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JASON BROOKS & DON MCCULLIN

'After the dinner party, Don suffered a stroke. He could survive Vietnam but he almost didn't survive Lucy's cooking'

DON MCCULLIN. 79

A war photographer for more than 50 years, McCullin (right in picture) has documented conflicts, disasters and epidemics around the world, including the Aids pandemic in Africa. He lives in Somerset with his wife, the travel writer Catherine Fairweather

Jason's a solitary figure, which made me wary when I met him eight years ago at a dinner party. I remember us sussing each other out. The connection was through my wife, who had worked and been friends for some time with Jason's partner, Lucy Yeomans [editor-in-chief of luxury online fashion website Net-a-Porter's *Porter* magazine].

He's not your usual artist: he's well turned out all the time and looks amazing. He's tall, handsome and masculine-looking; at that dinner, I thought he looked quite threatening. But the evening was rather jolly, and once I got talking to Jason, I was pleasantly surprised.

Once I drink a glass of red wine, I feel more endeared to the company and atmosphere, and it's hard to stop. I woke up the next day feeling awful: my face felt weird and my left arm had this weird burning and tingling sensation. I'd had a stroke. It's not often you meet someone and can put the blame on them for giving you a stroke. He must have thought, "That silly old bugger drank too much."

It was after that that we got to know each other through going on trips together. We had one night at a black-tie party in Paris thrown by Lucy and *Porter*. Jason and I were the odd two out. The chatter of the evening was that Rihanna was coming for the grand entrance. I don't look through the prism of celebrity and, when she made her grand entrance, I turned to Jason and said, "What was that all about?" I could see he was thinking, "Why am I here?" We were both uninterested – you could even say contemptuous. So we stood there together, taking the mickey out of everyone acting as if it was Jesus's [second] coming.

Another time we went on a group trip to Sicily, where he wasn't very happy. He certainly doesn't belong on poncy trips: I suspect that if he's not in front of a canvas, he feels he's wasting his time.

I do think we are like chalk and cheese with our work: I photograph the dangers of surviving wars, famines and revolutions, while Jason loves an inquisitive journey into the feminine world. I went to the opening of an exhibition of his work about the orgasm, where his paintings were all very intimate. I don't understand the art world, but I know that Jason is an amazing draftsman; his paintings make you feel you can reach out and touch the human face.

I talk more than Jason; he's a man of few words who lives inside himself, but he thinks like me in many ways and understands my angst. I don't have time on my side for new friends, as I'm too old, and socially not that interested. But I like the idea of being relaxed in the company of trustworthy people like Jason. My oldest friend, Mark Shand [the brother of Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall], died last year. It was a terrific blow, but Jason could easily fill that space, as I feel he could almost be a brother. But the trouble is, who wants to be friends with an 80-year-old?

JASON BROOKS. 47

A sculptor and painter, Brooks's artwork ranges from abstract canvasses to figurative sculpture. He has exhibited at galleries including London's National Portrait Gallery, where he had a solo show in 2008. He lives in London with his wife and their three-year-old son

Our first meeting could have been his last ever. We met eight years ago when my better half Lucy decided to throw a dinner party for her close friends, so that they could meet me, the new bloke. She invited Catherine, who she's been great friends with for 15 years, and Don

came along. I sensed he was a bit of a legend, like the Doc Savage of war photography.

After the dinner party, Don suffered a stroke. Cooking is not Lucy's strong suit, so we now jokingly put it down to her dinner: he could survive Vietnam, but almost didn't survive Lucy's cooking.

Lucy pushes me to do various things and, once I agree, I usually love them. But on one occasion we went on holiday to Sicily and the whole trip for some reason didn't quite work. After we arrived, Don and I bonded over feeling the same way. We became the miserable bastards sitting in the corner.

He has a huge fascination with the other half. With women, he is incredibly flirtatious and when we sit and talk, he often brings up the characteristics of women in the vicinity. He's a voyeur, which comes with being a photographer – though it's a trait we share.

We are known as two old curmudgeons – though while he has every right to take a pessimistic view of humanity because of what he's witnessed, a lad from Yorkshire like me shouldn't be encumbered with that. It's made me more interested in him as a personality: I think he is perplexed by what the human race seems to do to itself.

I don't see him as being 80, and I have a great love for him. Lucy thinks he's mentally younger than I am in many ways. Our relationship transcends age and I like the idea that together we can have a bromance and find more and more things we have in common.

I remember sharing a moment with him, out on the terrace of his house in Somerset, looking down at the valley below in the early morning sun. It was a perfect moment, and it's that quietness he now wants to reflect on, away from what his life has been. He's told me that he's keen to do a photo series on places in the UK unsullied by human habitation. •

*Brooks's latest exhibition, *Origins*, is at the Marlborough Contemporary Gallery, London W1 (marlboroughcontemporary.com), until 18 July*

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