



Two Hadza hunters overlooking their territory bordering Lake Eyasi. © African Twilight: The Vanishing Cultures and Ceremonies of the African Continent by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, Rizzoli, 2018.

By Adam Ethan Berner

At first, it might seem ridiculous that Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher spent the last four decades working in one place, but the actions of the two world-renowned photographers are far less ridiculous than to insist on calling Africa “one place.” Thousands of years of racism and imperialism has left it labelled, “the Dark Continent.” At the very least, Africa is a *very* big place; a place that also just so happens to be both the first home of the human race and remains the home of almost 1.3 billion people to this day, and for all those years in between that continent witnessed the rise and change of countless cultures within it.



Unmarried girls wear brightly beaded necklaces, belts, and medallions. They often wear more vibrant colors than married women to attract the eye of potential husbands during the courtship dance. © *African Twilight: The Vanishing Cultures and Ceremonies of the African Continent* by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, Rizzoli, 2018.

In, *African Twilight: The Vanishing Rituals and Ceremonies of the African Continent*, Beckwith and Fisher have gathered together an almost overwhelming collection to document the ceremonies of various remote communities. The first volume of their compendium both celebrates and contextualizes the various traditions and rights of many groups as they perform rituals of adulthood, relationships of kinship and affection, and the cycle of the seasons that shape their lives.



Shields made of wooden slats and decorated with ocher, chalk, and charcoal are carried by the older initiates, who lead the younger boys across the field in the direction of the village. The boys are carried on the shoulders of their masked mentors back to the village, where they will be reunited with their families. © *African Twilight: The Vanishing Cultures and Ceremonies of the African Continent* by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, Rizzoli, 2018.

The hundreds of photos that make up the first volume of *African Twilight* are utterly breathtaking; Beckwith and Fisher capture the various ceremonies and cultural practices in all of their stunning vibrant colors and the ecstatic movements of their dances as they perform. The book manages to record these moments in all of their context, complexity, and beauty without ever disrupting or intruding into the cultural space of the ceremony even as it captures image after image in exquisite detail. In capturing the performance of the various ceremonies and

cultural rights in this way, *African Twilight* reinforces just how meaningful these moments of initiation, kinship, and the changing of the natural world is to those who live in these communities, and seeks to reinforce the importance of valuing and preserving these cultures.



After the harvest when the Kara have leisure time, courtship season begins. Young men go down to the river bank to paint using a mixture of chalk and water. The designs will wear off after a day of dancing and be repainted the next morning. © *African Twilight: The Vanishing Cultures and Ceremonies of the African Continent* by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, Rizzoli, 2018.

Beyond just the simple, but masterful, aesthetics at play within *African Twilight*, the photos also manage to capture the humanity of the subjects. None of the shots ever come across as staged, nor do they ever present the subjects within as “other” or “foreign”. Instead, the book imbeds as much context and history into its pages as possible, making sure that the most possible amount of information surrounding these ceremonies is present. In doing so, the images within the book cannot be recklessly divorced from context, nor from the care, worth, and value that their culture imbues into these ceremonies, and in turn it refuses to ignore or dismiss value, humanity, and beauty of these cultures, these arts, and the people who maintain them.



Performing the courtship dance, young Kara men form long lines and leap high in the air to impress the admiring young women. © African Twilight: The Vanishing Cultures and Ceremonies of the African Continent by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, Rizzoli, 2018.

As much as the book records the ceremonies, it is equally critical of the threats these cultures face. The text calls attention to communities' dwindling numbers and disruptions to their cultural practices; admitting they were only able to gain access to some of ceremonies because the communities recognize that this may be the last chances to preserve them. The threats against these practices are not just the result of time or internal changes, but instead often come from the seizing of land by governments that refuse to recognize the ancestral use and sacredness of the land. The erasure of these cultures is not something inevitable, but instead a choice being made by outsiders.



Portrait of a young warrior at the close of the Herr Heroon ceremony. © *African Twilight: The Vanishing Cultures and Ceremonies of the African Continent* by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, Rizzoli, 2018.

African Twilight is simultaneously a testament to the cultural practices that have lasted for thousands of years, a criticism of those who would ignore and destroy them, and a call to understand and support the beauty, complexity, and knowledge held within.

African Twilight is a work by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, published by Rizzoli, is available now, and can be ordered [here](#).