

[美] 艾略特·厄威特 著
程 墨 译

ELLIOTT ERWITT

艾略特·厄威特 个人精选

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ELLIOTT ERWITT; PERSONAL BEST

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艾略特·厄威特的照片（还有他的生活）远比它们表面上看起来的复杂。同样，这样一本冠以《个人精选》之名的画册，虽然在表情达意上看起来是简单、直接的，但事实上并非如此。

在厄威特的摄影词典里，“个人”意味着虽然他是一名以拍照为生的职业摄影师，但这里所说的照片是他明确为自己而拍的。不管是青少年时期在好莱坞公关公司的暗房里工作（“我曾在一个星期里冲印了25000张英格丽·褒曼的照片！”），还是后来来到纽约加入著名的马格南图片社，并为世界500强公司拍摄年报照片，为广告公司拍摄6位数的天价广告照片，或是为《巴黎竞赛》杂志拍摄突发新闻照片，厄威特总能在职业地完成他人委托的任务之余找到时间，以一名业余摄影师的身份来拍自己的照片。对他来说，“业余”一词一点也没有贬义的成分，这个词的拉丁词根 amo（意为“爱”）即是例证。这是基于爱好的摄影，或者，就像厄威特也许会说的，这是自找麻烦的摄影。

许多年前，为了写一篇艾略特·厄威特的小传，我请他的导师之一，亨利·卡蒂埃-布勒松谈谈厄威特的双重性。布勒松这样说道：“在我看来，艾略特创造了奇迹，他一方面能带着镣铐拍摄一大堆商业照片，另一方面却仍能忙里偷闲，拍出极具个人特点的、幽默的照片。”这段来自摄影偶像（就像施蒂格利茨之于布勒松）的评语并不适用于那些可以为任何人拍照，却从不为自己拍照的摄影师。

这本画册几乎不收录商业作品，书中的绝大部分作品都是厄威特在从事商业摄影工作的间隙自发拍摄的（通常是用经典的徕卡旁轴取景照相机拍摄的黑白照片）。现在，年届78岁的厄威特，在他这样干了60年之后，编选了他最得意的作品。

我第一次遇见厄威特是在1970年，当时他正在华盛顿的史密森尼学会举办摄影展，为了给《生活》杂志写一篇关于该展览的评论，我去看了这场展览。我被厄威特敏捷的思维（反应速度更是有过之而无不及）吸引住了，他能在世界的各个平凡角落里捕捉到巧妙的并置画面，从嘲讽的（见本书第44页）到滑稽的（见本书第165页），不一而足。这就是厄威特，一个讽世者。

在看了厄威特后期的一些作品后，另一些评论家会指出，也许除了晚年的罗伯特·杜瓦诺之外，20世纪没有一位摄影师像厄威特这样有幽默感；也就是说，厄威特能够从人类的生存境况中发现那些引人啼笑皆非或哄堂大笑的事物。这就是厄威特，一个智者。

接下来就是狗了。厄威特知道观众疼爱弱者，因此，对狗这一人类最好的朋友，厄威特拍摄了无数照片，这些年来，这些照片足以用来出版5本专题性的画册。P. G. 沃德豪斯对此曾如此评论：“他作品里的拍摄对象没有一个是不会令人为之心软的……而且也没有令人厌恶的阶层差别。纯种马与杂种狗，它们都在一起。”这就是厄威特，一个拍狗者。

最常被忽视的则是那些抓拍的、世界级的杂志新闻摄影作品，其中包括发生在尼基塔·赫鲁晓夫与理查德·尼克松之间的那场臭名昭著的“厨房辩论”。尼克松后来在1960年的总统选举中还使用（未经厄威特许可）了这张照片来证明他对共产主义的强硬立场。（据厄威特的说法，这场所谓的辩论堪称“荒谬”，两人都吹嘘着各自国家的财富与力量，越说越激动。尽管两人的翻译官竭力想让言辞委婉，但作为俄国移

民的后代，厄威特是听得懂双方所说的话的。“尼克松一度讲得非常过分，我想我听到赫鲁晓夫用俄语说了一句‘你他妈见鬼去吧’。”）

接着再转到风起云涌的1966年，当时的法国总统夏尔·戴高乐让北约盟友十分紧张。戴高乐去苏联访问时，厄威特是随行记者，他趁人不注意潜入了莫斯科的一间密室，在那里拍到了戴高乐正在与苏联领导层进行非正式的会面。

这就是厄威特，一个隐身的内幕知情者。

然而，在过去的10年中，从厄威特的档案库中发掘出来的更多照片却应该归为社会纪实摄影。以拍摄这类作品而闻名的是罗伯特·弗兰克，以及人们通常所说的纽约学派，其中包括威廉·克莱因、路易斯·法瑞尔和海伦·莱维特。（黛安·阿巴斯、李·弗里德兰德和加里·威诺格兰德是该学派的下一代代表人物。）

在20世纪90年代，厄威特开始更多地展示他那些拍摄于20世纪40年代末50年代初的作品，其中许多作品自从被拍摄后就一直未得到发表。那是一个艺术摄影群星闪耀的时期，而这些作品让厄威特在其中占有一席之地。它们展现出对当时通行的摄影规则（完美的曝光、完整的影调范围、锐利的对焦、传统的构图）的有意突破，同时也展现出一种美国式的“严厉之爱”，并笼罩在一种黑色电影（对厄威特这一代摄影师影响深远）般的氛围中。而且，就像他同时代的摄影师一样，厄威特也在不自觉地努力创造一种刻意的独有风格。本书收集了许多这类作品，其中大部分从未发表过。

厄威特是如此全面，他在许多方面都取得了耀眼的成就，但为什么直到现在，仍然很少有人能看到这一点？这要归因于他在商业上取得的成功。他不仅是一位成功的摄影师，而且还是一位有着20余年从业经验的纪录片导演，你可以在有线电视网HBO上发现他在这一领域的成就。正是这些遮蔽了我们对他的认识。施蒂格利茨（和布勒松）对商业成功的蔑视仍然萦绕于某些艺术机构的思维中，但后者却忽视了一个事实，那就是这两位大师都属于无须考虑生计的富有阶层，所以他们能够作出这样的声明。（而且他们都无须养育6名子女！）

然而厄威特没有这么幸运，他是一对背井离乡的俄国夫妇的唯一的儿子。他生于巴黎，长于米兰，在法国沦陷前搭上了最后一班船逃离欧洲，在11岁时来到了纽约。然后，他们又到了加利福尼亚，他的父母在这里分手并离开，留下了厄威特孤身一人，此时他16岁。一个少年经过了俄罗斯、意大利、法国和纽约城的文化熏陶，然后上了好莱坞中学，和朋友们租住在平房中，这简直就是一部情景喜剧的剧情。

厄威特度过了这些艰难的岁月，这些人生经历使他成为了一个不同寻常的观察者，他对他人的人生浮沉有着极为敏锐的观察，而当必要时，他也可以魅力十足，让人不由得放下戒备。（本书卷首照片即是一例，厄威特作为一名帅气的美军士兵，正与一群女孩站在女洗手间外面。）因此，厄威特成为20世纪摄影史上最敏锐、最具洞察力、最特立独行的摄影师之一，这有什么好奇怪的呢？

肖恩·卡拉汉

Elliott Erwitt's photographs (as well as his life) are more complicated than they seem. Likewise, a book of his pictures called *Personal Best* would appear to be a simple, straightforward expression. Not so.

In Erwitt's photographic lexicon, "personal" means pictures he has been determinedly making for himself while earning a living as a working photographer. Whether, as a teenager, in the lab of a Hollywood publicity mill ("One week I washed and dried 25,000 Ingrid Bergmans!") or, later in New York, as a member of the distinguished photo co-op Magnum shooting annual reports of Fortune 500 companies, six-figure advertising campaigns for Madison Avenue or breaking news for *Paris Match*, Erwitt has been working professionally for others yet still finding time to be an amateur photographer for himself. For him, "amateur" is hardly pejorative; he points to the Latin root of the word *amo* (to love). This is photography for the love of it. Or, as he might say, photography made difficult.

For a profile on Erwitt many years ago I asked one of his mentors, Henri Cartier-Bresson, to comment on this duality and he said, "Elliott has to my mind achieved a miracle working on a chain-gang of commercial campaigns and still offering a bouquet of stolen photos with a flavor, a smile from his deeper self." This, from an icon who, like Stieglitz before him, could not reconcile a photographer working for anybody but himself.

Few of the commercial works are included here. Most of the pictures in this volume Erwitt shot for himself (usually with a classic Leica rangefinder and in black and white) in between commercial assignments. And now, at 78, after some 60 years of doing so, he has compiled his best.

I first encountered Erwitt in a 1970 exhibit at the Smithsonian in Washington which I reviewed for *Life*. I was struck by a quick mind—and even quicker reflexes—that could capture juxtapositions that ranged from the sardonic (page 44) to the whimsical (page 165) all found in the commonplace across the globe. That was Erwitt the ironist.

Later photographs would inspire other critics to point out that, with the possible exception of the late Robert Doisneau, no 20th Century photographer had a sense of humor; i.e., Erwitt saw things in the human condition that evoked everything from wry smiles to outright guffaws. Erwitt, the wit.

Then there are the canines. Knowing an audience's affection for an underdog, he has made scores of photographs—enough to sustain five monographs over the years—of man's best friend. Writing about them P.G. Wodehouse said, "There's not a sitter in his gallery who does not melt the heart...and no beastly class distinctions, either. Thoroughbreds and mutts, they are all there." Erwitt, the shooter of dogs.

Most often overlooked is the candid, world class magazine photojournalism that includes the infamous "kitchen debate" between Nikita Khrushchev and Richard Nixon that Nixon later used (without Erwitt's permission) in the 1960 presidential election campaign to support his platform of being strong on Communism. (The level of the so-called debate was "ridiculous" according to Erwitt, with each man bragging, with increasing vehemence, about their country's wealth and power. As the son of Russian émigrés, Erwitt understood what both men were saying despite the best efforts of their translators to be diplomatic. "At one point Nixon was getting so irritating I thought I heard Khrushchev say in Russian, 'Go

fuck my grandmother.”)

Then, in 1966 during a testy period when Charles DeGaulle was making his NATO allies nervous, Erwitt covered the French president's trip to the Soviet Union and was able to slip unnoticed into a back room in Moscow where DeGaulle was seen informally with the Soviet leadership.

Erwitt, the invisible insider.

In the past decade, however, there have emerged from Erwitt's archive many more pictures that might be defined as social realist documentary photography of the kind most famously attributed to Robert Frank but also of the so-called New York School of photography that included, among others, William Klein, Louis Faurer and Helen Levitt. (Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand would emerge as the next generation in this line.)

In the 1990s Erwitt was increasingly showing images—many that hadn't been shown publicly since they were created in the late 1940s and early 50s—that put him squarely in the firmament of this revered period of fine art photography. They demonstrate a conscious breaking of the rules for the then-contemporary photographic standards—perfect exposure, full tonal range, sharp focus, traditional composition—coupled with an existential “tough love” treatment of America, cloaked in the aura of the *film noir* motion pictures of the period that hung over this generation of photographers. And, like his peers of that time, there is the unselfconscious striking out to create a deliberate style or signature of his own. *Personal Best* gathers together many of those and many more that have never been published.

So what is it that has allowed Erwitt to achieve such prominence in so many ways that few of us have seen, until now, as a whole? Clouding the picture is his commercial success as not only a photographer but, for some twenty years, a documentary filmmaker whose efforts could be found on the cable television network HBO. The stigma of Stieglitz (and Cartier-Bresson) regarding commercial success still haunts parts of the art establishment which ignores the fact that both men were independently wealthy so they could afford to make such pronouncements. (They also didn't have six children!)

Erwitt, however, the only child of displaced Russians, was not so fortunate. He found himself in New York at the age of 11 after being born in Paris, raised in Milan and fleeing Europe on the last boat out of free France. Then, at 16, he was on his own in Los Angeles where his parents had decamped, then split up and took off. There must be a TV sitcom in the story of a teenager steeped in the cultures of Russia, Italy, France and New York City attending Hollywood High and living in a rented bungalow with friends.

Erwitt survived all that and has used the experience to become an uncanny observer of others, highly sensitive to the vicissitudes of life and, when necessary, utterly charming and disarming. (Witness him as the handsome young GI in 1951 working the line of young mädchen outside a ladies room (see frontispiece). So is it any wonder that he developed into one of the most acute, perceptive and individualistic eyes in 20th century photography?

Sean Callahan









