

Photos and videos document a changing Africa



"Engu, Nigeria," part of the "Possible Cities: Africa in Photography & Video" exhibition at Haverford College. The works explore the relationship between Africa's past and future.

By Victoria Donohoe, For The Inquirer

POSTED: April 22, 2011

'Possible Cities: Africa in Photography & Video' is a major exhibition now at Haverford College, developed in conjunction with the 2011 Mellon Symposium "Imaging Africa," an international event held there recently.

The display acknowledges that we live in a "city century" or "urban millennium," and that Africa is growing more citified at a faster rate than any other continent. Lagos, Nigeria, is one of the largest cities on Earth, and Nigeria's Nollywood is the world's third-largest and fastest-growing film industry.

That said, "Possible Cities" in its exhibition catalog declares itself sharply opposed to the "troubled" and "troubling" image of Africa that the "global media consistently circulates" (barren, it says, but for the two extreme pendulum swings of coverage: idyllic landscape with roaming wild beasts, and deep poverty, warfare, and corruption).

In this show, curated by anthropologist Ruti Talmor, a more complicated picture of Africa emerges, one that begins anew to explore the relationship between the continent's rich historical past and its future. This is reflected in the work on city life by four photographers and two video artists, each living in a particular cosmopolitan area portrayed.

Two strikingly different video presentations are equally compelling. One is an individual's daring - and optimistic - action that shows a problem on a public street but seems to suggest that, with a little help, the problem can be solved. In *Eastleigh Crossing* - created by the single-named artist couple IngridMwangiRobertHutter - Kenyan-born performance artist Ingrid Mwangi wades into a very large puddle of murky water on a busy street at Nairobi's edge, crowded with Somalian Muslim refugees. It's an area of veiled women where Somalian pirate money energizes the local economy.

Anthropologists recognize, from studying the way the sidewalk crowd follows Mwangi's every move as she thrashes about and cries out madly, that the fact people seem ready to help her if she falls is very significant. Such a response among strangers, we're told, is a decidedly urban trait. It suggests strength in that newly forming community - something that can be built upon. Societies that lack this may appear stable, but they break down easily.

The other video, Salem Mekuria's *Square Stories*, gives a thoughtful, if brief, historical overview marking Ethiopia's millennium with images of Maskal Square in the heart of Addis Ababa, the country's center of state throughout the ages, including the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, later overthrown by a brutal military junta.

Meanwhile, Peter Hugo's intense portraits reflect marginality, power, and Nollywood actors' high jinks. Sammy Balogi's Congolese images succinctly blend the historical Belgian presence and new media, while Sabelo Mlangeni looks penetratingly at changing relationships between city and rural locations. He pictures the corps of "unseen" female workers who clean Johannesburg's streets at night, while their husbands stay home doing the housework. Guy Tillim's images of people and architecture in Congo, Madagascar, and Mozambique also are a rugged asset.

Art indeed is more than a form of personal expression; it's also a way of presenting to others a vision of the human condition that



@

[Like](#) [Tweet](#)

We Recommend

A Kenyan Lawman: Large In Life, Now Larger In Legend

March 13, 1988

Out of Africa, a new wave of crime fiction

August 25, 2011

Exhibits Journeys Of Blacks From Dixie To Phila.

December 14, 1989

Footprints provide clues on path to modern man

February 27, 2009

Find More Stories About

[Nairobi](#)

[Africa](#)

may belong to one person, but that others can recognize as true and significant for them, too. The artwork in "Possible Cities" speaks to people in that way. A groundbreaking show.

Haverford College's Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford. Through next Friday. Mon.-Fri. 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Wed. 11-8, Sat.-Sun. noon-5. Free. 610-898-1287.

Curves and Colors

Alan J. Klawans of Willow Grove and Andrew Werth of Princeton Junction share an exhibition called "Curves and Colors" at Artists' Gallery in Lambertville, N.J., the 18-artist co-op that relocated a year ago to a more prominent place in the town. The strength of Klawans' work is that it is bound up with an expansive approach to daily experience. The mood is lyric, the colors often bright in these original, zingy, limited-edition digital prints. None are copies of his art done in other media.

Andy Werth, meanwhile, panel-paints his acrylics with a slow, deliberate process reflecting his deep personal feelings about abstraction and symbolization.

He involves the two effectively, fascinated as he is with the philosophy and science of the mind. The collective title of these softly patterned works, "Centers of Narrative Gravity," is a reminder of that.

Artists' Gallery, 18 Bridge St., Lambertville, N.J. To May 1. Fri.-Sun. 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Free. 609-397-4588.

Figures and glass

Nancy E.P. Halbert and Sara Horne offer "Horne & Halbert" at Muse, a 22-member vintage co-op gallery. Boredom is foreign to Halbert's paintings - variation, not repetition, is her rule in dealing with the human figure. Several of her finest subjects achieve an independent complexity in their rugged, hearty dignity.

Sara Horne, a lover of marine biology, finds her voice in tabletop and other small handblown and sandblasted glass pieces with hard-to-ignore surfaces.

Muse Gallery, 52 N. Second St. To May 1. Wed.-Sun. noon-5 p.m. Free. 215-627-5310.

Comments for this thread are now closed. X

0 Comments [Philly.com](#)

[Login](#) ▾

Sort by Best ▾

Share Favorite

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON PHILLY.COM

[WHAT'S THIS?](#)

[Homelessness is on the rise in Kensington](#)

68 comments

[Naya Rivera Marries Ryan Dorsey In Surprise Wedding](#)

1 comment

[Comcast's charity extends to friends and potential foes](#)

18 comments

[PhillyDeals: Building bridges in a new Pa. style](#)

3 comments

[Subscribe](#)

[Add Disqus to your site](#)

comments powered by [Disqus](#)

[Commenting policy](#) | [Comments FAQ](#)

FEATURED ARTICLES



Carpenters to picket letter-carriers' convention