

BIOGRAPHY

Lennart Nilsson, born in Strängnäs in 1922, is a pioneer in medical photography. In association with researchers and with the help of advanced, specially designed equipment, he has documented the inside of man down to the level of a cell. Throughout the years, he has devoted special attention to capturing the creation of a human being, from conception to birth.

He began his career as a photojournalist in the middle of the 1940's and published a number of photo-essays in Swedish and foreign magazines, including *Polar Bear Hunting in Spitzbergen* (1947). On his assignment for Life to photograph Dag Hammarskjöld's arrival in New York as UN Secretary General in 1953, he took with him his first photographs of the human embryo. The photographs were published, and he was encouraged to continue photographing the origins of man.

In order to show the foetal development from the earliest stage he used macro-lenses and instruments with special wide-angled lenses. The publication in 1965 of Nilsson's cover story for Life, *The Drama of Life before Birth*, was a landmark. His famous book *A Child is Born* was published that same year and has since been published in five editions in over twenty countries.

He was under contract as a photographer for Life from 1965-1972 and produced stories on the heart and heart attacks, the microscopic view inside the body and the brain. His experiments with photography and light microscopy were succeeded by his use of the scanning electron microscope, which provided not only magnification of hundreds of thousands times but sharp three-dimensionality. The photographs from the scanning electron microscope are in black and white. In order to make them more legible he has collaborated with Gillis Hägg to translate the grey scale into full colour, which provides the photographs with their own particular colour identity. Some of the most recent colour has been applied digitally and is conspicuously different.

Nilsson has established an international reputation for his films for television on the human body, but he has also directed his attention to the animal world and the plant and insect world.

Lennart Nilsson has received a number of eminent awards and prizes for his photographic work. He was the first recipient of The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation's Photography Award in 1980 and received the ICP Infinity Award in 1992. Among his other awards are 1944 Year's Prize ("The Little Nobel Prize") in 1972 by The Royal Institute of Technology and The Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences' Big Gold Medal in 1989. His documentaries won Emmy awards in 1982 and 1996.

Nilsson became a member of the Swedish Society of Medicine in 1969, received an honorary doctorate in medicine from Karolinska Institute in 1976, an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy from the Technische Universität Braunschweig in Germany in 2002, and an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy from Linköping University in Sweden in 2003.

In 2002, Nilsson received the 12th presentation of the Swedish government's Illis Quorum.

In 2009 the Swedish Government awards Lennart Nilsson the honorary title of professor.

NASA's unmanned spacecraft Voyager I and Voyager II both carried photographs from *A Child is Born* on their journey through our solar system and out into the universe.

Lennart Nilsson's work can be found in collections at a number of museums and institutions, including the British Museum in London, Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, MOMA in New York, Hasselblad Foundation in Gothenburg, Nationalmuseum and the Modern Museum in Stockholm.

Since 1998, the Lennart Nilsson Award has been presented annually during the Karolinska Institute's installation ceremony. It is given in recognition of extraordinary photography of science and is sponsored by the Lennart Nilsson Foundation.