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SCENES FROM SOME SOUTH AFRICAN WEDDINGS

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Abstract
These photographs were part of a larger series exhibited at The Market Galleries in Johannesburg in 1990. This project deals with the changing and unchanging aspects of the nature of the wedding ritual as it is practiced in various South African communities.

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One of the main functions of conventional wedding photography is to service the wedding ritual and affirm its centrality in conservative western society. In this series, however, the approach is to represent moments outside the formality of the institution; to emphasize the incidental pauses between accepted ceremonial highpoints, and in this manner, reveal, sometimes humourously, the continuous fabric of human interaction.

Generally, Gillian Cargill’s concern is with social rituals and rites in South Africa that reflect life’s continuity in the midst of violent political change.

Gillian Cargill writes:

The photographs in this series represent an attempt to convey what it is like attending some South African weddings. Although prompted in part by a desire to understand modes of matrimony in different cultures, the pictures are neither a quest to illustrate nor statements about nuptial procedure in these communities. My concern is mainly with side-line action outside the formality of the ceremonial ritual, that reveals something of the absurdity, mundanity, resignation and wit that such occasions create.

I have worked on photographing weddings over a period of ten years. During this time I was continually daunted and repelled by both the overt violence and the undercurrents of aggression that continue to pervade all levels of South African society. Socially integrating rituals, like weddings, while providing only temporary capsules of light relief against the horror, seem to me, in some oblique way, affirmative of our will to compete against it.
A bride and groom, unable to afford an entourage, pose with bridesmaids borrowed from another wedding couple met in the park. August, 1990.
A Portuguese wedding.
Yasmin Shariff waiting for her husband at their nikah in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall. February, 1987.
Going down the aisle of a township Community Hall, Alexandra, Johannesburg, October, 1988.
Reverend D.J. Mbona leads a procession around his church after the engagement service of Michael Mkheze and Joyce Sosibo at Nkanda, Zululand, 1980.
John and Lulu Poulton with their two children in a Johannesburg park after their wedding on the 25th October, 1991.
Bride receiving instructions on how to look after her home and husband.
Soweto, 1986.