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The Enclave gives forgotten war a hint of visibility



[Nick Galvin](#)

Journalist

A startling take on the Congo conflict uses a 'weird' film, writes Nick Galvin.



Out of Africa: *Safe from Harm*, North Kivu, eastern Congo, 2012. Photo: *Supplied*

More than 5.4 million people have died in the conflict and humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998. Yet despite a death toll to rival that of the Holocaust, this unimaginable misery and horror remains all but invisible to Western eyes.

So when Irish photographer Richard Mosse came across a soon-to-be discontinued infra-red film that, in effect, makes visible the invisible, it seemed a natural medium to use in the country.

"I went there on my own on a whim with this weird film," he says of what was to be the first of many trips into the war zone. "The film was originally developed to reveal enemy camouflage back in World War II. I was fascinated by this ability to render the invisible.



Photographer Richard Mosse. *Photo: Dean Sewell*

"Congo is one of those conflicts that doesn't have enough visibility."

With its extra sensitivity to green, the film displays the verdant countryside of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the soldiers and their victims in a surreal and deeply unsettling pink.

For four years, Mosse revisited the eastern part of Congo, infiltrating many of the groups in the volatile conflict at considerable personal risk. On one occasion in 2012, he was caught in no man's land between the lines of the national army and the M23 rebel group when "all hell broke loose".

"Everyone started firing at each other with tanks on one side and rocket launchers on the other, and mortars," he says. "We got under a little piece of concrete. It lasted about 14 hours and we thought we'd get killed."

But he insists this is not a macho story about the personal risks he takes. "I can get out of most situations and go across the border and get in a feekin' plane and have my gin and tonic but the Congolese can't," he says. Mosse believes the world has largely closed its eyes to the fighting because the conflict is so "convoluted, complicated and opaque".

"You have 30 different armed groups fighting in this power vacuum in a near state of anarchy," he says. "The national army itself is totally corrupt and they are also extorting, raping and killing. It's not a war of black and white. It's not like victor and victim. It's not an easy soundbite for the media to convey.

"I've been going there for four years and think I know less now than when I started."

The extraordinary and unsettling video installation Mosse has produced from his many hours of footage is called *The Enclave*. Six large screens are dotted around a blacked-out room showing scenes from the Congo - sometimes graphic, sometimes heartbreakingly beautiful - all rendered in that incongruous pink and accompanied by a soundscape from 11 hidden speakers.

"I want people to be seduced aesthetically," he says.

"I want them to really enjoy it and feel overwhelmed with aesthetic sensation and then I want them immediately to feel angry for being seduced by the piece, for being in a place where they feel wonderful about people's suffering.

"I'm trying to activate the viewer. I don't want to spoonfeed them, saying 'You must think this or you should think that'.

"Most war photography says, 'Here's the viewpoint that you should take'. I'm not trying to offer a didactic approach where there is only one reasoning."

He also leaves open to the viewer what the pink might "mean".

The Enclave will be at Galleries UNSW in Paddington until June 7.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/the-enclave-gives-forgotten-war-a-hint-of-visibility-20140318-3507h.html#ixzz2wUeIQFrL>