

Robert Lyons. *Boxer, Khartoum, Sudan*. 1989. Chromogenic color print. Henry Art Gallery, Anonymous gift, 2005.93. Photo: Richard Nicol

MARCH 2 – SEPTEMBER 1 | NORTH GALLERIES

Out [o] Fashion Photography: Embracing Beauty

Is beauty something inherent or is it embodied?

Through the themes of idealized beauty, the unfashionable body, the gendered image, and photography as memory, *Out [o] Fashion Photography: Embracing Beauty* challenges conventional perspectives on beauty and reveals that the camera remains a powerful device for exploring how we see others and view ourselves.

Through photographic and video imagery culled from the collections of the Henry Art Gallery and the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, the audience will explore historical and cultural perceptions of beauty, identity, and desire — and how those perceptions shape visual culture.

Out [o] Fashion Photography: Embracing Beauty brings together new and unknown works that offer a cross-cultural read on beauty. Images include portraits, documentary and constructed images, and fashion photographs from the 19th to the 21st century. The exhibition features the work of more than 50 internationally recognized photographers, including Cecil Beaton, Nan Goldin, André Kertész, Lee Friedlander, Lorna Simpson, Cindy Sherman, and Andy Warhol. Shifting attitudes about gender, fashion, and representations of the body can be seen in images by Gertrude Käsebier and Diane Arbus while the effects of fashion, advertising, and desire on depicting beauty are considered in the work of Don Wallen, Janieta Eyre, and Jan Saudek. Photographs by Edward Sheriff Curtis and Fred E. Miller who worked with Native American subjects are informed by ethnographic ideologies. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue co-published with University of Washington Press.

Out [o] Fashion Photography: Embracing Beauty is curated by Deborah Willis, Ph.D., Henry Art Gallery's inaugural Visiting Fellow. Dr. Willis is a photographer, curator, and historian of African American photog-

raphy, as well as serving as a Professor and Chair of Photography and Imaging at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. The Henry's Visiting Fellow Program is designed to bring artists and scholars to Seattle to study works in the museum's collections and engage with students at the University of Washington. Over two years' time, Willis conducted research at the Henry and the UW's Special Collections. Among the core strengths of the Henry's collection of over 25,000 objects are more than 2,500 images representing the history of photography since its inception, as well as a range of new-media and video works by notable contemporary artists.

This exhibition is made possible by the generous support of ArtsFund; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation; the Barton Family Foundation in memory of Irving Marcus; Cathy and Michael Casteel; and William and Ruth True.

RELATED EVENTS

Thursday, March 1

Curator lecture by Deborah Willis

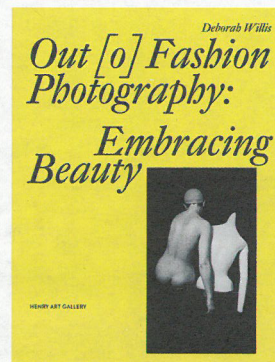
Thursday, March 9

A screening of the film *Paris is Burning*, introduced by Seattle filmmaker Tiffany Gannon

Thursday, May 30

A screening of the film *Cleopatra Jones* followed by a discussion inside the exhibition led by Sonnet Retman, Associate Professor of American Ethnic Studies at UW.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



Published 2013
\$35 / \$29.75 with Member's Discount
Purchase at the front desk or online at
henryart.org/shop

The exhibition *Out [o] Fashion Photography: Embracing Beauty* is accompanied by a 144-page exhibition catalogue featuring an introduction from Henry Director Sylvia Wolf, an essay by exhibition curator Deborah Willis, and 90 works selected from the Henry's permanent collection and UW Libraries Special Collections.

Portrait of a Génocidaire as a Human Being

April 2006

April 6th marks an anniversary that most Rwandans--and indeed the world--would rather forget. It's the 12th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, which lasted for three months. In that time, 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu lost their lives, while thousands more were irreversibly affected by those crimes.

It's these survivors --the victims, génocidaires, and those involved distributing justice--whom Robert Lyons and Scott Straus turn their undivided attention to in the new book *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*. The abstract and horrific concept of genocide is rendered vulnerably human in the dozens of faces and corresponding stories of the men, women and even children who participated in the killings, or who lived through the ordeal (men who survived attempted murder, and women who were raped while their families were killed). While raw, unanalyzed interviews given by these Rwandans with Scott Straus, an expert on violence in Africa, open the book, it's the striking black and white portraits taken by Robert Lyons which are so absorbing. Over 59 faces stand alone on the pages --some defiant, some confused, others filled with guilt and grief-- uncluttered by their names or details. You can almost guess at their stories, before turning to the back pages revealing their names and predicaments. Photography this poignant is a good reminder that a picture really can speak a thousand words. This is a hauntingly beautiful book.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

by Regina Hackett, April 2006

Candida Hofer wants to be alone. Hey, no problem. After 30 years in the limelight, her fame paves the way. When she asks to shoot an empty library, concert hall or museum, gatekeepers hand her the keys. Organized by Florida's Norton Museum of Art and California State University Museum in Long Beach, "Candida Hofer: Architecture of Absence" hangs in the hallway at the Frye, a minor space for a major figure. She's one of Hilla and Bernd Becher's most celebrated students from the Düsseldorf Academy in the 1970s. Using a brutally reductive vocabulary, the Bechers articulated the serial rhythms of industrial structure. Their students took the Becher approach uptown, rejecting the raw in favor of the florid.

Some hit gold with sumptuous serialism. Hofer's the weak link. She's responsible for some notable pictures, but none of the images root into the content and wake you up. This is Hofer's first North American Retrospective, although she's in frequent gallery rotation, including at Seattle's Winston Wachter. What Jay Gatsby said about Daisy's voice, that it was full of money, is true of Hofer's photos. They cushion the world instead of cracking it open. Remarkably, the Henry also is hosting photos that explore people-free, domestic spaces. Curated by Sara Krajewski from the Henry collection, "The Empty Room" throws in relief what's wrong with Hofer's efforts. Krajewski's photographers don't need to print big and decorate with color. Fourteen small, nearly all black and white photos fit into one little gallery without crowding and bring widely carrying worldviews into sharp focus. The only light in Lee Friedlander's "Philadelphia" comes from a TV set. On the screen is a beautiful young woman. If this is your room, she's looking through you. If this is your room, she's out of your reach.

Ralph Gibson's untitled print presents a room as a lover. The corners of its walls are her thighs, pressing together, their tops shadowed into intimacy.

The gold streak in Gordon Matta Clark's "Splitting" is not a reflection. That's daylight pouring through the vertical slit the artist made by hacking into the wall. Talk about activating empty space. Adam Barto's "U.N. Room" is deliberately drab to set off its radiant core. Subtle color saves the scene from itself, warming the chairs and making the silver lamp and ashtray glow. Evelyn Hofer's "Two Chairs, London" suggests a cozy couple own them. Wearing identical baggy sweaters, they're in the kitchen, making tea. Leland D. Rice inflects a dark wall with smoke. A white door on the right waits for you to walk through and change your life.

Christopher Rauschenberg uses light as a club. You know it's just light, but you have the uneasy feeling that some brute might bring it down on you.

Robert Lyons' "Siwa Oasis" is about beauty, how in some cultures it's a given. This bar has a mud floor, but its walls are pink and baby blue, and its windows run a spectrum. Look closely, and you'll see, along the Arabic writing, palm trees and roses. Everybody

in this exhibit is worth noting. Besides those mentioned above, "The Empty Room" includes Steve Kahn, Andre Kertesz, Joanne Leonard and Philip Melnick

artist trust awards grants to 40 washington state artists

by Fionn Meade

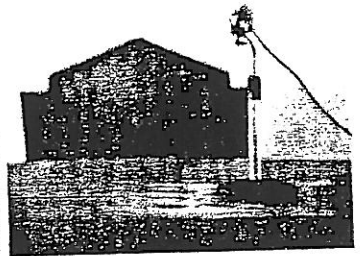
In June, Artist Trust awarded \$54,525 in Grants for Artist Projects (GAP) to 40 outstanding Washington State artists. The GAP program provides up to \$1,400 to individual artists for various projects. This year, Artist Trust received 675 applications from artists working in all disciplines across Washington State. Recipients were selected by a multi-disciplinary review panel comprised of artists, past Artist Trust grant recipients, and arts professionals from Eastern, Central, and Western Washington, as well as Oregon.

The next few pages include summaries of the 2004 recipients' project descriptions. Artist Trust is proud to be able to support these projects and to be a part of the development of some of the most vital, innovative and important works being created in Washington State.

In addition to the GAP program, Artist Trust administers the Artist Trust/Washington State Arts Commission Fellowship Program, which will announce \$6,000 awards to 21 artists working in the disciplines of dance, design, theater and visual art, in November 2004. The application deadline was June 18, 2004. Additionally, Artist Trust offers the Twining Humber Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement. Artist Trust is also a vital information resource for artists, providing current, year-round professional information, through print, website, telephone and email. For more information on all Artist Trust services to Washington State artists, visit our website at www.artisttrust.org

Support for the 2004 Artist Trust GAP program is provided by 4Culture, Edie Adams, the Kenneth and Marlene Alhadeff Charitable Foundation, The Paul G. Allen Charitable Foundation, Chap and Eve Alvord, Nancy and Buster Alvord, Joan Alworth and Peter Ackroyd, ArtsFund, Shari and John Behnke, Bossak/Heilbron Charitable Foundation, Paul and Debbi Brainerd, Joan Broughton, Lauren Dudley, Cora Edmonds, Ellen Ferguson, Katharyn Alvord Gerlich, the Helen and Max Gurvich Artist Fund, David Kersey, Michael Macri, Michael D Miller and Michele Wallace, Norcliffe Foundation, PANACA Gallery Fund, PONCHO, Jon and Mary Shirley Fund for Visual Artists, David and Catherine Eaton Skinner, Kayla Skinner, Mary E. Snapp, David and Dana Taft, Merrill Wagner, Washington State Arts Commission, Marsha Wolf and Ken Linkhart, Merrill Wright and donors to the Artist Trust Benefit Auction and Brunch and the Fund-a-Grant program.

Robert Lyons, ▶
*Microphone Witness Stand,
Court of First Instance,
Genocidal Tribunal, Butare,
Rwanda, silver gelatin print,
19" x 19", 1999/2003*



Robert Lyons, Seattle (\$1,400) to help offset the cost of creating work prints from which final photographs will be selected for his forthcoming book, *Intimate Enemy*. The book and its images are concerned with the ideas of genocide and human rights issues as they pertain to Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. "I have been working in the field since 1998 photographing and collecting information for the project. Co-authored with Scott Strauss, who is a PhD Candidate from UC Berkley, the project is underway and we are attempting to collect all the material, photographs and actual interviews in order to find the right design format for the book." The projected release is early 2005.



◀ Robert Lyons,
*Charles Ikurukiyinka,
Genocidiare - Category I,
Remera Prison, Kigali, silver
gelatin print, 1999/2003*

Friday, November 16, 2001

ART REVIEWS

In 'No Single Truth,' Humanity's Potential for Good and Bad

By LEAH OLLMAN, Special to The Times

Two basic truths emerge from Robert Lyons' Rwanda photographs at Paul Kopeikin Gallery. First, photographs remain fundamentally ambiguous until words are applied to direct their meaning. And second, humans don't fall into mutually exclusive categories of victim and perpetrator, but are born into the potential for both.

Lyons has been photographing in Africa since the late 1980s, and his 1998 book, "Another Africa," is a gem of humanistic poetry and environmental portraiture. In this new series on Rwanda, Lyons takes a radically different approach, shooting in black and white, and stripping his subjects of context. The men, women and children in these portraits are rendered with startling clarity, but even more startling is the realization that such straightforward, direct representations yield no obvious interpretations, but only unanswered questions and moral equivocation.

The portraits are beautiful, elegant, sympathetic. Most of the subjects look clear-eyed into the camera, which neither accuses nor aggrandizes them. A gentle evenhandedness applies throughout, whether the subject is a man who confessed to having killed a child in the Rwandan genocide, a child confessed to having killed his neighbor, a man with a soft crater in his skull from a bullet wound, or a young woman who survived the killings by living in hiding. Cues to the identity of each have been suppressed to the point where the captions alone tell us whether the subject is guilty or innocent.

"No Single Truth" is Lyons' title for this work and his bottom-line take on the complexities of the Rwandan genocide. His photographs are powerful in their ambivalence, striking for their paucity of answers. They give the lie to the pseudo-science of physiognomy, which claims a correlation between a person's physical features and his or her character. Here, an utter democracy reigns, and the hands of a woman who admits her capacity to murder are pictured with the same dignity and studied elegance as the fronds of a banana tree. There is no single truth to be drawn from this collection of images, only multiple questions, and not just about tribal politics, but about our faith in photographic documents to serve as evidence.

Witnesses to genocide

Robert Lyons focuses his camera on Rwanda's people

By KARRIN ELLERTSON
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

In the second presidential debate, Jim Lehrer questioned both candidates on their opinions regarding U.S. involvement in international conflicts in recent years, including the battle between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes of Rwanda.

Both George W. Bush and Al Gore appeared to suggest that the lack of U.S. involvement was a choice made in alignment with a standardized foreign policy — the genocidal massacre not falling into the confines of our "national interest."

This vague response is part of an ethical dilemma echoed in the presentation of photographs offering views of Rwandan people by Robert Lyons now on view at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

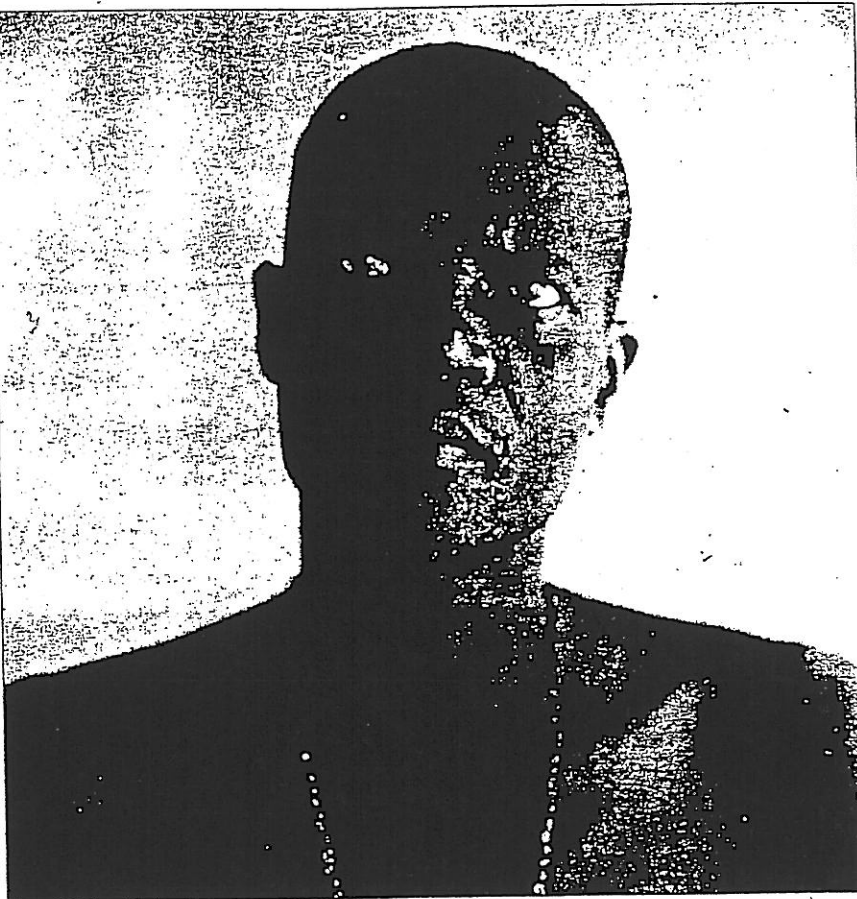
Though his work is not strict documentary, it is poised in that direction. Rather than describe a nation and a conflict, Lyons attempts to evoke a sense of the base reality.

Lyons has a keen ability to finesse his camera into the lives of these people, their postures indicating a certain ease with the intrusion of his camera.

Most of his work in the exhibition are straight-on interactions with human subjects: close-in shots of characters involved in the historical genocide. The faces, some belonging to the innocent, others to those guilty of crimes against the opposing tribe, have a large presence on the white walls, instigating a reminder of a conflict that passed through the media machine a few years ago.

After being part of or witnessing some of the deaths of 1 million people in 100 days, the faces appear aged and knowing beyond time and, not surprisingly, ambivalent and slightly bemused by the foreigner taking their photograph. While the faces look directly at the camera, they are not individualized portraits. They portray themes beyond the scope of the subject or viewer.

While this ambiguity is intellectually curious, Lyons includes a few triptychs in the exhibition that lend a more lasting provocation. The first image of such a trio depicts a microphone atop a witness stand



Revisiting Rwanda: Robert Lyons' "Charles Nkurukiyinka; Genocidiare."

at the "... Court of First Instance, Genocide Tribunal, Butare, Rwanda." The sparse scene consists of a table top and chair filling the frame. A microphone and a piece of paper resembling a calendar rest on the surface. The second image, "Torso; Innocent Musabyimana, Gitarama Prison," unveils a youthful form adorned by a bone crucifix. A tattered belt holds up ill-fitting pants. With clasped hands, the young man seems to be waiting politely, awkwardly. The third image, "Leg Wounds Rescued, Butare," is a cropped image of a figure raising a pant leg to expose a healing leg wound.

Like the selection of nameless faces, these three images on their own solicit powerful conjecture by the viewer. But together they send an ominous message. In the cold reality of aftermath, the Rwandan conflict is by no means over.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 205 S.W. Pine St. Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, through Nov. 11.

A greater intensity

Photographer Carol Yarrow usually operates in a vein similar to Robert Lyons, interacting with her subjects as a somewhat oblique observer. In October 1999, Yarrow unveiled "Tender Hearts and Ancient Words," a striking documentation of the Lacandon Mayas of the Mexican rain forest.

But in her current body of work, "Ghosts," the Portland photographer ventures into a realm of image-making that flexes her directorial muscles with greater intensity.

In 1998 Yarrow was selected by famed New York photographer Nan Goldin to travel with a small group of photographers and

dancers to Yamaguchi, Japan, where the group coexisted for a three-week residency.

Within this unique working environment Yarrow created a series of small black-and-white prints titled "Ghosts." Yarrow chose a Japanese dancer as model, placing him in the set of a Japanese bamboo forest. In accordance with the tide, Yarrow's images have a haunting quality. The compositions are simple. The scantily clad dancer stretches and wanes among luminous bamboo trees. As he falls into and out of the dark shadows of the forest, he begins to embody the fluid grace of a ballet dancer and the controlled power of the samurai.

Mark Woolley Gallery, 120 N.W. Ninth Ave., No. 210. Hours: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, through Oct. 28.

Visual Arts

BY LISA LAMBERT

243-2222 EXT. 313

To be considered for listings, send information at least two weeks in advance to Visual Arts, *WWJ*, 822 SW 10th Ave., Portland, OR 97205. Fax: 243-1115.

Most galleries are open Tuesday through Saturday; some have more limited hours or require an appointment. Call ahead for times.

new review

Works from Rwanda

Africa has a new face. The round-eyed children posing for charity commercials (sentimental remnants of the racist white man's burden) have left, replaced by the subjects of Robert Lyons' recent photographs.

The photos in Lyons' show, *Works from Rwanda*, are large (most measure 30 inches by 30 inches) and sometimes combined into triptychs. The camera stays close to the subjects, normally only capturing their faces and upper bodies in clean and crisp black-and-white (Lyons uses gelatin-silver prints). Most are taken with a wide aperture, giving the faces noticeable detail and letting the rest of the world blur along the edges. Sometimes the subjects smile, and sometimes they look unapologetically into the camera.

They are more than poster children. These are people, worth watching, studying and understanding. Many of them are also confessed participants in genocide.

Lyons' show centers on recent violence in Rwanda. It includes installations created by Dutch Meyer that narrate the war, its accompanying genocide and the justice system devised to determine who is a "genocidaire" and who isn't. While Meyer's pieces are interesting and informative, the photographs form the heart of the show.

The photos' subjects look human, and yet some of them are monsters capable of murdering babies. The accompanying silver placards that give background information about each portrait look like cheesy mirrors, as if to remind viewers that they, too, may have genocidaires lurking inside—although the descriptions printed on the cards and the high level of humanity portrayed in the photographs do this already. Simply, the placards relay the subjects' names, their crimes, their ages and

their hometowns. The photographs portray these people honestly and openly, allowing viewers to look straight at them and see the coexistence of beauty and ugliness, the irrepressible clashes of the human soul. They allow us to connect real people to the headlines and exposé articles. They inspire inquiry over snap judgments. Most importantly, they are compelling portraits in their own right. (LL) Elizabeth Leach, 207 SW Pine St., 224-0521. Ends Nov. 11.

VISUAL ARTS

BY KATE BONANSINGA

243-2122 EXT. 313

Rich Rollins sees the extraordinary in the familiar, while fellow photographer Robert Lyons travels and locates the unusual.

At Home and Abroad

REVIEW

Photographs by
Robert Lyons
Elizabeth Leach
Gallery
207 SW Pine St.,
224-0521
Ends May 30

Photographs by
Rich Rollins
Gallery 114
1100 NW Glisan St.,
243-3356
Ends May 30

Rich Rollins edits the ordinary in his inventive and understated black-and-white representations. Robert Lyons seeks out subjects that fascinate him and photographs them in vibrant, seductive color.

These two photographers currently have solo exhibitions in Portland galleries. Both men are white, educated, mid-career artists who reside in the Pacific Northwest and use a camera as their primary tool for art making. But this is where the similarities end. Their approaches to recording their experiences in the world are radically different, which suggests that their intentions as artists are different, as well.

Rollins' subjects include the uneven edge of a concrete road; the legs, feet and shadow of a woman walking across the street; a white



Rollins makes the familiar just abstract enough to be exotic (above), whereas Lyons conveys the qualities of a place he finds exotic (left).

line on brick wall; a bird on a telephone wire; waves in water. The 22 images in his current exhibition are all untitled, and all but one are the intimate size of 5 inches by 5 inches. This artist abstracts mundane scenes just enough to make them speak of more than themselves. He photographs with a Diana camera, which has an inexpensive, plastic lens that does not provide an even focus across the picture plane. Consequently, the photographs are sharp and resolved in the center and dark and blurred at their edges: The representation is reminiscent of a memory drifting out of focus. It's not clear where these images were taken, and Rollins seems as satisfied



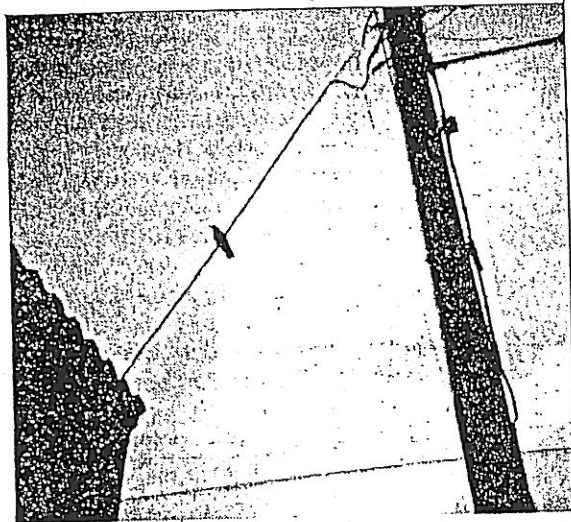
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continued from page 57

photographing in and around his Portland home as he does in places less familiar to him. He is, in his words, "by nature an observer" for whom seeing is a creative act. "I love to look, to be in the world wandering," he says.

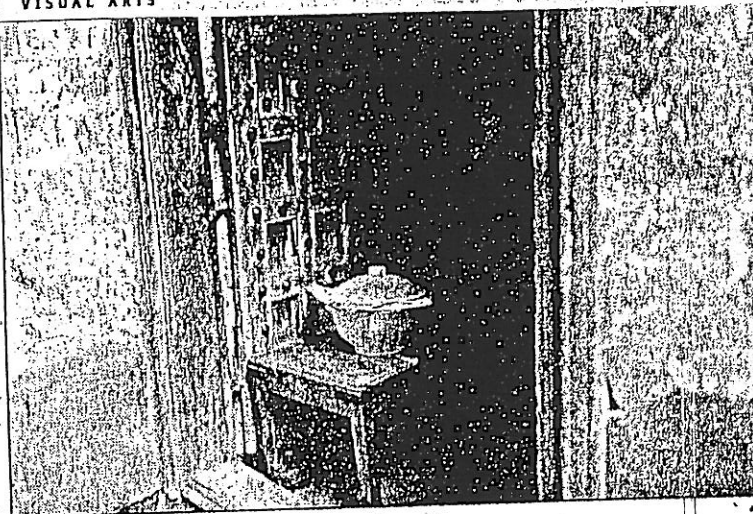
By contrast, Robert Lyons, who received his MFA from Yale University, photographs in vibrant, seductive color, which he says "permits the suspension of disbelief." He travels from his home base of Seattle to places that North Americans find exotic and photographs the landscapes and the people who live there. The exhibited prints are of Africa, and most of them are 20 inches by 24 inches, large enough to

An untitled photograph by Robert Lyons



seem cinematic. *Commercial Artists Studio*, for example, is a photograph of the front of an artist's studio and shop in Ghana. To the right of the open door, painted in bright colors on the facade, is an image of Sean Connery wearing a tuxedo and holding a gun. The facial features are inaccurate, but the actor's name is unevenly printed beneath his portrait, so there is no mistake about his identity. "For Your Eyes Only" is printed above in bamboo-like script, like that found on prepackaged Chinese food. *Fante Woman*, photographed in Ghana, portrays a dark-skinned young woman from the waist up. She wears a paisley dress and is seated sideways at a window, looking over her shoulder through a light gauze curtain at the viewer. *Food Stall, Stonetown, Zanzibar Island, Tanzania* renders a lidded, glass bowl etched with grapes and peaches. It rests on a wooden chair that props open a thick door carved in a grid pattern.

These subjects represent "the other" and seem to fascinate Lyons. British colonial travel photographers set a precedent for the recording of such scenes in the mid-19th century. Francis Frith traveled to the Middle East three times between 1856 and 1859 and created several portfolios of images that found a healthy market with his fellow Victorian English-



Food Stall, Stonetown, Zanzibar Island, Tanzania by Rich Rollins

men. His second trip was sponsored by the publisher Negretti and Zambra, who subsequently published *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described* by Francis Frith. Lyons' intentions appear to be similar to Frith's in that he's photographing foreign lands with an eye for the beauty and "exoticism" that appeals to the population in his homeland.

Both Rollins and Lyons convey their interpretation of the world with photographs. Rollins makes poetry of the mundane; Lyons captures subjects and scenes that seem extraordinary to Anglos. Rollins' work is not

location-specific; Lyons conveys the qualities of a particular place from his point of view—his bodies of work are usually formed around a country or continent. Rollins is a true observer; Lyons is a collector of images reflecting the extensiveness of his travels. If "ordinary" is what 20th-century North American urban dwellers experience on a daily basis, then the crux of Rollins' art is a passionate portrayal of the transcendent in the ordinary. Conversely, the basis of Lyons' art is physically escaping the ordinary and photographing what he finds once he gets out.

xxx



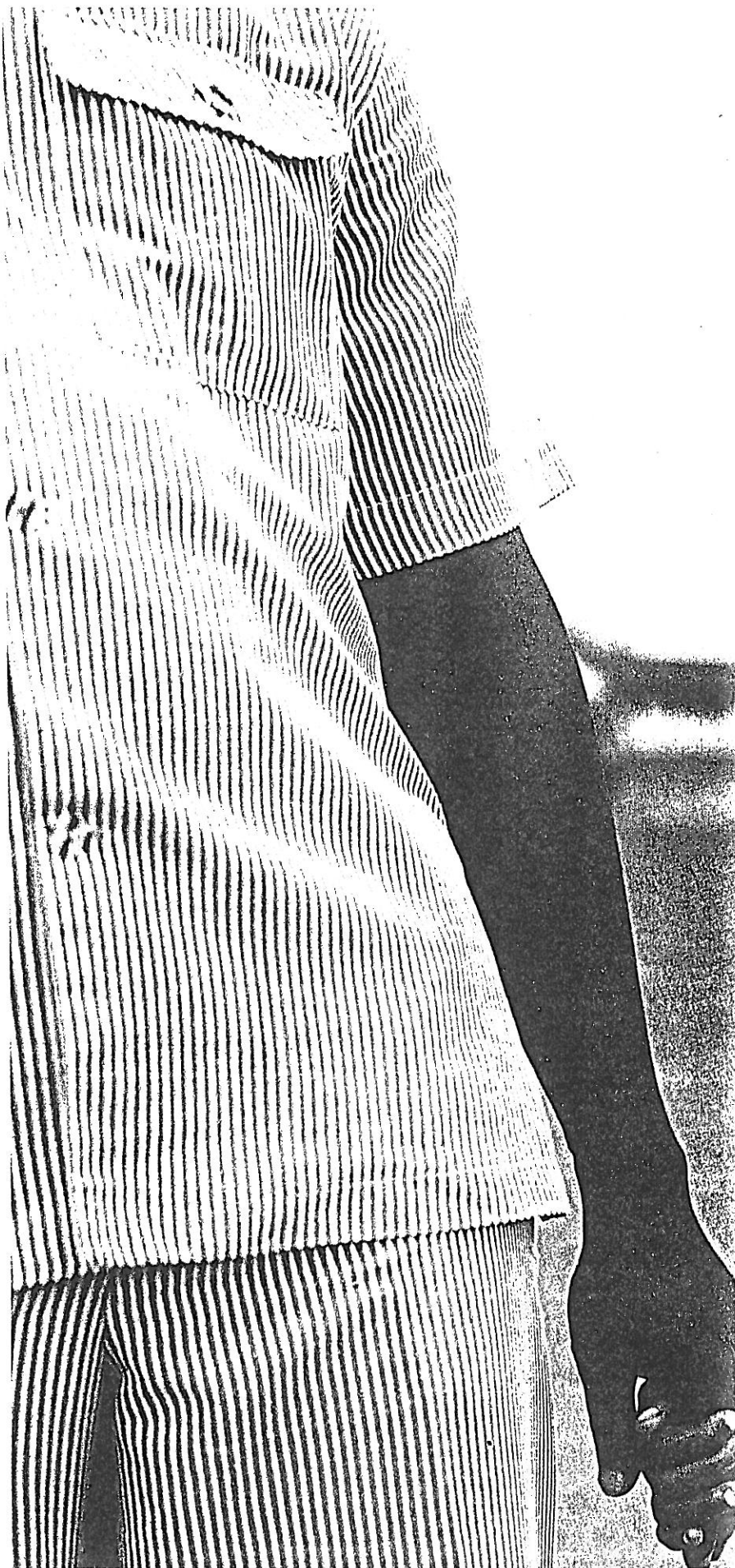
THE NEW YORKER

DECEMBER 21, 1998

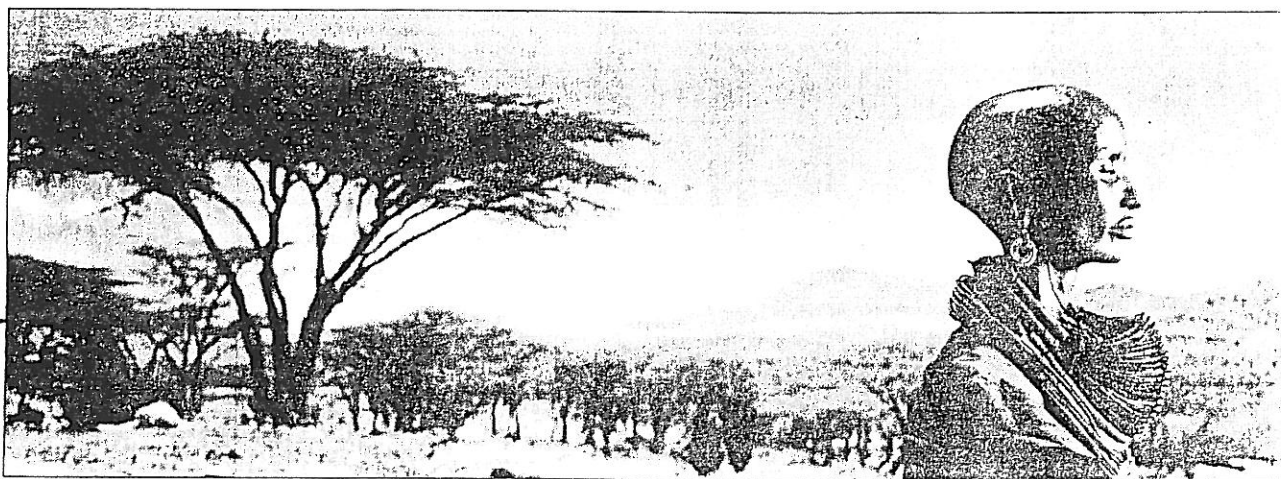
CONTINENTAL DRIFT

In an essay included in Robert Lyons's latest book of photographs, "Another Africa" (Anchor), the renowned Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe faults the West's "hankering for the exotic" in its perception of Africa. Lyons himself, who has been photographing the continent since 1989, writes of trying "to counteract the constant portrayal of Africa as a place beset by famine, drought, and civil war." In their clarity, dignity, and stark simplicity, however, Lyons's photographs have an exoticism all their own. The images of ordinary Africans going about their ordinary lives—as street vendors, in primary schools, in night clubs and bars, playing checkers, waiting for ferries or buses—leave the viewer with the sense of a world filled with mysteries and small wonders.

"Young Girl Outside Manhiya Palace," Kumasi, Ghana, 1997







"Sukulen, age 37," by Phil Borges from his current exhibit now showing at the Benham Studio Gallery.

Capturing the faces of Africa

Photographers take different approaches to their subjects — one manipulative, one more natural

By JOE HEIM • Seattle Times staff reporter

There is something both fascinating and oddly disconcerting about the exhibit of Phil Borges' photographs of Kenyan, Ethiopian and Indonesian tribes people now being shown at the Benham Studio Gallery.

Borges, an award-winning Seattle-based photographer, has made a name for himself with projects, particularly his much-heralded photographs about Tibet, that focus on endangered cultures around the world. The nearly two dozen photographs in the Benham exhibit continue to mine that potentially rich vein, but the results in this case are less than satisfying.

Many of the pictures are stunning, and it is as interesting to explore the landscape of faces as the panorama of mountains and plains that seem to float behind them. The problem is that Borges seems not to trust the pictures on their own merit. Using a sepia-toning process, he has added color to the human subjects in his photographs, while leaving the background in black and white. By trying to make more of what he has, he ends up making less.

While there is a great elegance and intensity to the faces, the enhancing process creates a certain falseness or staged aspect. And many of the pictures end up looking like studio portraits imposed on an impossibly fake background.

By manipulating the photographs, the artist in turn manipulates the viewers. You can almost hear the photographer's instructions: "Look off to the side, don't smile, think of something sad or serious."

In their insistence on nobility and earnestness, the pictures sacrifice a basic humanness. All of the people photographed seem to view the world through only doleful eyes. There is no hint of

humor, playfulness or other emotions that connect people of all cultures.

An additional and perhaps more serious problem is that the photographs are overly enamored with the subjects' exotic qualities. They unknowingly become models, recast and framed in the artist's understanding of them. Perhaps that is the artist's prerogative, but in this instance it seems overly presumptuous.

Artful without being condescending

A very different approach to photographing people from the same area of the world is taken by Robert Lyons, another Seattle-based artist whose recent works are showing at Grover/Thurston Gallery.

The 20 full-color photographs on display were taken in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mali and Ghana. Lyons clearly sees a different Africa than Borges. His pictures capture people caught in transition between old ways and customs and the imposition of the West. But the real difference between the two photographers is the way they treat their subjects.

While many of Lyons' photographs are also portraits, they seem neither contrived nor manipulated. The subjects look directly at the camera but never seem to be posing. As a result, the photographs capture emotion and feeling in a way that Borges' photographs do not.

There is also an understated quality to Lyons' work that somehow enhances the essence of whatever he decides to shoot, be it three stacked coffins, a woman behind a screen or a handmade checkerboard. The pictures are artful and engaging without being condescending.

Robert Lyons' photographs capture emotion and feeling in a way that Phil Borges' photographs do not.

Photographs by Phil Borges

Through Nov. 30 at Benham Studio Gallery, 1216 First Ave., Seattle; 206-622-2480. An artist reception will be held from 6-8 p.m. tomorrow at the gallery.

Photographs by Robert Lyons

Through Nov. 29 at Grover/Thurston Gallery, 309 Occidental Ave. S., Seattle; 206-223-0816.

Lyons eyes a different perspective of Africa

By REGINA HACKETT
FI ART CRITIC

The ladies in black lipstick are exhausted. Turbaned, bedecked and bejeweled, these rural dancers from the Senegalese provinces have waited too long to perform.

Seattle's Robert Lyons shot them three hours after their scheduled slot at a car race in Dakar. They fill his foreground in a horizontal row, squashing their crisp black and yellow costumes by leaning their backsides against a rail, professional glamour deflated, the race a blur behind them.

Lyons is showing a portion of his African portfolio at the Grover/Thurston Gallery. A 42-year-old Jewish American with sandy blond hair and green eyes, he has spent a major portion of his career traveling through the Arab and African-Muslim worlds with his camera, shooting chromogenic dye prints of startling beauty and affectionate insight.

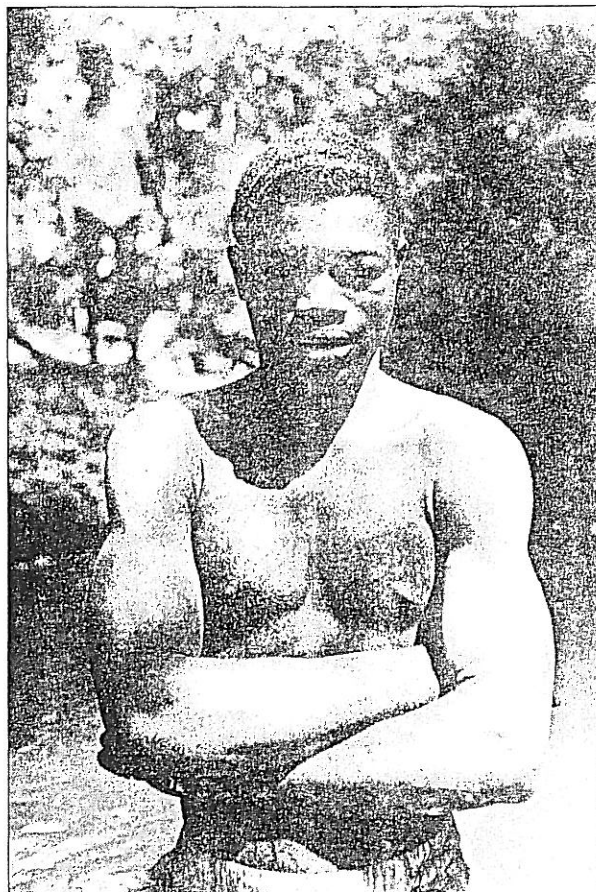
Lyons' Arab/African photographs do not show crisis, confrontation or post-colonial injustice. He's interested in the rhythm and color of life itself. He documents something rarely noted in news photography — that the world in these regions is awash in a high-tone and sophisticated visual style.

Lyons traces the colors that William Eggleston found in Southern U.S. kitchens, living rooms and streets to their source, and presents them in their original context.

His work is deceptively casual. The genius of the print of Senegalese dancers (24 inches square) is in its details: the black lipstick and curving black eyeliner distinct and charming against the warm, satin brown skin; the boldness of the patterned prints puffing out around ripe bodies; the women's regal indifference to the background action, which excludes them.

The owners of Mali's "Cafe Nuits de Chine" (30 inches high by 40 inches wide) use Christmas decorations as part of their regular decor. Colored lights and sparkly gold ropes hang from the thatched ceiling, things of beauty and joys forever. Walls are painted deep turquoise, turning the room into sky floating on a red horizon line.

A Sudanese boxer (on the What's Happening cover) assumes the position with fists raised, head warily cocked. He's a coiled spring of kinetic energy, not an extra calorie stored on his lean body. He needs no



Robert Lyons' "La Gingette River, Burkina Faso" was taken in 1991.

ART REVIEW

■ Robert Lyons photographs at Grover/Thurston Gallery, 309 Occidental Ave. S., through March 2. Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

props to fill his frame, and neither does the larger, generously built young man hip deep in water who appears in "La Gingette River, Burkina Faso." (Both prints are 40 inches high by 30 inches wide.) Arms folded across his chest, the swimmer is a gentle giant, an impassive, handsome Buddha gazing at the camera with benign detachment.

Lyons loves blue. What caused him to wade out into the river in pursuit of the shot might have been the man's faded turquoise trunks, the top band visible above the murky green water with an apt brand name sewn across the front: "C'est Jolie."

Mali's "Dogon Market" (20 inches high by 60 inches wide) is a sweeping horizontal narrative. Women sitting, turning and standing are in charge, organizing the drift of colored produce around them, directing children and customers. Set into a dirt square, the market is anchored at its edges by fat, ash white baobab trees, one in the center,

several at either end.

Painted metal, colored plastic and woven baskets are heaped high with seeds, fruit, cloth and vegetables. In the congestion and the heavy heat, a pregnant woman scans the crowd. She has a smooth, 20-year-old face and 50-year-old hands; hard work.

Lyons' prints have attracted attention not only in New York but in Egypt and Africa. In 1992, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Naguib Mahfouz contributed a story for Lyons' book of photos, "Egyptian Time" (Doubleday), now unfortunately out of print.

Lyons is working on a similar book with Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, whose novel "Things Fall Apart" is an African tragedy on par with "King Lear."

Beauty may be its own reward, but the beauty of Lyons' prints has a purpose. He's celebrating cultures whose aesthetic productions are not limited to the quarantine of museums. They fill streets, cover walls and fueling stations, grace the bar stools and bodies of even the poorest inhabitants.

In Lyons' version of Egypt and Africa, art is not the enterprise of the specialist but the work of the world itself, the assumed context, the gracious given of daily life.



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visual arts

Capturing a culture clash



In his photos from Africa, Robert Lyons sees a poetic tension in the absorption of foreign ideas

By RANDY GRAGG
of The Oregonian staff

From the time of its invention, photography has been entwined with travel. One part show-and-tell, another part proof "I was there," travel photography made use of one of the medium's most powerful aspects: making the world more portable.

But with most early travel photographers coming from the First World, and most of their subjects being in the Third World, the genre also became entangled with colonialism. As capitalists exploited foreign lands and missionaries converted foreign peoples, photographers often preserved the foreignness of both.

To twist an old slogan: "Kodak — it's the next best thing to being how it was."

These days, of course, photography has become such an extension of living that few of us would even think of traveling beyond the city limits sans camera. Like bats projecting sound waves to "see" the world around them, we photograph, perhaps, to navigate a world ever increasingly shaped by images.

Any photographer of foreign places, however, who calls himself "an artist" lives by a higher law. Hanging the pictures in a gallery, selling them to collectors and, perhaps, one day establishing them in a museum collection is about more than snapping cool shots. It's a self-conscious effort to present a historic vision.

And far more than being about reportage, exotic landmarks or pleasing compositions, this kind of photography is about ethics.

At first glance, Robert Lyons' photographs of Sudan, Mali, Niger, Ghana and Morocco might not seem worthy of such high-falutin' scrutiny. The photos, now on view at Savage Fine Arts, often seem rather casual: a straightforward portrait here, a still-life there and the odd-occasional landscape, sometimes with people, sometimes not. But over time, Lyons' images tend to collect in the mind, much like the patina of humanity so frequently found in each of his compositions.

Lyons is a photojournalist by trade who frequently

works for the New York Times Magazine and other high-end publications. But left to his own devices, he's interested in almost anything but the news.

He shows us the Safari Nightclub in Zinder, Niger, festooned with mirrors, foil-covered plywood, lace and Christmas-tree garlands — but entirely empty. His still-life of a pair of blue fish crossed like swords on a cutting board is isolated against the gray floor of a Ghanaian market, blank but for a rotted banana peel.

Yet imbedded in each of the photographs is a quiet and often poetic tension between the evidence of Western influence and the absorption of it. We see things we know — molded plastic kitchen utensils, high-design modern chairs or a children's swing set — but they've become African. Like surrogates for our own Western sensibilities, they have been subsumed, altered and sent back to us, via Lyons' pictures, in ethnic dress.

The complexity of Lyons' work is perhaps best understood by his simplest images — those of people. The man standing in the La Ginguette River of Burkina Faso; the sinewy and scarred Sudanese boxer raising his fists; and the Nigerian nanny cradling a white baby, each show profoundly different emotions, and consequently widely different interactions between photographer and subject. Though he is ultimately just another white man in a long tradition of photo-colonialists, Lyons quietly shows us the many reactions to the handshake of the camera, whether friendly, bemused, theatrical, careful or, occasionally, hostile.

Indeed, one of the most engaging images in this show is a large panorama of the Dagon Market in Tirelli, Mali. Here, poetry and fact flirt but remain in separate rooms, in a metaphor for the parallel dilemmas of understanding other cultures and photographs. In a collage of patterned fabric, meager wares, blurred movement and the tightly entwined interactions of daily life, a man at the center stands staring baldly back. As you meet his gaze, it's the classic experience of photography as both a window and a mirror: a view on another culture and the reflection of what's different about our own.

Parallel Enlightenments on the life and work of Blake

"On-line," "CD-Rom" and "interactive" may be the new words for new media. But what do they mean for the old media of art? Artists James Petrillo and Betsy Davids may have an answer. Look to history's precedents.

Part performance art, part CD-Rom demonstration, Petrillo and Davids will present "A Voice from the Fire: William Blake" — a look at one of history's original multidisciplinary artists.



Creating dense books of unprecedented images and verse, Blake was as little understood by the mainstream of his time as your average cyberpunk is today. Petrillo and Davids offer something of a biography of Blake, speculating that the steamy romantic life he led was the source for the heated work he produced.

Make no mistake, the piece is experimental, no doubt with the usual pluses and minuses — and pleasures and failures — of trying the new.

Friday 8 p.m. Northwest Film Center, 1219 S.W. Park, \$6

— Randy Gragg

review

Robert Lyons:
"Under African Skies"

WHERE: Savage Fine Art

HOURS: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.,
Mondays through Fridays
by appointment; call
223-2668

CLOSING: Nov. 10

ADMISSION: Free



Broadening the tradition of travel photography, Robert Lyons confronts his viewers with a panoramic slice of a Nigerian market.

ROBERT LYONS