

ART FIRST is delighted to participate in the third edition of **AKAA**. *Also Known as Africa* sets out to emphasize the diversity of Africa's spiritual, cultural, commercial and ideological links to other regions of the world, and to examine their impact on contemporary art.

Photography plays a special role in the second half of 20th Century and contemporary visual history in Africa, and we have great pleasure in presenting two bodies of work by photographers who have dedicated decades of their lives to documenting, recording, celebrating and seeking the truth about the cultures to which they have devoted their time and commitment. The visual beauty we present stems from their careful in-depth observation, one that has won the acclaim, the awards and world-wide recognition by museums, collectors and publishers alike.

CAROL BECKWITH & ANGELA FISHER

ART FIRST is honoured to show the launching series of limited edition photographic prints from Beckwith & Fisher's private portfolio. These images can also be found in their magnificent double-volume publications, *African Ceremonies* (1999) and *African Twilight: Vanishing Rituals and Ceremonies of the African Continent* (Just published by Rizzoli, New York, October 2018).

Of the newly published volumes, **George Okello Abungu**, Associate Professor of Heritage Studies, University of Mauritius, has written:

'This represents the collective heritage of humanity, rare and incomparable in both quality and quantity, it is a jewel of jewels and a resource of knowledge of unparalleled value. In this archive, the two have ensured that what has been captured will be safeguarded forever, never to die in human memory.'

African Ceremonies (1999) received a United Nations' Award for Excellence for its 'vision and understanding of the role of cultural traditions in the pursuit of world peace' and Beckwith & Fisher have been honoured twice with the Annisfield-Wolf Book Award in race relations for 'outstanding contributions to the understanding of cultural diversity and prejudice'.

"For the last fourteen years of our continuous 40-year journey across Africa, we have been seeking out remote communities; we have crossed thousands of miles of often extremely inhospitable terrain, in order to record the sacred ceremonies, powerful art forms, and boundless creativity of the people living there today. We have been granted rare access to ceremonies usually closed to outsiders, including the Royal Igue Ceremony in the Palace of Benin, the Royal masquerade dances for the Kuba King of DR Congo, the Famadihana, the biannual rewrapping of the dead in Madagascar, and the secret rites in the Voodoo shrines of Ouidah Benin.

Africa is changing at a dramatic pace. Over 40% of what we have recorded no longer exists. Our photographs present traditional cultures in a contemporary context – we focus on the living rituals and ceremonies that not only express the great creativity and diversity of the continent but also facilitate the passages through life. The images reveal the epic splendor of Africa and also intimately portray the depth and breadth of human emotion as an individual undergoes the symbolic rituals which mark the most profound and exhilarating moments of life."

- Carol Beckwith & Angela Fisher.

GRAEME WILLIAMS

We have had the privilege of exhibiting several photographic series by **Graeme Williams** at art fairs in South Africa and in Paris, as well as exhibitions with ART FIRST in London.

Our selection for AKAA is taken from the series, *Painting Over the Present*, which conveys a specific vision of the living realities within a rapidly changing South Africa. Township life with its many paradoxes, its reinvented structures, transitional or permanent, abandoned or fully occupied, conveys moments and places which speak of a dignity and a truth beautifully observed.

In the extraordinary period which followed the apartheid era Williams has produced and published a distinctive, considered and contemporary body of photographic work, which has been exhibited world wide. His photographs featured in the *Figures and Fictions* exhibition at the **Victoria & Albert Museum** (2011), *Apartheid and After* at **The Huis Marseille** in Amsterdam (2014), and a series of images was showcased in *The World Atlas of Street Photography* published in 2014 by Yale University Press and Thames and Hudson. In 2013 he was awarded the prestigious **Ernst Cole Photography Award** for the series *A City Refracted*, a photographic essay based on post apartheid Johannesburg. In 2016 works from his series *As the Grass Grows* featured at the **Louis Vuitton Foundation**, Paris, in the remarkable exhibition, *Being There*.

Between 1989 and 1994 however, Williams covered South Africa's eventful transition to democracy for Reuters and other international news organizations. His courageous photographic work from the 90's has also been exhibited, notably in the monumental exhibition *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* curated by Okwui Enwezor at the **Haus der Kunst** in Munich (then toured). Given the current and lasting significance of these images, we are presenting two iconic works by Williams at AKAA, alongside his more recent series.

Williams's work is held in permanent collections including Cape Town University, the South African National Gallery, Duke University, USA, the Finnish School of Photography in Helsinki and the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.



G Williams, 'Ermelo' 2011



Ezenzeleni Township, Warden, 2011

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