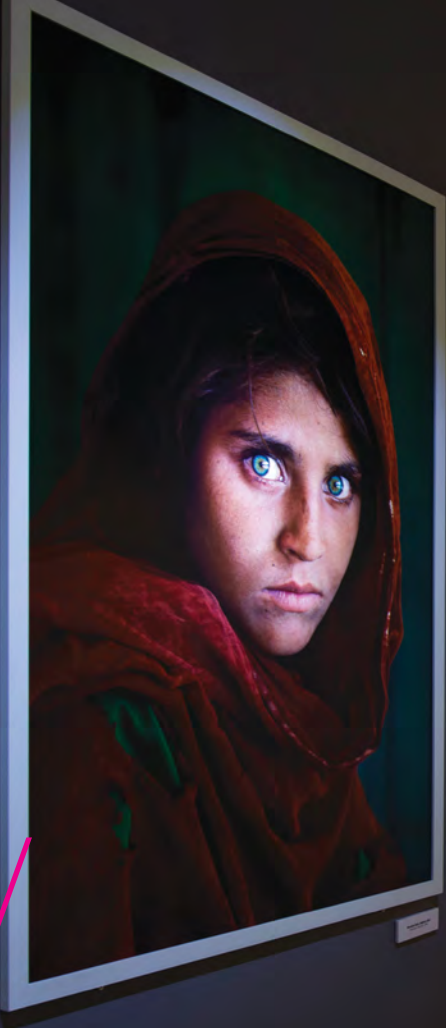


# here & now

NEWS + TRENDS + DISCOVERIES



## The Afghan Girl

December 1984 marked the 40th year of the Soviet-Afghan War, a war that had forced millions of Afghans to flee their homes. That was the year when Steve McCurry, an American photojournalist, was stationed at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to cover the crisis.

One morning, as he was walking among the sea of tents near Peshawar, Pakistan, McCurry heard children's voices and laughter coming from a large tent. Looking inside, he found out that it was a conventional elementary school for girls. The teacher invited him to see the classroom, and that was when he noticed the young girl. "I saw this little girl off to a corner, who was remarkable. A beautiful little girl. But she had this sort of a haunted look about her, which was really beautiful. And I knew instantly that this was going to be an amazing portrait."

He started out by photographing other students. In conversations, a combative atmosphere in the morning got. Eventually, the young girl agreed to be photographed. At that she was shy and hid her hands to cover her face. Then the teacher asked her to put her hands down for the world to see her face and know her story.

"So she dropped her hands. The light was right. And she just looked directly into my eye. I got this very concentrated, focused, intense look on her face." After a few images were taken, she left to join her friends, not knowing that her portrait would become world-famous.

The picture, titled Afghan Girl, appeared on the cover of the June 1985 National Geographic magazine and became the most recognized photograph in the history of the magazine.



CULTURE

## Perfect Exposure

House of Lucie, an ambitious new gallery in Bangkok, builds a home for world-class photographers.

BY RON GLUCKMAN. PHOTOGRAPHED BY SUPACHAT VETCHAMALEENONT.

Afghan Girl on display at House of Lucie.





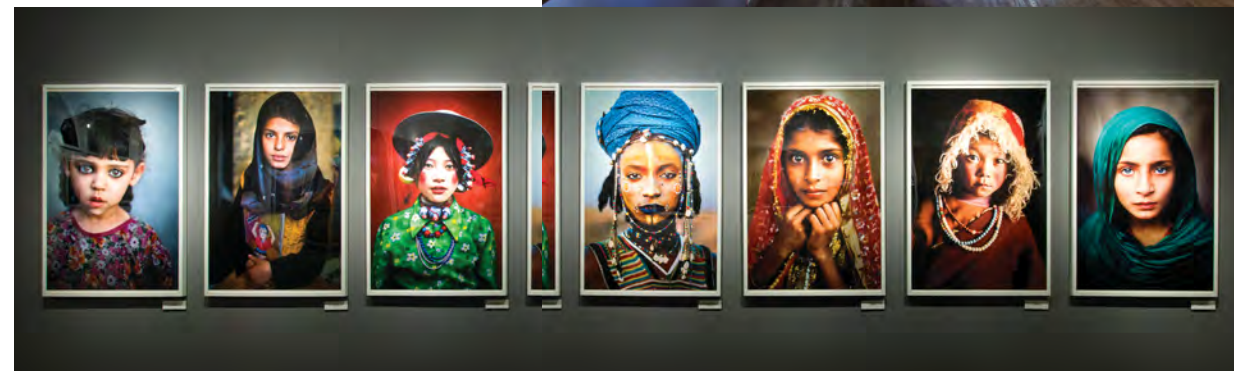
FROM TOP: *Camels, Gulf War, Kuwait*, by McCurry; Farmani (left) and McCurry at the gallery opening; *Woman in a Canary Burqa*; a wall of black-and-white prints.

**CHAMPAGNE FLOWED** as photography fans packed one of the most anticipated openings of the Bangkok art scene. Like many of the partygoers, I was hovering around *Afghan Girl*, a photo made famous as the cover of *National Geographic* in June 1985 and one of the most enduring images of all time.

This caliber of show was a rarity in Bangkok, but may soon be the norm with publisher and photophile Hossein Farmani's opening of House of Lucie, in Ekkamai. Born in Iran, Farmani migrated to the United States for university, where he studied photography and eventually combined his love of photos and publishing by launching the magazines *VUE* and *FotoFolio*.

Farmani relocated to Bangkok in 2012, married a Thai lawyer and opened Rooftop Gallery, which was a huge departure from his fine-art photography Farmani Gallery in New York and Los Angeles. The space hosted radical shows that blended music, fashion and photos atop a run-down shophouse in Thonglor. Though Rooftop garnered a lot of buzz (even unadvertised shows drew crowds that regularly snaked down the stairs), the place closed in 2015 when the lease ended and the building was sold. Farmani decided for his next Bangkok venture he'd return to his lifelong passion: pure photography.

Spread across four renovated shophouses, the stark white gallery offers clean lines and tidy presentations, in which Farmani still continues to push the artistic envelope. When I attended the



FROM TOP: Inside House of Lucie; *Shaolin Monks Training*. MIDDLE: A few of the arresting portraits displayed in "A Lifetime of Work."

opening in November, the stunning space was showing "A Lifetime of Work," a comprehensive career retrospective of photographer Steve McCurry, renowned for arresting portraits, like *Afghan Girl*. The exhibit abounded with photographs from Tibet, Burma, Sri Lanka and India. "I love working in Asia," said McCurry, 66, who first visited in 1978 and was smitten. "I've been back pretty much every year since then. I never tire of it."

This is among the largest shows ever mounted by McCurry, featuring more than 180 photographs, not only his evocative portraits from around Asia, but also work dating back to his days starting out with newspapers and even the rare celebrity shot of Robert de Niro.

It was particularly moving to see so many images up close, the huge, haunting eyes of his subjects locking upon onlookers. On exhibit at House of Lucie through March 14, the

McCurry show will next travel to Chiang Mai, and possibly Cambodia and other parts of Asia.

Don't visit House of Lucie with the hope of coming home with a McCurry original: nothing is for sale. It isn't a commercial venture, but more of a non-profit center for the arts. "This is really a pure gallery, devoted to photography and creativity," Farmani said of the three-level space. "I want to show the best photographers in the world, from Thailand and around Asia." Besides the main area that can be configured to serve a variety of shows at the same time, there are meeting rooms upstairs and a roof that will be used for open-air exhibitions and projections, like at Rooftop Gallery. There is also space for printing and workshops. "My goal is to really create a photography center here in Bangkok," Farmani said. "This is a place where local photographers can work, study and

congregate." The entire project is a prototype for a group of non-profit galleries and photography centers that Farmani is working to open around the region, and he's eyeing Manila and Chengdu as the next prime candidates.

House of Lucie will exhibit other international superstars of photography, including winners of the Lucie Awards. Farmani intends to tap talent in a range of categories from classic reportage to portraiture, commercial work and fine arts. The next powerhouse show will feature 140 Lucie honorees, including Bruce Davidson, Sarah Moon and Sebastião Salgado. Gallery-goers should expect a few treats from Farmani's vast personal collection as well, which is among the world's largest, with more than 30,000 prints.

But Farmani's photo reserve isn't the only thing that House of Lucie is airing out. The inaugural exhibit



arrives on the back of a recent controversy with the revelation that some of McCurry's images had been graphically altered. McCurry has countered that his role had changed over the years from strict reportage to "visual storytelling," meaning that touching up the photos was fair game. Farmani, a longtime friend of McCurry's, embraced the controversy. "The whole point of photography, and art, is to provoke discussion, and art, is to provoke discussion," he said. "I want people to see this exhibit and have a conversation." ☘

*House of Lucie*, 1 Ekkamai Soi 8, Sukhumvit 63, Bangkok; [luciefoundation.org/house-of-lucie-bangkok](http://luciefoundation.org/house-of-lucie-bangkok); admission is free.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF HOUSE OF LUCIE (3)

FAR RIGHT: COURTESY OF HOUSE OF LUCIE