

African Ceremonies Fall Newsletter

Dear Friends, we send you warmest greetings from London. We would like to update you on our two recent field trips and share with you our exciting fall schedule of exhibitions and publications.



Departures Magazine (American Express) has published an illustrated article in their October issue about our work in Africa, entitled "The Tribal Guardians" by Lucia Van Der Post. The entire issue is dedicated to Africa, full of informative stories which we hope you will have a chance to see.

Each day while shooting the Dinka tribe in South Sudan in 2000, our Angela Fisher and Carol Beckwith. We followed the great, Yabou Madoug, as he led his remarkable ox cart to pasture, singing praise songs to his spiritual animal and enjoying the beautiful low shape of horns with his arms.

From top: Photographers/guardians Beckwith and Fisher in the Bekebebe in Kenya, 1970s and 1980s; Ethiopia in 1970s and Fisher in 1980s.

THE TRIBAL GUARDIANS

Angela Fisher and Carol Beckwith's goal to photograph every traditional culture on the continent is a race against time. BY LUCIA VAN DER POST

Over the course of 35 years, photographers Angela Fisher and Carol Beckwith have amassed an archive that is equal parts art and anthropology, as remarkable for its raw aesthetic power as it is for its unparalleled access to the ceremonies and rituals of Africa's tribes. The rapid pace of change on the continent, as children head for the cities, has given their work fresh urgency. Even as the pair continue to find new cultures to document, they estimate that about 40 percent of the rites and ceremonies they have shot have already disappeared into the mists of history. In other words, it will not be possible for anybody to repeat what they have done.

Beckwith, from Boston, and Fisher, from Adelaide, Australia, have published books individually but work best side by side, occasionally forgetting who took what shot. They have traveled more than 250,000 miles together, often in great discomfort, in pursuit of their images. To get to the Dinka in South Sudan, "Five miles a day was good going—the average was two," says Fisher. Sometimes logistics made access hard; other times, the obstacles were cultural. Permissions to visit the Kuba kingdom came after 12 years of trying. When they eventually arrived, the duo met children who had never seen a white face before. "It was," says Beckwith, "like walking through a doorway into the ancient past."

African Griotness (Abrams) is their best-known work. Last year they published *Painted Bodies* (Rizzoli), a Pan-African study of the art of body painting. They are now working on *African Festivals* which will cover some 140 cultures in 50 African countries, including 22 peoples they have not previously photographed. It is set to come out in 2015 (Rizzoli).

Today Beckwith and Fisher share a large, airy house in London's Belair Park, a wonderfully idiosyncratic home filled with the treasures they've accumulated on their travels. This is also where they keep their archive: more than half a million photographs, hundreds of hours of film, as well as 200 illustrated and annotated journals from 150 African cultures. Considering the value to humanity of such a precious resource, they are looking for a more worthy home for it. (The Smithsonian in D.C. and London's Royal Geographical Society have expressed interest.) It's not just that "these ancient cultures are a living record of our shared past, a map of where we've come from," says Beckwith, but, just as important, they are "a guide for our future." What follows is a portfolio in their own words.

On October 9, The Google Cultural Institute launched our online exhibition of "African Ceremonies: Passages from Birth to Death" featuring 97 photos and 7 video clips first shown at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 2000. We are thrilled that people all over the world will get to see this exhibition and share our recording of the many ceremonies that make up the rich heritage of Africa. This extraordinary legacy is fast disappearing and serves as an invaluable map of our past and guide to our future.

<http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/exhibit/african-ceremonies-passages/QQJgfgg2>

At present, the "African Ceremonies: Passages" exhibition is housed in California and is available for travelling again to interested institutions.



Exhibitions: We are currently preparing for two exhibitions of our photography which will open in November in the USA. one in California and the other in Florida.

1: African Passion: Painted Bodies and Beyond opens at the House of Photographic Art (HOPA) in San Juan Capistrano. Included in the exhibition will be a special collection of the African jewelry we have collected, and pieces designed with traditional elements in our London studio.

Venue: House of Photographic Art, 27184 Ortega Highway, San Juan Capistrano, California, 1-949-496-3330

Opening: Thursday November 14, from 6.30pm to 9.30pm, remarks at 7.30pm

Lecture by Carol & Angela: Saturday November 16, at 1.30pm held at HOPA Gallery

2: Portals to the Human Spirit: A Survey of Cultural Diversity at Holden Luntz Gallery in Palm Beach Florida opens on November 23 and runs until December 18.

Venue: Holden Luntz Gallery: 332 Worth Ave, Palm Beach, Florida, 1-561-805-9550

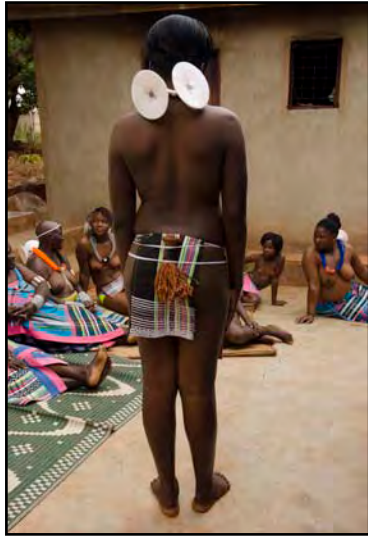
Meet the Artists: Saturday November 30 at 9.30am, the gallery will host a breakfast and Carol & Angela will give a talk at 10.00am. From 3-5pm on the same day guests are invited to meet the artists in the gallery for an afternoon opening.



Archive: In mid-November we will be flying to Washington D.C. to present our Beckwith & Fisher African Ceremonies Archive of half a million images, video films, journals and exhibitions to the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of African Art. We look forward to bringing you more news of the development this life long dream of furthering the legacy of our work with the peoples of Africa and making our archive accessible to future generations.



Fieldwork: During the past three months we have undertaken two important field trips, one to visit the Venda Peoples of South Africa in order to photograph the sacred Domba female initiation into womanhood and the second to revisit the peoples of the Omo River Valley of Southwest Ethiopia.



The Venda live in the Limpopo region, on the border of Zimbabwe and close to Lake Fundudzi which they believe to be the sacred resting place of their deceased. We have wanted to visit the Venda for many years and photograph their celebrated female initiation ceremonies including the captivating Domba Python Dance – a communal dance where a set of female age mates dance as one fluid snake, each initiate holding the forearm of the next. Our coverage of the Venda with their highly refined arts of feminine beauty will be part of our forthcoming African Ceremonies double volume set, entitled *African Twilight*.



Our second expedition was to revisit the peoples of the Omo River Valley in South West Ethiopia where we travelled by boat to access villages that we haven't previously been able to reach by foot. By using the river, we were able to visit the many different groups of peoples who live by the Omo such as the Kara, Nyangatom, Mursi and Hamar. Under the guidance of Lale Biwa, our extraordinary friend and Kara guide, we were able to photograph Kara body painting and courtship dancing, Nyangatom war dances, Mursi lip plates and their use of clay for healing purposes, and a Hamar Jumping of the Bull ceremony which is an initiation into manhood.

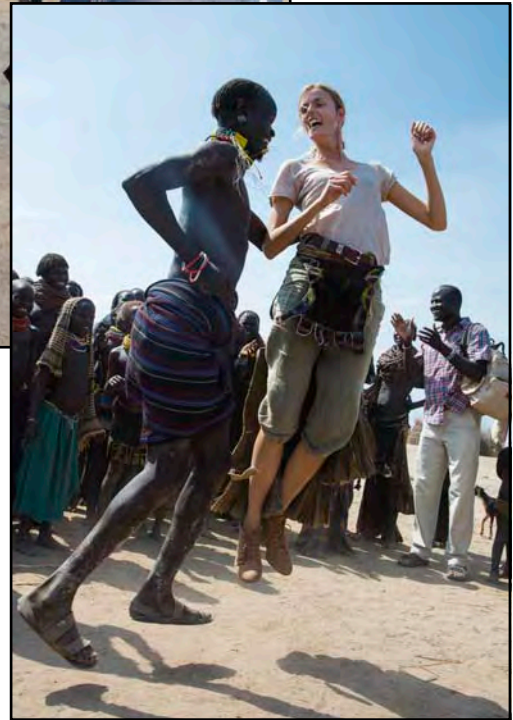




This was a special field trip for us as we were joined by two great supporters of our African Ceremonies Foundation, Miles Morland and Ken Lipper, as well as a small party of kindred spirits and lovers of Africa which included renowned sculptor Anish Kapoor with his girlfriend, landscape architect Sophie Walker, supermodel Jacquetta Wheeler with her husband, investor Jamie Allsopp, jewelry designer Olympia Guillaume, writer Melissa Pritchard and fellow nomad Lee Harvin.



Anish with Nyangatom



Jacquetta with Nyangatom, and Lale Biwa, background right

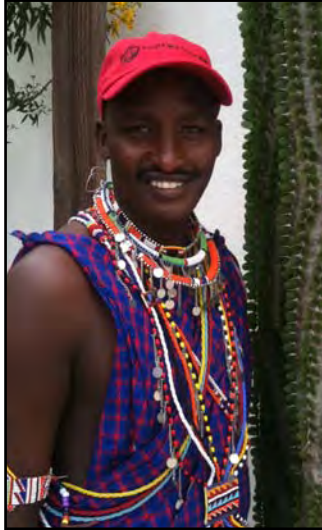
Top: Jamie, Olympia, Jacquetta.
Bottom: Lale, Angela, Anish, Carol, Sophie, Ken, Miles
Image taken by Olympia Guillaume

Our guests were deeply moved to be experiencing first hand such rich cultural traditions, creativity, ritual and a sense of belonging to the history of early mankind. We were all concerned about the uncertain future which the Omo people face. Their way of life is threatened by the completion of the Gibe 3 Hydroelectric dam in 2014 which will diminish the floodwaters of the Omo, and by their homelands being taken by the government for sugar and cotton plantations as well as private investment. The government has begun to forcibly resettle tribespeople into distant villages, uprooting them against their will and ending a rich and balanced way of life developed over centuries. We are looking for ways to protect the peoples of the Omo and at the same time help them adapt to the changes they face. If you would like to find out more or see what you can do to help to save this truly unique corner of the world and its people we have included relevant organizations below.

- Survival International - <http://www.survivalinternational.org/>
- The Oakland Institute - <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/>
- International Rivers - <http://www.internationalrivers.org/>
- Human Rights Watch - <http://www.hrw.org/>



On the positive side, we have just returned from Kenya and a visit to Maasailand and are extremely happy to report that Maasai Elder Paul Kitesho, whose Ereto Orphanage project we have been supporting, has just returned from America where his lectures and presentations have raised \$42,000US for the orphans education! We are so inspired by his creative endeavors and extraordinary initiative to help the Maasai.



From London we send you all best and warmest wishes,

Carol & Angela



Angela & Carol with Kara Children in Ethiopia,
image taken by Jacquetta Wheeler