



LONGING for Lamu

BY ANNELIES DAMEN



Annelies Damen

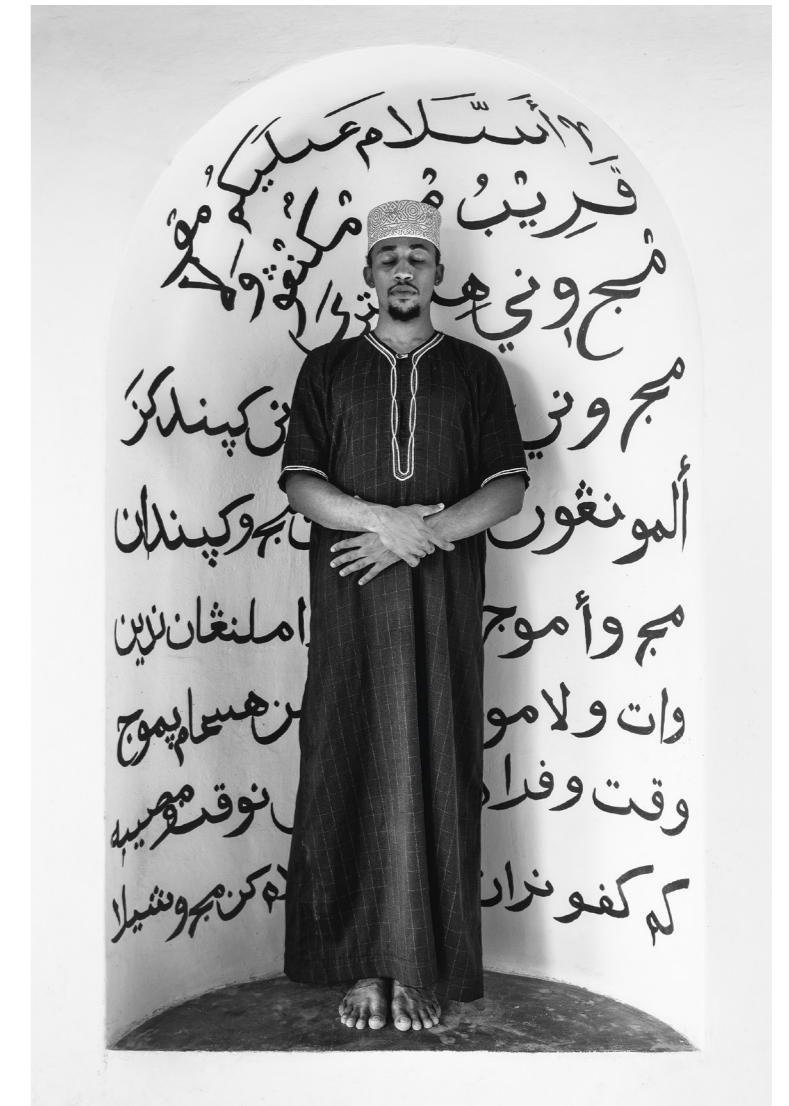
"The women in Africa fascinate me: magical, proud, independent as well as sensual. It was after my first extended trip to this continent that women became the central theme in my photography."



The beautiful hand carved Omani door frames the entrance to an all-male mosque. This photo captures a glimpse of a women's hand, detailed with traditional Swahili henna painting, as she cautiously enters a man's world. A mix of cultures brought together through a daring woman's touch.

Lamu is a melting pot of religions and cultures. Unlike the Swahili women, some of the women on Lamu, such as Sheila photographed here in the beautiful tropical light, have more freedom to express themselves, their bodies and emotions.

The Arabic influence on Lamu can be seen here in the language of the poem written on the wall behind the first ever male photographed by Annelies. Poetry is incredibly important to the women of Lamu as an outlet to express themselves in a way they are unable to do so physically and verbally.



“Lamu is a small island just off the coast of Kenya. The women who live there inspire me. They are very strong and they really make a difference.”

Elements of Inspiration

Whilst Annelies Damen’s family business is firmly fixed in ship and yacht building, her passion lies in art, travel and photography. Two worlds she creatively combines in her role at Damen Yachting leading the interior design concepts for both internal projects and working with clients. She draws on her experiences from travel, love of architecture and knowledge of the art world as elements of inspiration to influence design choices and create inspiring and evocative spaces to stimulate the imagination of clients. And for Annelies, no other continent has captured her imagination more so than Africa.

Her Home in Africa

Annelies first stepped foot on the Kenyan Archipelago of Lamu 20 years ago. The feel of this African paradise with its unspoilt Swahili cultures, slow pace of living and captivating architecture instantly triggered her creativity and Lamu has since become ‘her home’ in Africa. A place to recharge, re-energise and feel inspired.

The beach presents a unique opportunity for the Swahili women to be more at ease and express themselves, within limits, in a public place. A chance to recharge and embrace the beauty of nature.



Sheila’s back to front seating position symbolises her strong-will, determination and independence. For Annelies, she symbolises exactly why she admires the women in Africa who are able to draw on their strength of character.



Sheila proudly shows her natural beauty as she looks up to the sky high up on a roof top. Doused in the equatorial sunlight, she exposes her femininity and gentle touch which balance beautifully against her somewhat harder can-do nature. This photo is part of a series of three known as ‘Kiburi’ which means proud in Swahili.



“Sometimes the model looks away, sometimes her look says that she won’t be pushed around, but it always takes strength.”

Mirrors, decorated with local shells, are a prominent feature of interior décor in Lamu’s homes. For the women there, they are a symbol of a safe haven where they are permitted to express themselves, show their neck and shoulders and celebrate their ‘Azuri’ (beauty).

▼ Walls in Lamu are traditionally built using coral found on the beach. Here, this Muslim woman comes face to face with the coral wall, symbolic of both the boundaries she lives within but also that provide safety and protection.



Beyond this natural connection, there is a far stronger force at play; an overwhelming intrigue and respect for the women who live there. A chance to quite literally shine a light – the incredible tropical equatorial light – on these women as they go about their daily lives.

Strong Female Imagery

Like many of Annelies' collections, 'Longing for Lamu' is inspired by strong female imagery capturing the culture, connection to the surrounding landscape and beauty of the female form in both natural and architectural settings. This collection highlights the diverse female African culture with some women veiled in black, as is custom in Swahili culture, and others more boldly displaying their colourful clothes and interactive mannerisms in keeping with other African tribal traditions.

"There are so many cultural and religious influences in Lamu that you cannot help but be captivated by it. Especially by the women who have found strength in difference and harmony in acceptance and friendships that are not bounded by cultural or religious differences."



▲ The local Swahili culture and architecture, with beautiful houses and amazing inner courtyards, form the backdrop to photographing these beautiful women.

"During my last trip to Lamu, I met an incredible Imam who presented me with a collection of poems. These became a source of inspiration in capturing the women of Lamu's true identity in pictures."

▶ A typical Lamu house with its thick stone walls, cut out window holes and beautifully print decorated stairs. Sheila stands tall, a pillar of strength, in a dress made from traditional African fabric.



Behind the Lens

Annelies has turned her creative drive behind the lens into a successful career with her works displaying at numerous galleries and art collections both nationally and internationally. Her latest collection, 'Longing for Lamu', celebrates her deep affection for a place and people who have been a source of inspiration to her for 20 years.

▶ *In contrast, the same backdrop is used to photograph a woman from Lamu from a different religion and culture reflecting the harmonious relationship between all of the women on Lamu. Whilst they have different beliefs and different traditions, their femininity brings them together as friends and support for each other.*

Annelies Damen is a third-generation shareholder of the Damen Shipyards Group and Non-Executive board member. She has been closely involved with Damen Yachting's Amels projects for more than 20 years and enjoys discussing interior design proposals with clients.

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Lamu's beautiful school teacher epitomises grace, elegance and beauty. In contrast to some of the other women photographed, her tribal culture enables the freedom of expression with the colours, from both her clothing and the light, symbolising her strength and personality.