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Deep into the heart of Africa



Photo by Spanish photographer Jaime Mota exhibited at AUC.



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By **Mariam Hamdy / Special to Daily News Egypt** **April 2, 2010, 2:00 am**

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Photography is a particularly strong medium when explored properly. Alas, it's been fairly difficult to find a photography exhibition in Cairo without cliché and tired ideas. The recent exhibited works have been somewhat pasty: either too abstract to incite interest or too obvious to sustain attention.

A wonderful interruption to the pallor of today's photography is the current show at the American University in Cairo's Photographic Gallery, "African Photographs," by Spanish photographer Jaime Mota.

Mota is an exceptional photographer, a fact that can be instantly deduced upon entering the gallery space. I also have to mention that the AUC Photographic Gallery is an exquisite space for photography exhibitions. With superb high ceilings and skillfully designed windows allowing natural sunlight to tenderly touch the photos, the work is beautifully presented in the best possible form.

Mota's work is a true reflection of his conscientious, genuine representation of the unfortunate, the lost and the forgotten. After traveling to various places across Africa and witnessing the dire conditions endured by its inhabitants to acquire basic needs like food, water, shelter and education, Mota felt obliged to show the world the neglected reality of these people.

In 2003, Mota launched a humanitarian aid project to a school-orphanage in northern Tanzania. The project was supported and funded by the Foundation of International Lyons Club, which ultimately led to the fundraising of €24,000.

In the same vein, Mota's aim behind this exhibition is to increase awareness of these "pure and humble" people, and, with any luck, impel the viewers to lend them a helping hand. The contrast between the fact that the images portray everyday events we can relate to, yet in such poverty-stricken areas we could not possibly imagine living under, is both painful and alarming.

Images showing naked children at a school looking eager to learn in what appears to be a barely complete hut of a classroom, or texts carved in stone as reading materials instead of books, jolt the viewer into this harsh reality. Despite their severity, some of the images are alive with happiness, such as the beautiful photograph of a young girl at play aptly titled "Felicity" or a young boy jumping into a lake titled "Into the Water."

In contrast, an image of two teenage boys kneeling in a shallow pool of water to drink can swiftly break your heart. This kind of spectrum of emotion illustrates Mota's excellent eye for capturing

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break your heart. This kind of spectrum of emotion illustrates Mota's excellent eye for capturing rare and intimate moments.

The photographs stare deep into the subject's soul — without resorting to the visual platitudes that plague representation of similar subjects. Mota's ability to present deep and difficult-to-digest subjects without forgoing the artistic approach to presentation is worth teaching.

His compositions are flawless: both balanced and absorbing; his photographs never fail to present a scarring image with incomparable beauty.

Although shot entirely in black and white, the most impressive aspect of the photographs is their full spectrum of color. The tonalities employed in the photographs are startling in their intensity, a further testament to Mota's expertise.

Not only are the photographs remarkable, but the sentiment that Mota displays in this exhibition, and iterates on the walls of the gallery, is worth supporting. Such a giving and thoughtful endeavor to increase awareness of this world that is literally mere hours away from our own personal comfort is humbling to any viewer.

And doing so via art grants this field and the artist's profession a whole new goal and substance.

"African Photographs" is not like any photography show you'll come across, and it is certainly worth the long drive to the new AUC campus.

"African Photographs" is currently showing Sunday through Thursday, 10 am-5:30 pm, at the American University in Cairo's Photographic Gallery.
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