

A world of women

The International Museum of Women will open its maiden exhibition Monday, featuring more than 300 photographs taken by Mill Valley photographer Paola Gianturco. The installation, "Celebrating Women All Over the World," is the culmination of Gianturco's travels to more than 17 celebrations in 15 countries, where she documented events ranging from parades to ceremonies all held in honor of women.

There are haunting images of coffins being carried through Spanish streets by those who have had near-death experiences; humorous pictures of husbands running an obstacle race with their wives slung over their backs in Finland; and powerful prints of bare-breast virgins in Swaziland dancing for the queen mother.

But it's the pictures taken in America that astonish most people, Gianturco said. The images, taken during the 2002 Miss America pageant, reflect her view that the controversial contest is culturally valid because it provides scholarships for women who enter and win. Gianturco, a businesswoman for 34 years before switching to photography nine years ago, got the idea to focus on male-oriented festivals during her extensive travels

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Photographer
PAOLA GIANTURCO

in 2000 while working on a book about craftswomen. "Just the fact that there were so many of these festivals was provocative to me," Gianturco said, adding that it was the perfect venue to achieve her dream of "helping people everywhere understand each other more completely."

So she traveled with her Canon EOS camera, a flash and two lenses, taking 100 rolls of film to each event, resulting in more than 10,000 images. She also received a grant from the mu-

seum to purchase costumes, masks and artifacts that will also be integrated into the show. Gianturco said she became so dedicated to getting the museum opened while working on the show and the 240-page book published by Powerhouse Books that accompanies it that she plans to donate all the royalties and rights to the exhibition to the museum.

Show curator Anna Balsamo said she is as proud of the educational aspects as she is of the visual ones. "There's something called 'What Color Are You?,' which is a presentation that shows there are over 100 words Brazilians use when asked about the color of their skin," she said. "What we're trying to do in a poetic way is call attention to the fact that our concept of race — with simplistic color words — doesn't even begin to get at the ways that people around the world describe themselves."

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The exhibition was chosen to be the first show because it perfectly reflects the mission and even the location of the museum, said Elizabeth Colton, chairwoman of the museum's board of directors. As the first global institution of its kind, it belongs in San Francisco because "it's right on the edge where East meets West, and we think that's very important." Supporters have already raised \$8 million toward the \$120 million needed in cash and operating funds, and she is confident that the museum will open in 2008 — on International Women's Day, March 8.

The show runs through Dec. 17. Because the museum will not open its permanent home at Pier 26 until 2008, the exhibition is in the Concourse Lobby of One Market in Spear Tower. Information about lectures and performances associated with the exhibition can be found at www.imow.org or by calling (415) 543-4669.

— Anastasia Hendrix



Photos by PAOLA GIANTURCO

Wearing a veil is customary for Ait Haddou women in Morocco during wedding ceremonies, though they do not wear them daily.

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Traditional Khasi costumes are worn at a five-day religious ceremony in Meghalaya, India, that features dancing and the sacrificing of goats.



Descendants of Brazilian abolitionists share a meal after a Mass celebrating the Assumption of the Virgin in Cachoeira.



Crowns of flowers and herbs are gathered by young Polish girls and thrown into rivers and lakes to see if they will marry quickly.