



Michael Semak - Clip 13

Social Change

I was naïve. I'm still naïve in many respects, but. In those days, I actually thought my pictures would make a difference, as Eugene Smith thought his pictures, if he took enough gruesome pictures, he would make mankind - or humankind as they would say now, which I think is better - would stop wars. And unfortunately, pictures don't stop wars. Some pictures can rouse people that they will contribute funding to starving nations, or nations at war. So I do acknowledge pictures can make a difference. I'm sure the six o'clock news in America, looking at the Vietnam war, helped shorten the war. Of course having America lose so many troops, I think was the main reason why they left Vietnam. But pictures can play a decisive role. So I actually thought if I was photographing say, for example, black people in Brooklyn, that the middle class, white audience, who would see these pictures, they would be a little more understanding of people of different, races of different skin colouring. I would make them a little more aware, hopefully "educate" them, in quotes. But looking back now, I guess I'm getting more cynical in my old age. I see it doesn't work like that. Life doesn't work like that.

So now I look at life differently. If I'm looking at a man, or a woman, or a child, it's not with the intent that it's going to make a social change, or

a political change, or an economic change. It's just that it has an intrinsic value. And for someone, it could maybe reveal something that they weren't aware of, or it gives them a moment of peace, or a moment of enjoyment, or a moment of puzzlement. At least gets them thinking about whatever I'm depicting. So that's why I do it.

