to console his mother. This series of photos has won several prizes. Recently, they were exhibited in the city of Basse-Terre on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. After that, I was asked to visit a prison to talk to men convicted of violent crimes. At the end, they said to me: "What you have done here, you need to do again ... People must understand why they are violent towards women." It's because of moments like that I do this job.



**"THE WOMAN SUFFERS FOR MEN'S BEHAVIOUR"**

French photographer Véronique de Viguerie studied law, then photography in the UK, before becoming a freelance photojournalist in 2004. She first travelled to Afghanistan in 2003 and went to live there in 2004. She fell under the country's spell, and her photos of both the countryside and the Taliban have been seen around the world. This shot was taken in Cameroon, west Africa.

What's the point of this age-old practice? Pubescent girls' breasts are flattened and crushed to protect them against men's sexual desire. It is always the same story: it's the woman who suffers because of men's behaviour. There are several ways of destroying the breasts. In this photo, a woman flattens a girl's breast with a couscous branch. This practice happens in Cameroon and has long been kept a secret between mothers and daughters.

People often say about my pictures: "It's obvious these photos have been taken by a woman." And it's true that I often treat female issues that many male photographers wouldn't be able to tackle.



**"GIRLS GET HIGH BY STARVING THEMSELVES"**

Lauren Greenfield is a US photographer and documentary filmmaker. Her feature-length reportage, *Thin*, was shot in 2006 at an eating disorders treatment centre in Florida. It has had a huge international impact. Greenfield has won numerous awards for her work.

Ata was in the middle of her seventh treatment, but was finally getting better

and had reached 43 kilograms for her 32nd birthday. When this picture was taken we were at the beach, where Ata hadn't been for several years. However, she was very nervous, as it was torture for her to be in a swimsuit.

For anorexics, clothes are like armour; they protect them. So

she quickly put her jeans back on and we walked a little way along the beach before returning to the centre.

This photograph was very intense for me. We were making *Thin* at the time, so I had to spend several months in the clinic where they treated Ata and, consequently, formed very strong bonds with the women there.

Anorexia is a serious mental illness that does not just affect young girls; it is an addiction in the same way drugs are. Girls get high by starving themselves. ■