

DAZED



Richard Mosse via tumblr

Ten artworks which helped humanity in times of crisis

In times of deep human struggle, is art our only way forward? Richard Mosse, Ai Weiwei, Douglas Emory, and more, say it is

Crisis is often defined as a time when a difficult or important decision must be made. It's a word which has been used across all of time, as history repeats itself with humanitarian, social, political, and environmental crises plaguing the world daily. But in moments of intense difficulty, how can enough clarity be sought in order to make decisions that will push human suffering beyond crisis and into progression?

For many people searching desperately for a way out, art comes as a strong catalyst for change. In the face of austerity, art has the power to challenge hostility and alleviate the pain, as much as it can produce alternative realities for escapism and become a voice for those who go unheard.

In light of the [Liverpool Biennale 2018](#) theme, *Beautiful world, where are you?* where artists and audiences are invited to reflect art at the intersection of a world of social, political and economic turmoil, here are ten times art proved its role in crisis:

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: GORDON PARKS, "BOY AND JUNE BUG", 1963

Photographer [Gordon Parks](#) was also a civil rights artist who championed the realism of the movement. His photographs, from 1942-78, exposed the stark reality of life in the era, from peaceful moments of black escapism to lensing the degradation of coloured segregation. Parks' "Boy and a June bug" was taken in the year that changed the course of the movement – 1963 – when Martin Luther King delivered his history-making "I Have a Dream" speech. In this sense, the image is not only a zeitgeist for the change in direction of the movement, but within it, we see so much symbolism about the way in which Park's work projected black life forward. We see a young boy, a metaphor for those who will become the future of black America, taking a moment for himself. In his calmness, viewers too get to escape the commonly violent, degrading images of black people published in mainstream media at the time. Here is a black boy just living, breathing and enjoying life in the way all humans should be able to.

It's within Parks' photos that we see the power images have in crossing cultural and linguistic barriers to expose a crisis of human suffering. We can all understand and interpret images, no matter what language we speak, and the way Park's images traverse racial barriers to move us is a bold testament to this.



"Boy and June Bug", Fort Scott, Kansas, 1963 Photography Gordon Parks, courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

THE CONGO CONFLICT: RICHARD MOSSE, *INFRA*, 2011

Since 1998, the Democratic Republic of Congo has been victim to one of the world's largest and longest humanitarian crises that has killed 5.4 million people. And throughout all of the destruction, Congo's face in the media has been overshadowed by endless images of conflict, meaning the humanity at the core of the suffering has forever been suffocated by war. This was until the works of Irish photographer Richard Mosse surfaced in 2011.

Mosse's *Infra* series uses surrealism to turn perceptions of Congo upside down by featuring the landscapes and people of Congo in unexpected colours. Using a type of film designed by the U.S military in the 1940s for camouflage detection, the landscapes appear as if through a psychedelic lense that turns shades of lush green into strong pinks and vibrant reds. Mosse's exacerbation of colour alarms viewers about the harrowing urgency of the crisis at hand just as much as it's surrealism turns the voyeur's eye away from the harsh canonisation of war, allowing viewers to resonate with the human suffering at the core of Congo. In 2013, Mosse took the project further and turned it into a short video, *Enclave*, to which

he stated to *CNN* takes “two counter-worlds into collision: art's potential to represent narratives so painful that they exist beyond language, and photography's capacity to document specific tragedies and communicate them to the world.”



“Higher Ground”, 2012 Richard Mosse Via Pinterest