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THE AFTERMATH PROJECT ANNOUNCES
2009 GRANT WINNERS AND FINALISTS

Dec 15, 2008 – The Aftermath Project is pleased to announce the winners of its 2009 grants:

\$25,000 grant: **Asim Rafiqui** (Sweden/US), for his project, “The Idea of India: Religious and Cultural Pluralism as Resistance to Sectarian Conflict,” an exploration of the aftermath of religious conflict in India through documenting pluralist landscapes, shared sacred sites, shared cultural traditions and efforts at reconciliation within divided communities.

\$15,000 grant: **Louie Palu** (Canada), for his project, “Home Front,” which explores and compares the experiences of American Vietnam War veterans, and returning soldiers from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Palu’s project focuses on the emotional and psychological issues faced by soldiers who return from war and the long-term effects they deal with as they try to reintegrate into their families and society.

Due to the exceptionally strong number of applications among the 142 submissions, *six* finalists have been named this year, instead of the usual number of three. In alphabetical order, they are:

Rodrigo Abd (Guatemala) – “Reclaiming the dead: mass graves in Guatemala, a story only partially told”

Andrea Bruce (US) – “Unseen Iraq”

David Monteleone (Italy) – “Russian Caucasus”

Saiful Huq Omi (Bangladesh) – “The Disowned and the Denied: the Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh”

Donald Weber (Canda) – “Firewalk: Life with Cluster Bombs in South Lebanon”

Ami Vitale (US) – “Kashmir: Lifting the Veil”

This year’s awards were judged by Darius Himes of Radius Books; photographer Maggie Steber and photographer/director of the Aftermath Project Sara Terry. (See below for judges’ comments about the grant winners and the competition).

Darius Himes on \$25,000 grant winner Asim Rafiqui and his project "The Idea of India: Religious and Cultural Pluralism as Resistance to Sectarian Conflict":

“When freedom of conscience, liberty of thought and right of speech are upheld within a society, when each person, according to their own manner of worship, is allowed to express their beliefs, development and growth are not only the norm, but inevitable. The subcontinent of India has, for countless generations, provided humanity with an example of a pluralistic and deeply religious society that has dis-allowed the diversity of religious sentiments from hindering its many differing peoples from developing deep bonds of affection, tolerance, and service to each other.

This was the norm until the bankrupt nationalistic philosophies of the twentieth century were allowed to run amok amidst the generality of the worlds' populations. Ultra-nationalism and its close ideological cousin, tribalism, are both nothing more than racist tendencies masquerading as points of falsely-placed pride.

When religious sentiments tied to patriotism are stirred-up and the fires of religious hatred and intolerance are fanned to flame, more often than not by the clergy, the baser tendencies in man flourish. This is especially deplorable when religion is involved, for the fundamental purpose, as attested by the scriptures of all the world's great religious systems, is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, as well as foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men.

Asim Rafiqui's work as a photographer aims to recover this lost sense of religious pluralism and tolerance for a 21st century India. He states that he is "using photography not only as a means of evidence, but also as a vessel for the imagination." His multi-faceted work addresses the rich legacy that is still present in much of India, through her shared sacred sites and integrated communities. Rafiqui's photographs are elegantly layered compositions that convey the vibrancy and urgency of his project.

With the imbalanced reporting of seemingly constant acts of inhumanity reported through our mainstream media, we have little chance to imagine, picture or develop a true sense of community, not just in India, but world-wide. The way must be discovered again. We must be helped to imagine such an alternative reality as opposed to what we too-often see before us. I anxiously await more from the camera of Asim Rafiqui.”

Maggie Steber on \$15,000 grant winner Louie Palu and his project, "Home Front":

“Louie’s work does the job of photography in the best tradition of honesty and story-telling. He trains his camera on the truth: men coming in from battle, shell-shocked, dismayed, broken-hearted, destroyed, and yet somehow holding on to the humanity that gets whittled down each day with military patrols.

“His portraits of American soldiers are as honest and raw as they come. This is the picture of war, albeit one-sided but still universal. Louie doesn’t stop there. He is intrepid in his looking behind the drawn curtains at the loneliness, the otherworldliness of after the battle, and of living with what one has done. Louie’s photos draw that curtain aside

for us and there is no blinking, no shying away, from what these men have been through, what they have seen, what they have done and now, what they must live with.

“It is true, honest work at a time when we need it, like it or not. But it will also be work that helps us understand who we are, and who we have become. Bravo Louie, for your courage.”

Sara Terry on the 2009 Aftermath Project winners and finalists:

“This year’s group of 142 applicants marked the strongest competition yet for the Aftermath Project grants. It’s exciting to see how many photographers, from so many different parts of the world, are exploring issues that illumine the other half of the story of conflict. If we had only had the money, we could have given 10 grants this year – it was a very difficult decision to narrow it down to the two outstanding winners who won our 2009 grants. The fact that we chose six finalists, instead of three, is an indication of how impressed the judges were with the quality of work submitted.

“It’s a privilege to be part of this conversation, to engage with these photographers, and to watch a broader dialogue emerging, day by day, about the true cost of war and the real price of peace.”

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