



The SPACE Art Gallery

Presents

“The Gift of Water”

by

William T. Dowell

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WATER RESEARCH CENTER

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Covering the news for more than half a century, William Dowell has worked on assignment in five continents. *“The Gift of Water,”* his first solo exhibition at The SPACE, focuses on the individuals from the mountains of the Hindu Kush to the depths of the Congo and their dependence and interaction with one of the five basic elements of the universe. William’s career began in Vietnam during the war, where he started as a freelance combat cameraman for UPI Television and then signed on with NBC News. After a brief period with NBC Nightly News in Washington, DC, he moved to Paris, France, and freelanced for the next 15 years, parachuting into trouble spots in Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In 1989, he signed on as a staff Middle East correspondent for TIME Magazine, covering the Arab World and Iran. That was followed by a tour as TIME’s Southeast Asia bureau chief, based in Hong Kong. After retiring from TIME, he signed on as information coordinator for a rapid reaction team responding to major international disasters for CARE, the world’s largest secular international development agency. That work took him from Asia to the Horn of Africa, with a focus on water as the gift of life and at times the bearer of destruction. It is that experience, and the documentary images it produced, that allow us to delve into a world rarely seen in such a personal manner as its subjects live with the ebb and flow of *“The Gift of Water”*.

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The Congo River Aug - Sept 2001

On assignment William ventured up the Congo River to Mbandaka, the river port capital of the Congo's breakaway Equateur Province. The Congo is so vast that the river is the primary means of transport. The 9/11 terrorist attack against the World Trade Center, which occurred at the same time, dominated the headlines and the story was never published. The photographs, seen here for the first time in public, depict a way of life that hasn't been influenced by the tech bubble or nearly every measure of life that we take for granted in the western world.



A barge carries passengers and cargo up the Congo River, near Mbandaka (formerly Coquilhatville). The town is 364 miles by river from Kinshasa and the distance by road is more than 2,000 miles and takes at least 45 hours to drive. Mbandaka was the center of the UN's efforts using the Uruguayan Navy as peacekeepers to clear the river of pirates in order to open the country's interior to transport.

“Barge on the Congo River” Congo. 2001
8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

It takes one month to travel up river from Kinshasa. These barges stop at villages on the journey up river and the passengers can buy food and supplies at the villages along the way. In the life on the river, these villages are sparsely populated and seem inactive, until a barge carrying a thousand or more people arrive. The effect is like a county fair. Villagers slaughter pigs and chickens or smoke small crocodiles for meat. They eat fish and the popular delicacy of live caterpillars. In the foreground a Father teaches son how to navigate a pirogue, a key skill to survive life encompassed by water.



“Barge Arriving at Mbandaka” Congo. 2001
8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00



“The Riverfront at Mbandaka” Congo. 2001
 8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

Most of the traffic out of Mbandaka is by pirogues, the wooden dug out canoes. The wreckage of a river steam ship arises from the middle of the scene. Mbandaka has a lively commerce serving much of the region. The Pirogues are made out of the trunks of Tola Trees which can grow to 200 feet and have trunks upto 3 feet in circumference.

A woman selling an electric catfish while nursing her baby, in the Mbandaka market. The Electric Catfish stuns its prey with 300 volts of electricity and can be treacherous to fishermen.



“Mother and Child” Congo. 2001
 8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00



“Fish Market” Congo. 2001
 8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

A local catch for sale at the market - The Goliath Tiger Fish head, these fish can grow in excess of 5 feet and weigh over 110 lbs. These are one of the few fish known to kill crocodiles. For the locals the food the river provides is essential to their way of life and they are willing to hunt in the fast rapids that these fish are known to occupy.



“The Future is Here.” Congo. 2001

8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

School boys in Equatoria Province, Congo. The province was in rebellion against the capital. Teachers maintained classes, but they had no books and they even lacked chalk for the blackboards. The boys were reacting with enthusiasm to our arrival on a UN Russian built MI-8 helicopter flown by Ukrainians. One of the boys holds a knife in the air, another holds high a soccer ball, and in the melee, an empty container for water is brought forward, perhaps with the unconscious knowledge that this vessel is the boys most treasured item.

A child in pirogue on Congo River at Mbandaka. The need for clean water is one of the largest concerns for river people. As mining continues further into the Congo rainforest and industry changes the landscape, the effluent of the modern processes used will quickly alter the way of life the natives have been used to for millennia.



“Contemplating Life on the River” Congo. 2001
 8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

Sunsets on the Congo River, the only guarantee as the locals face uncertainty in their futures.



“Dusk on the River at Mbandaka” Congo. 2001
 8”x 12” matted 20” x 16” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

The Horn of Africa 2007 - 2008

As information coordinator for a rapid reaction team responding to major international disasters for CARE, William witnessed the unprecedented conditions in The Horn of Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea). They had previously experienced a severe drought once every five or six years but are now experiencing drought at least every two years. The boreholes used for getting fresh water from the ground tend to dry up quickly and are at best temporary.



Ethnic Somali women in the desert near Garissa, Kenya. These women would normally be helping their husbands, nomadic herdsman, raising goats and cattle. The absence of water has killed off many of the animals they previously depended on for survival. The Kenyan Government will not all these people to move towards Nairobi because it fears the revolutionaries from Somalia, where the social system collapsed long ago.

“Everything Here is a Luxury” Kenya. 2007
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

Gathering in the desert, Garissa. The white bag is fortified wheat, provided by USAID. The US Agency for International Development (USAID), delivered emergency food rations into the desert. Tanker trucks, provided by CARE also brought water to central distribution points.



“Life in the Desert” Kenya. 2007
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

This Ethiopian grandmother, from Borana, Ethiopia, told William that the government had forbidden nomadic tribes to take their herds where they want. As a result, her cow died and they were gradually slipping into deeper poverty. She feared for the survival of her grandchildren.



“Beauty, Age and Wisdom” Ethiopia. 2008
 12”x 8” matted 17” x 14” \$180.00
 18”x 12” matted 24”x 20” \$375.00



These women, near Garissa, northeastern Kenya, are transporting water from a distribution point to their encampments. The water is brought in by giant tanker trucks and then distributed on a daily basis.

“Bringing Home the Water” Kenya. 2007
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00



Dadaab was the largest refugee camp in the world. It is largely filled with Somalis fleeing the civil war in Mogadishu and it is run both by CARE and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The school, administered by CARE, was considered excellent. One of its graduates went on to Medical School in the United States and is now a recognized neurosurgeon. The quality of the school and the administration of the camp led many ordinary Kenyans to try to gain admission to the camp, pretending to be refugees. The UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees was responsible for determining admission.

“Surprise and Awe” Dadaab Refugee Camp. 2007
 12”x 8” matted 17” x 14” \$180.00
 18”x 12” matted 24”x 20” \$375.00

Hindu Kush Mountains 2005

The 2005 earthquake, which struck the Allai Valley in the Hindu Kush mountains of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Territory, registered 7.6 on the Richter scale. It killed 69,000 people immediately and injured another 70,000. Whole sides of mountains collapsed. Local government officials were traumatized and had difficulty knowing how to respond until international humanitarian organizations moved in and began providing relief.



Villagers are discussing emergency relief. The major concern was that winter was fast approaching and unless emergency shelters and food could be provided millions more might die. Snow would soon make mountain trails impassable.

“We will Decide” Allai Valley Pakistan. 2005
8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

The man, whose arm is being held, was accused of taking an extra blanket from relief supplies. The man holding a stone in his raised hand, is about to strike him. The incident brought home the tensions of the moment.



“Thief!” Allai Valley Pakistan. 2005
8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

Bangladesh Flooding (2006) and Cyclone Sidr (2007)

Flooding in 2006 that was compounded by the Cyclone Sidr of 2007 led to catastrophic circumstances for Bangladesh. The flooding is an annual event caused by melting snows in the Himalayas. The Cyclone Sidr in 2007 generated winds up to 150 miles an hour and created a 16' high sea surge that polluted the drinking water ponds, killing more than 10,000 people and leaving millions virtually homeless. These types of water borne catastrophes are a catalyst for dysentery and diarrhea from unsafe drinking.



This woman is filling water containers from an emergency pump filtering water up river on the Brahmaputra. Dysentery and diarrhea from unsafe drinking water are primary dangers for all. The Brahmaputra river, one of the longest in the world, starts at the Angsi Glacier in the Himalayas. Climate change and deforestation has left Bangladesh particularly vulnerable to more frequent floods because it is flat and very low lying.

“The Gift of Water” Bangladesh. 2006

12”x 8” matted 17” x 14” \$180.00

18”x 12” matted 24”x 20” \$375.00

These women had come up river in Bangladesh to an emergency medical clinic following 2006 floods, which left millions of people temporarily homeless in Bangladesh. CARE had organized medical teams with doctors from the capital, Dhaka. Many of the villagers had never seen a doctor or had any contact with organized medicine before. The greatest danger following the floods was waterborne disease. In the intense heat finding potable drinking water became a primary necessity.



“We Are Sisters” Bangladesh. 2006

8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00

12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00



This elderly man is contemplating flood conditions up country on the Brahmaputra, Bangladesh. A bridge had been knocked out by the river nearby and this was one of the transit points where dugout boats took travelers across to the other side.

“Return of the Floods” Bangladesh. 2006
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

Teams build emergency dikes up country along the Brahmaputra River. The battle that is never won, dikes are built as proactive measures to try and shore up the river banks but increasingly with the floods arriving more frequently and larger than ever the fight is one of futility. It’s a fight that one cannot win without external intervention.



“To Stem the Floods” Bangladesh. 2006
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00



A family adapting to flood conditions on the outskirts of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. The reality these people face is one of extreme resilience. The houses are on stilts, and during the monsoon season, the whole village can be under water.

“We Live with Water” Bangladesh. 2006
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00



“What Will Come Next?” Bangladesh. 2007
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

Women in Bangladesh following Cyclone Sidr. The humanitarian NGO CARE distributed coupons to the most vulnerable survivors, which they could then exchange for emergency supplies and food, much of which had been stockpiled by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). These women are at a food distribution point. The woman in black veil is holding a coupon that can be exchanged for supplies.

These are women waiting for emergency supplies at an aid distribution point, following Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh. The Cyclone struck at harvesting season for Bangladesh, wiping out any chance for crop.



“We Are Here” Bangladesh. 2007
 8”x12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

A Bengali boy waits at an emergency aid distribution point following Cyclone Sidr. In the midst of devastation this boy shows the determination that shows hope for the future. It is him, with the first hand knowledge of the pain these disasters create that can change how we, as a human race, cope with the unknowns of the next millenia.



“We Will Prevail” Bangladesh. 2007
 8”x 12” matted 14” x 17” \$180.00
 12”x 18” matted 20”x 24” \$375.00

Editions and Materials

This 1st edition series of William's work is exclusive to The SPACE Philadelphia. Each print is signed and dated 2019 by the artist.

Printed exclusively by The SPACE Art Gallery on Platine Fiber Rag using Archival Lucia Pro Pigment Inks. Mounted on Acid Free materials and matted using conservation quality Mat Board.

Each print is accompanied by a Certificate of Authenticity.

Framing is available, please ask to see samples.

Size 14"x17" \$125.00

Size 16"x20" \$150.00

Size 20"x24" \$200.00



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