

Advance Media Release

November 5, 2004

Douglas Curran
The Elephant Has Four Hearts: Photographs of Nyau Rituals

Exhibition dates: January 8 to February 27, 2005

Presentation House Gallery is very pleased to exhibit recent work by Vancouver based photographer Douglas Curran. He is the first person to extensively photograph the masks and rituals of the Nyau, a secret society of spirit dancers in Malawi. He is also perhaps the first photographer to ever document the rituals of an "exotic" people *after* being inducted into the "brotherhood" that maintains the beliefs and rituals that form the very core of a culture, in this case the Chewa people of Malawi. Curran's portraits of the Chewa masks carry much of the meaning in the rituals; some of the masks are out-sized zoomorphic entities that require several people to move them through their roles in the performances.

Curran first met members of the Chewa people while working on a film in Zimbabwe in 1992. The Chewa he met were migrant workers from Malawi employed on plantations and in mines. Over a period of nine years he has gradually become integrated into this community in Malawi, photographing the Nyau masks and the public performances of Gule Wamkulu (*The Great Dance*). The Chewa rituals and their masks form a complex and spectacular set of beliefs that Curran has been encouraged by the Chewa to document. No longer an outsider to this culture, Curran has created a stunning pictorial record that invites dialogue about recording the lives of others, and forces comparisons with contemporary performance art. The exhibition will consist of photographs, video and a sampling of masks. Curated by Bill Jeffries.

EVENT:

Saturday January 8 at 3pm Douglas Curran (other speakers TBA) will present a talk about his life among the Chewa people and answer questions about the exhibition and his experiences. Followed by a reception.

Douglas Curran is an internationally known photographer whose previous projects have also documented his encounters with the belief systems of specific cultures. *"In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space"* was a beautiful exhibition and a book from Abbeville Press. *"Photographs from the Metis Settlements of Alberta"* and *"Moses Couldn't Draw a Crowd... Travelling Tent Preachers in Modern America"* both documented systems of belief and knowledge that fall outside of contemporary norms.

Images available. CD enclosed. For more information contact Diane Evans at 604-986-1351 or go to Douglas Curran's Website: www.dougcurranphotos.com