

Steptoe

Diversity & Art: A Virtual Tour

Peter Beard

United States (1938-2020)

Ali Hassan

Ali Hassan ("a lonely horn in the woods"), Servant to Karen Blixen (aka Isak Dinesen, author of *Out of Africa*); Nairobi Kenya for the *End of the Game*.



Work

It has been said that Peter Beard lived the kind of life Socrates would advise against, that is an unexamined one. Beard himself called his life an “accidental accumulation” of experiences, claiming that he never made a conscious decision about it. One could say the same about his work until human encroachment began to change the face of Africa. It was then that his photography found a mission, a mission he pursued even at the risk of his own life.

For the greatest part of his life, Beard’s work explored the effects of the Western world on Africa’s wildlife, elephants most poignantly, as well as the people of the African continent. He spent a good part of his life and career sounding the alarm about the future of our planet, while his work is testimony to, as well as an indictment, for the damage done to Africa by humans, whether it be missionaries, big-game hunters, or others hungry for wealth or adventure.

Beard's stunning and haunting photographs in *The End of the Game*, his landmark work that documents and highlights the atrocities committed against Africa's wildlife in Kenya and Uganda, continues to be relevant and still sounds the alarm at man's irreversible crimes even more than fifty years since its publication.

Beard made no pretense and was quite vocal about the Western world's efforts to undo the irreparable damage on Africa, efforts that ignore the knowledge and wisdom of the African people themselves. His famous quote that "conservation is for guilty people on Park Avenue with poodles and Pekingese" is just one indication that he viewed these efforts with condescension, dismissing them as quaint and frivolous, and most likely hopeless.

About the Artist

Peter Beard, often called "the last of the adventurers," was an American world renown wildlife photographer, diarist, writer, and wildlife preservationist, who lived and worked in New York City, Montauk, NY, and Kenya. He was born in New York City to a well-to-do family and grew up amid Manhattan's upper crust society, heir to a railroad fortune on his mother's side and a tobacco inheritance on his father's. The self-proclaimed black sheep of his family, Beard entered Yale University as a pre-med student, but ultimately changed to art history, studying under Josef Albers, the German-born artist and educator.

As a child, Beard compulsively preserved his memories in special diaries or collages that incorporated a variety of items he found of interest, including newspaper clippings, leaves, insects, postcards, photographs, drawings, seashells, and even blood, a material he especially liked to work with, even if it was his own. This was a practice he continued until the end of his life with the diaries considered an important part of both his work and his life.

Beard's interest in photography developed in unison with his deep passion for the African wilderness, though he was obsessed with nature in general since early childhood. After reading *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen, aka Karen Blixen, he travelled to Africa for the first time at the age 17, bringing along a camera gifted to him by his grandmother. It was love at first sight and Africa remained his muse until the end of his life, despite his discontent over its development at the expense of wildlife. Eventually Beard came to spend much of his time in Africa, outside of Nairobi, Kenya, where he purchased a 45-acre property that lay next to Karen Blixen's property.

In the 1970s, Beard began working for fashion magazines, including *Vogue* and *Elle*. He also became a regular at Studio 54, becoming friends with many artists, including Andy Warhol and Francis Bacon, and such celebrities as Mick Jagger, Truman Capote, and many others. His photographs and diaries have been published and exhibited in galleries in many parts of the world, including Berlin, London, Tokyo, Vienna, and Toronto. His first exhibition was in New York's Blum Helman Gallery, while there were major exhibitions in Paris at the Centre National de la Photographie and in New York City at the International Center of Photography. His work is also included in many private collections worldwide.