

Inescapable Truths



*Fallen (Mutassim the Fourth Son of Gaddafi,
Sirte, Libya, October 20, 2011, 5:50pm)*

Artwork by Bradley McCallum

Inescapable Truths

In this preview of an exhibit to be titled “**Inescapable Truths**,” conceptual artist Bradley McCallum has rendered images of frontline reporting by American freelance war correspondent James Wright Foley. The images are from Jim’s videography of the conflict in Libya, during the spring and fall of 2011, and in Syria during early 2012.

Jim was kidnapped while reporting in Syria on November 22, 2012. After being held hostage for two years, Jim was publicly beheaded by ISIS militants on August 19, 2014. This brutal war crime was streamed over the internet and shocked the world, revealing the barbarity of ISIS and the rising peril for journalists covering conflict in the Middle East.

After Jim’s death, McCallum was granted permission by the Foley family to pore through his archive. Amid the hard drives, McCallum unearthed raw video Jim shot in the field, discovering the raw emotion of the lives that were behind all of that news footage. He also found Jim’s field notes which were filled with his own reflections.

McCallum created this series of oil paintings from this combination of Jim’s video and notes. McCallum often captures several stills all at once, revealing multiple angles on a moment in time. He then overlays the painted canvas with a silk layer of photography. Some of the overlays also have Jim’s hand-written field notes reproduced over them, connecting Jim’s thoughts with the images he was seeing at the time.

McCallum’s body of work seeks to reclaim Jim’s legacy from what the profane ISIS propaganda execution video sought to achieve. McCallum’s art also speaks to broader universal concerns of journalists who seek the truth, and witness the consequences of war and human suffering. The works are intuitive and motivated by the universal and archetypal quality of the images and focus less on the specific news stories to which the video images were intended to speak. McCallum transforms the documentary footage into timeless and universal images of art that seek to honor the journalistic work of Jim Foley.

Remembering James Wright Foley

(October 18 1973 – August 19, 2014)

Jim Foley had a calling.

Throughout his life, he was drawn to serve others -- teaching students in a poor, inner-city corner of Phoenix, or helping inmates learn to read in Chicago jails, or documenting the suffering of the people and the fighters caught up in the machinery of war in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Journeying into these conflict zones as a freelance journalist for GlobalPost and Agence France-Presse, Jim wanted to tell the story of the suffering of innocent people trying to stay alive amid the savagery of war. That journey brought him to the Syrian Civil War in 2012. He was kidnapped in Syria while reporting on November 22, 2012. Jim was tortured and starved by ISIS for nearly two years before ISIS publicly beheaded him on August 19, 2014 in a horrific war crime that revealed a dramatically rising peril for journalists covering conflict.

When Jim was taken hostage in Syria, it was not the first time he had been held captive as a journalist. During the Arab Spring of 2011, Jim was on the ground

in Libya chronicling the rebel uprising against the forces of Col. Muammar Gaddafi. He provided vivid portraits of the rebel fighters and what motivated them. He captured front-line battles and their impact on civilian life, particularly women and children. Most of the artwork featured in this exhibit is based on those images which Jim recorded from Libya.

On the frontlines of Eastern Libya on April 5, 2011, Jim and three other freelance journalists were overtaken by Gaddafi's forces on a road near the Gaddafi-stronghold of Brega, killing photographer Anton Hammerl. Foley and two colleagues were taken hostage and held for for 44 days before they were released. When he got home, Jim was asked to write an essay for The GroundTruth Field Guide about lessons learned from his experience. He ended up writing it from the field, back in Libya. He felt he had to be on the ground to see the fall of Gaddafi. Gaddafi's life ended when he was pulled from a drainage ditch, where he was hiding and attacked and killed by a mob of his own people.

Jim wrote, “Now seven months later, I am back covering the rebels as they have succeeded in taking the capital and beginning to establish a new government. It’s good to be back. This story matters and I wanted to be here telling it from the front lines.”

That defined Jim’s journalism. Jim wanted to be on the frontlines, telling the story of the people caught up in war. His work upon his return to Libya seemed to have an added clarity of purpose and urgent intensity to it. The video he recorded during the fighting in and around Sirte, Libya in October of 2011 was particularly jarring and dramatic. And the images from that video form the basis for this preview of a body of work titled “**Inescapable Truths**” by conceptual artist Bradley McCallum.



Mercy (Benghazi, Libya, March 19, 2011, 6:06 am)

2019
oil on linen, toner on silk
56" x 85"

Jim Foley worked as a freelance journalist and videographer in Libya during the height of the Arab Spring in 2011. Early in the conflict, the fighting was sporadic and chaotic. In this scene in March of 2011, a field ambulance returns from the front. It appears one of the men in the truck has a noose around his neck. The silk captures two frames of this hectic scene and diffuses the brutality of this image, shifting the focus to the drama that is swirling and unfolding as the community bears witness to what is turning into a revolution.



*Retreat (Road to Ajdabiya, Libya,
April 1, 2011, 12:00pm)*

2019

oil on linen, toner on silk
56.5" x 85"

By early April 2011 in Libya, the fighting was intensifying and the frontlines were constantly shifting. These images were shot from the back of a medical vehicle operated by rebels. Jim was inside the vehicle with Nicole Tung and several rebels, recording the action unfolding on the streets. This is an excerpt from Nicole's website explaining the scene: "Rebel fighters and passersby run towards safety as shells fired by Gaddafi forces land to the sides of the road near Ajdabiya on April 1, 2011. Much of the war in the east was fought in a back-and-forth manner, with rebels and Gaddafi fighters gaining a strip of road only to lose it again the next day"



*Remembering Anton (The site of
April 5th, 2011 capture, near Brega,
Libya)*

2019

oil on linen, toner on silk
56.5" x 85"

On April 5, 2011, Jim Foley was reporting on a series of skirmishes between rebels and the forces loyal to Col. Muammar Gaddafi along this road near the Gaddafi-stronghold of Brega, Libya. He was with three colleagues, including Clare Morgana Gillis, Manuel Brabo and Anton Hemmerl. Gaddafi's forces opened fire on the journalists, killing Hemmerl. Moments later, Jim, Clare and Manuel were captured and beaten, beginning an ordeal of detention and court hearings that lasted 44 days until they were released in May, 2011 as Tripoli fell to rebel forces. Jim returned to Libya in August, 2011 eager to record the intense final days of the fall of Tripoli and the battle to topple Gaddafi as his forces retreated to Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte. On that trip, he returned to this road where he had been captured to take the photograph that this painting is based on.



Third story (Sirte, Libya, October 12, 2011, 12:58pm)

2018
oil on linen, toner on silk
23" x 31.5"

During the intense fighting in the fall of 2011 near Sirte, snipers played a prominent role. The sniper, featured in this painting, is rendered from video Jim recorded on October 12, 2011. Jim chose this particular video to share when he delivered a powerful speech in December 2011 at his alma mater Marquette University, where his call to public service was first instilled in him. The painting of the sniper is from an image a few moments earlier than the video as the sniper looks out of the window.



Cul-de-sac (Sirte, Libya, October 12, 2011, 1:07pm)

2018
oil on linen, toner on silk
23" x 31.5"

During the fighting in Sirte, Jim was extremely close to the action and there are moments where you feel the adrenaline coursing through each frame. The image rendered here is from a video clip that reveals just how open and exposed the city is to the fighting, the classical architecture feels timeless and provides structure for the image as the reflection of the water inspires a pondering of the action. The silk layer shows one of the fighters holding the body of the fallen as they take cover. In this video, Jim is heard saying, "Wow that's accurate," as he is standing across the street. The intensity of the video clip contrasts sharply with the stillness of the painting.



Urban Terrain (Downtown Sirte, Libya, October 15, 2011, 8:25pm)

2018
oil on linen, toner on silk
23 x 31.5"

As the fighting near Sirte raged on, the chaos of fire and rain was captured in this scene.



Dispersal (Waterfront, Sirte, Libya October 15, 2011, 7:40 am)

2018
oil on linen, toner on silk
23" x 31.5"

Throughout the civil war in Libya, the flight response was confronting JIm at every turn. Image after image is of rebel soldiers and civilians fleeing the artillery and tank fire from the government forces under Gaddafi.



Blood Soil (Approaching Sirte, Libya October 8, 2011)

2018
oil on linen, toner on silk
23" x 31.5"

This image captured the sense of rebels closing in on Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown, and revealed the stark peril of the stakes involved in this revolution which would topple the Gaddafi dictatorship that ruled over Libya for more than 40 years. Gaddafi fled into the desert and was said to be regrouping among the Bedouin tribes from which he came of age, but on October 20th 2011 rebel forces dragged from hiding in a culvert. He was captured on cellphone videos being paraded, brutalized and finally shot dead at the hands of the people who he had ruled with cruelty, torture and fear.



Dusk (Sirte, Libya, October 16th, 2011)

2018
oil on linen, toner on silk
23" x 31.5"

At dusk on the battlefield, Jim captured the long light of late afternoon in Libya. The warmth of the sunlight stands in contrast to the intensity of the tank in the foreground and sporadic fighting as rebels fired from machine guns mounted on Toyota pickup trucks.



Exposed (Sirte, Libya, October 14, 2011, 11:20 am)

2019
oil on linen, toner on silk
83.5" x 93"

The video footage in this battle scene in Sirte, Libya shows rebel forces, wearing t-shirts as they fire repeated rounds from high-caliber machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers, or RPGs, with no clear indication if their ammunition has reached the targets.

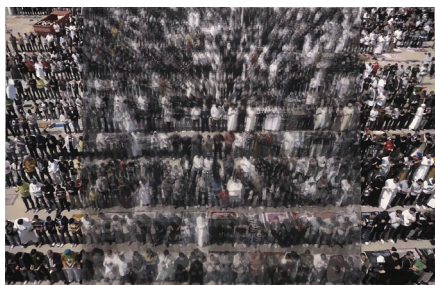
Located at the center of this painting is the silhouette of a fighter shouldering an RPG. McCallum combines several video stills to capture the passage of time, and adds emphasis on the bottom half of the painting by focussing on the land between Jim's point of view and the fighters.



Brothers (Libya, August 12, 2011, 12:32 am)

2018
oil on linen, toner on silk
36.5" x 50.5"

When Jim first returned to Libya in August, he focused on families, particularly children, who had suffered during the fighting. This painting combines two photographs that Jim took of these brothers as they are standing in the living room of their home holding what is believed to be the image of their father or older brother. The passage of time reveals the depth of grieving, of loss and of introspection. The images speak to a universal experience of war and the role of photography in our culture.



Group prayer (3/17/11, Benghazi, Libya)

2019

oil on linen, toner on silk

56.5 x 85"

As the forces arrayed against Col. Gaddafi in the Arab Spring, the rebels were motivated by many often conflicting forces. But a deep vein that ran through the rebel fighters was their commitment to God and to their faith as Muslim. In this image from Benghazi, there is a layered group prayer which reveals the layers of solidarity coming together to confront the dictatorship of Gaddafi.



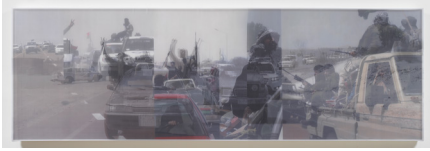
Exodus (Civilians being evacuated from Sirte, Libya, 10/17/2011)

2019

oil on linen, toner on silk

52" x 101"

During the intense, final days of fighting in Sirte, civilians were being evacuated. This image is a large painting that shows a group of civilians as they are walking along a section of urban landscape near Sirte, inspiring the biblical imagery of The Exodus and its resonant theme of liberation from bondage and flight into a new and uncertain future guided, as the Bible holds, by God and His covenant with His people.



Convoy (Rebel mobilization outside Sirte, Libya October 8, 2011)

2018

oil on linen, toner on silk

31.5" x 98"

On the road to victory in Libya, rebels used whatever vehicles and small pickup trucks they could get their hands on to head to the frontlines near Sirte.



(Rebels taking position in Sirte, October 18, 2011)

2018

oil on linen, toner on silk

31.5" x 111"

Rebel fighters in Sirte, Libya armed with Kalashnikov rifles are positioned on a rooftop firing at government soldiers in the distance.



Rebels Praying in the desert, Libya (March 21, 2011)

2019

oil on linen, toner on silk

56.5" x 85"

This scene of Libyan rebels praying in the desert was captured by Jim in video. He reflected on prayer in his field notes from his time in captivity, writing:

I prayed as much as I could, kneeling with my fellow captives whether they were American Christians or Libyan Muslims. The act of collective prayer and building faith in a higher power to guide me through the situation I could not control was perhaps the critical piece to maintaining the right attitude to locked prison cells and kangaroo courts. My patience and my faith that I'd be released was all I could control.



Fallen (Mutassim the Fourth Son of Gaddafi, Sirte, Libya, October 20, 2011, 5:50pm)

2019
oil on linen, toner on silk
41.5" x 40"

In this painting, rebel forces are viewing the body of the son of Col. Gaddafi, named Muttasim, after he was killed. In Photoshop, the artist combined multiple video stills of a chaotic moment when the body was first identified. The painting reveals how important the cellphone camera has become to bearing witness. The son's body looks ghostly as the silk layer shows the chest exposed while the painted image of Mutassim taken moments later shows the blanket being pulled up over his chest giving a more dignified presentation of the body.

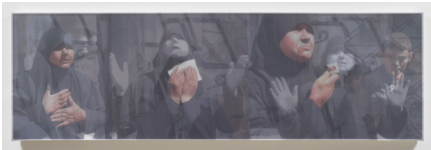


Ruins (Downtown Sirte, Libya, after the capture and killing of Muammar el Gaddafi, October 24, 2011)

2019
oil on linen, toner on silk
56.5" x 85"

In the days after the death of Gaddafi as the country began to celebrate a revolution and ponder a new future, there was an uneasy quiet reflection amid the rubble. Jim labeled the sequence of footage he took at this time "Ruins" and captures this downtown area four days after Muammar Gaddafi was killed.

The silk overlay is from Jim's journal writing that he did after he was released from detention in Libya, chronicling his capture, his fears and his faith that they would be released. In his notes, he also pondered lessons he learned in the field that led to his capture.



Mother's Lament (Syria, March 28, 2012, 5:22 pm)

2019

oil on linen, toner on silk
31" x 101"

In a timeless lament of mother mourning her son, Jim captures this Syrian mother sharing her pain and grief as three other young children look on from a doorway. In this video, Jim is fulfilling his passion as a journalist to give voice to the voiceless.



Funeral (Maarat Al Noman, Syria, June 12th, 2012)

2019

oil on linen, toner on silk
56.5" x 85"

After the fall of Gaddafi, Jim turned the focus of his reporting on the civil war in Syria which was raging. It was the most dangerous place in the world for a journalist to be, and Jim was determined to be there to bear witness of what was going on.

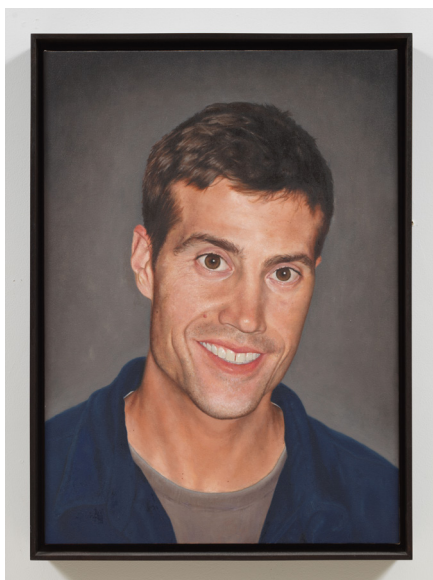
He was traveling with Nicole Tung, and about this image she wrote: "Demonstrators shout slogans as they carry the bodies of nine civilians killed the night before by mortars fired on the city of Maarat Al Norman by the Syrian Army on Sunday Jun 10th, 2012."

The painted surface of this work is based on Nicole's photograph as Jim documented this moment in video. McCallum uses multiple layers of silk in this work, each capturing different video stills from Jim's footage.

Jim's Legacy

Born James Wright Foley on October 18, 1973 to John and Diane Foley, Jim was one of five children. He was a bright light that emanated at the center of the family with a mix of wanderlust, passion, faith and humor. Jim's spirit and commitment to serving others lives on through the work of the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation. The foundation, headed by Diane Foley, has kept the spotlight on hostages and pushed the U.S. government to prioritize freedom for US citizens taken hostage or unjustly detained abroad and promotes journalist safety worldwide

Jim's extraordinary life and his tragic death have also inspired a generation of reporters and editors to work harder to ensure the safety of all journalists, particularly freelancers, reporting in the field at a time when the peril faced by journalists. It is a peril that is exceptionally grave for local reporters who are the most likely to be targeted and killed, often with impunity. Jim's murder in 2014 came amid the worst year in recorded history for attacks on journalists, and spurred the formation of an organization called A Culture of Safety alliance



(ACOS) which established a new set of standards and practices for safety and protective measures to be followed by both freelance journalists in the field and the news organizations that assign them there. ACOS is a historic collaboration of international media companies, press freedom non profits and freelance journalists.

Beyond the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation and ACOS, Jim's spirit of humility and dedication to the craft of journalism live on. He set an example as a journalist passionately committed to service and to bearing witness to

Acknowledgements

the people who suffer amid the horrors of conflict. Jim's life and work still inspire a new generation of journalists to dedicate themselves to giving voice to the voiceless. And his violent death chastens the global community of media organizations to ensure the safety of all journalists doing their job in the field.

This project is supported by Conjunction Arts, a non-profit founded by Bradley McCallum in 1989 to assist socially engaged artists in producing compelling art. As a partner on the project, the James W. Foley Foundation provided seed funding in 2016 to kick-start the paintings. Conjunction Arts is actively seeking funds to support finishing touches to the artwork and its exhibition at art museums in the United States. We thank Duggal Visual Solutions for generous printing support and Rooftop Reds for their donation of wine to support these important preview events. A special thanks to Grant Stoops for his ongoing support as the lead artist assistant on this project, Charles Sennott for his expert help in drafting this text, and Nicole Tung for her critical feedback and generosity.



Retreat (Road to Ajdabiya, Libya, April 1, 2011, 12:00pm)

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