

Mary Ellen Mark's Long-Term Relationships



By Ellen Feldman

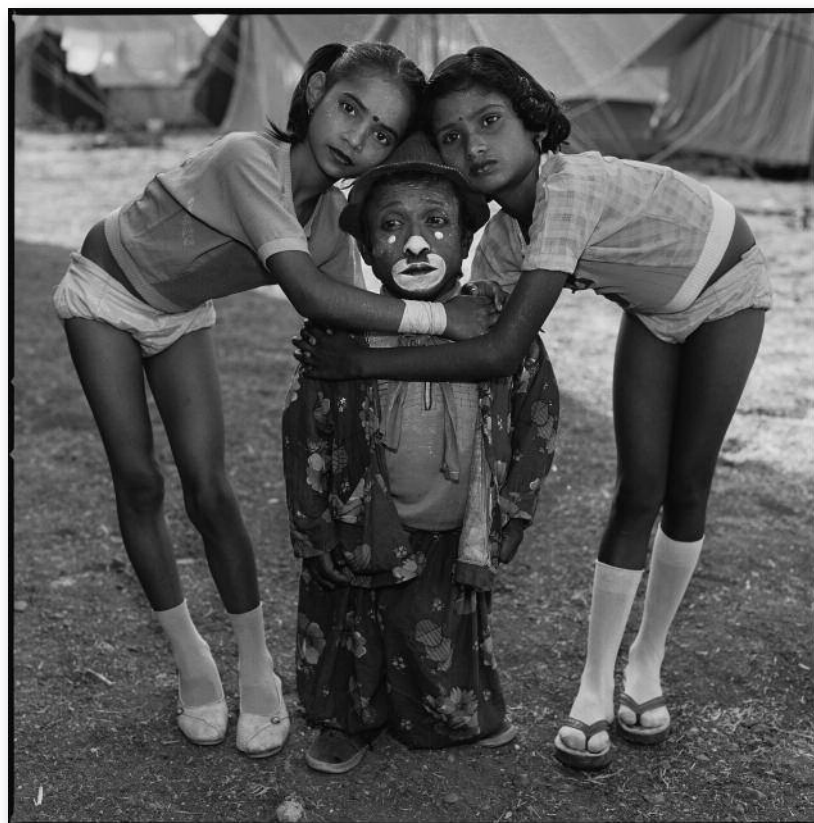
Three acrobats, Vázquez Brothers Circus, Mexico City, Mexico, 1997

Mary Ellen Mark is one of the most acclaimed photographers of our time, often working in the documentary realm that favors long-term relationships between photographer and subject. The images here are from her most recent book, *Man and Beast: Photographs from Mexico and India* (2014), which includes 116 images taken over forty years, many published for the first time. Since we can only print a few photographs ~~here~~—and we wanted to show a unified selection—we encourage you to seek out the book to see the full richness of (mostly) circus life captured by Mark.

Here is an excerpt from “MEM and Beast,” the introductory essay by Melissa Harris, editor in chief [Aperture Foundation](#), for *Man and Beast*:

[Mark] becomes deeply invested in many of her subjects—sometimes knowing and photographing them over the course of many years, as she did with Erin Charles (a.k.a. Tiny, of [Mark’s] 1980s project *Streetwise*), and with the Damms, a homeless family that Mary Ellen photographed many times. There is often a performative or interactive element to the photographs, whether they are of twins, prom-goers, or street children; whether she is on the streets of Oaxaca, Mexico, where she teaches workshops each year, or at a horse farm in Connecticut or a circus in Calcutta, or photographing dogs—pretty much everywhere.

Mary Ellen’s sense of dogs’ unconditional love is matched only by her belief that beasts are, unlike man, rarely if ever gratuitously cruel. This understanding infuses Mary Ellen’s images with an unsentimental poignancy and a fully intentional anthropomorphism that, while sometimes ironic and other times unsettling, always render photographs that are remarkably engaging. 🐾



Two girls and a dwarf, Raj Kamal Circus, Upleta, India, 1989

Ellen Feldman, WRB’s photography editor, is a photographer and writer with a PhD in cinema studies from New York University. Her most recent publication is the photo-comic, *The Dancer as the Invisible Girl*, self-published at [MagCloud.com](#).



Child circus acrobat in her trailer, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2008



Jumping acrobats practicing, Famous Circus, Calcutta, India, 1989



Carnaval, Zaachila, Mexico, 2006

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According to **Mary Ellen Mark's** website, maryellenmark.com, her "images of our world's diverse cultures have become landmarks in the field of documentary photography. Her portrayals of Mother Teresa, Indian circuses, and brothels in Bombay were the products of many years of work in India. A photo essay on runaway children in Seattle became the basis of the Academy

Award-nominated film *Streetwise* (1984), directed and photographed by her husband, Martin Bell.... Mark received the 2014 Lifetime Achievement in Photography Award from the George Eastman House." Mark has published eighteen books, among them *Exposure* (2005), which displays 134 of the strongest images of her forty-year career.