

**#82 April 2023 Cameraderie**  
**Paolo Pellegrin (1964-)**



Paolo Pellegrin is best known as a humanitarian photographer, going wherever there is war, suffering, and mistreatment of people. He has won award after award for his projects in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. His outstanding empathy for suffering or mistreated people is evident in all his work. See the Wikipedia article for details of his projects and awards:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo\\_Pellegrin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Pellegrin)

The following article, with lots of great images in it, is about Pellegrin's recent exhibition, *Un'antologia* (*An Anthology*), now on display at MAXXI, Italy's first national museum of contemporary art and architecture, located in Pellegrin's home city of Rome.

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/paolo-pellegrin-un-antologia/>

This recent New Yorker article, discussing Pellegrin's aesthetic process and showing several of his images, prompted me to write this article on him. Please read it—it is about the sublime.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/23/paolo-pellegrins-photographic-quest-for-the-sublime>

Here is Pellegrin's Magnum Photos webpage, full of his images:.

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/paolo-pellegrin/>

Pellegrin has worked more recently in commercial photography. See the image and discussion below about one of his commercial assignments. This hints at his personal history. According to the New Yorker article, he was invited *three times* to join Magnum Photos. He refused twice, preferring, I presume, to follow his own vision—he even walked out of an airport instead of continuing to catch a flight to visit Magnum for the second invitation. But he accepted the Magnum membership on the third invitation. Magnum membership is about the highest status membership there is in professional photography. But Pellegrin's evolution to the commercial gig for Magnum perhaps represents a concession to aging and poor health—of all things for a photographer, he has had progressive glaucoma (arrested for now, but always a sword of Damocles over his head—or eyes). So the stalwart younger independent photographer, going everywhere, risking danger, getting hospitalized from the rigors of assignments, now becomes a

designer of a name brand travel bag and manages a (very good) commercial photo shoot of the bag. This is perhaps not a cop-out, because many of the finest photographers (Steichen (#9, Sept. 2013), Penn (#30-34, June-Nov. 2018), Avedon (#3, Feb. 2013), Hiro (#67, Dec. 2021), to name a few) have had their greatest successes in commercial photography. Many others operated portrait studios for their livings (e.g., Weston (#1, Oct. 2012)).

Here is a very small sample of Pellegrin's images, with my comments.

Mother of a child killed during the Israel Defense Forces' incursion into Jenin. West Bank, 2002.



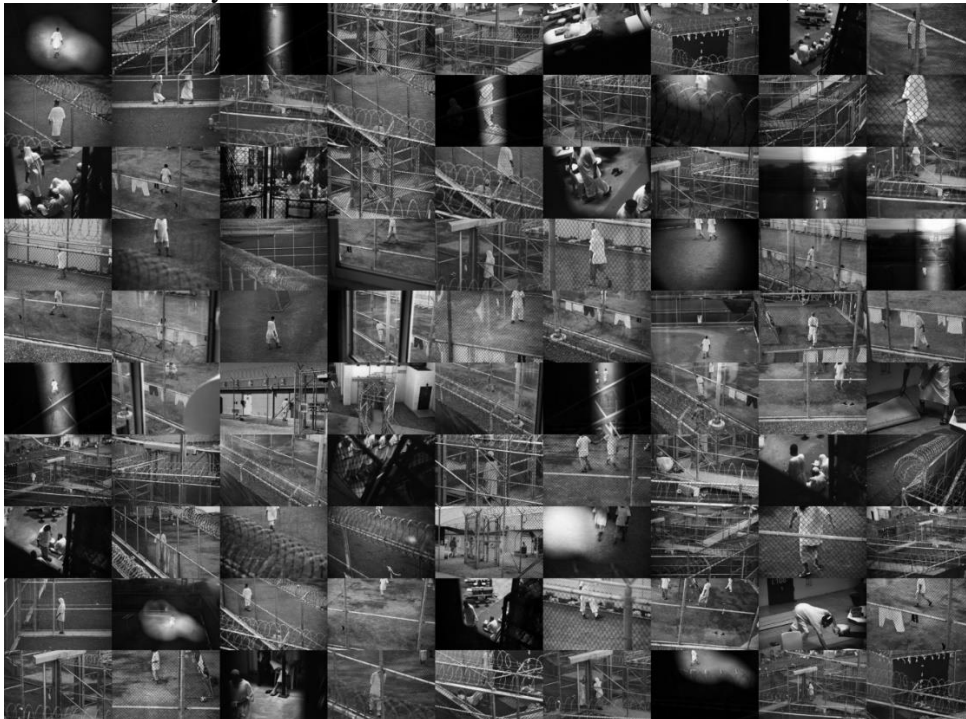
As I have mentioned before, there is history to out-of-focus images powerfully conveying emotions. Robert Frank's (#23, Oct. 2017) book, *The Americans*, had several out-of-focus images. Robert Capa's (#29, May 2018) most famous WWII Normandy Landing image was even blurrier than this image. See also Pellegrin's Wildebeest image below.

Civilians sift through the rubble looking for survivors following an Israeli air raid. Beirut, Lebanon, 2006.



This looks like a Cartier-Bresson “Decisive Moment.”

Guantánamo Bay U.S. naval base and detention center. Cuba, 2012.



This is a clever montage, where limited access and privacy restrictions have been overcome to produce an effective finished product.

Pellegrin shot an advertising set of images for the British high-fashion company Belstaff. The advertised item is a branded Magnum/Belstaff camera (and other uses) bag. Here is the descriptive blurb from the Magnum Photos website:

Belstaff teams up with Paolo Pellegrin on a stylish new addition to their brands accessories range. As well as designing a camera/weekender bag, Pellegrin also shot and directed the campaign in the rugged landscape of the Tenerife volcano range.



See this link from the Magnum Photos website for an article describing Pellegrin “in the field”:

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/theory-and-practice/paolo-pellegrin-in-the-field/>

Here is another link from the Magnum Photos website to a large set of the “field” images. If you look at this link, note the large number of less successful images: [Belstaff | Magnum Creative \(magnumphotos.com\)](https://www.magnumphotos.com/belstaff-magnum-creative/)

This is an interesting study of a professional photographer doing a commercial assignment.

A blue wildebeest, caught in motion during a sunset drive.



This is one of Pellegrin's iconic images, reflecting his study of philosophy—specifically the concept of “forms,” in which this image expresses not a particular wildebeest, but the “form” of a wildebeest, or “wildebeestness.” No joke here: “forms” originated with Plato.