

ART

In the footsteps of Bowles

Gay Portland photographer brings his Moroccan journey home*

BY MEG DALY

Paul Bowles once wrote that the "difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question." Bowles, the famous American expatriate writer and musician who lived in Tangier for more than three decades, opined, "Not so the traveler, who compares [his own civilization] with the others and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking."

Gay Portland artist Larry Cwik would likely constitute a traveler. The self-taught artist has spent much of the past several years documenting with photographs his exploration of the land Bowles called home. His show *Morocco* is on display downtown at Gallery 500 through May 29.

Cwik (pronounced "swick") first journeyed to Morocco in 1990 to find out for himself what had drawn so many Western writers and artists—including notable queers—to the mysterious, evocative country. Bowles and his wife, Jane (both bisexual), Allen Ginsburg and William S. Burroughs all sojourned there in the 1950s.

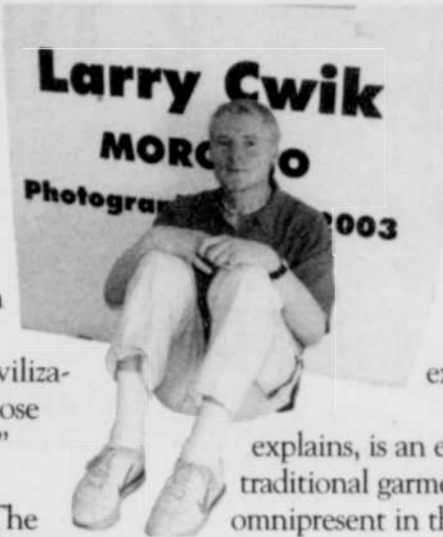
Cwik, 45, has fallen in love with Morocco. "I've had a joyous experience there," he says.

His photo exhibit captures the intense brick and sandy hues of the arid, desert country. Two prints from the Aheam Valley could be mistaken for images of the American Southwest. But there is no mistaking the distinctively painted wooden boats in "Boat, Asilah" and "Boy with Boats, Asilah," the interiors of which mirror the vibrant blue of the Mediterranean Sea.

Cwik, whose photos have been displayed at galleries in Portland, New York, Madrid and other cities, often refers to his work as surrealist. In this series, he pays homage to one of his main influences, Giorgio de Chirico, in a haunting photo of a street in Tafroute. Wires, shadows, buildings and open sky cross paths at slightly off-kilter angles.

Cwik's photos are stark and unpopulated, belaying the frenetic atmosphere of markets and street life in larger Moroccan cities. He says he traveled to many smaller villages where there was "not a soul in sight." He also notes that Moroccans, while notably friendly and kind, are camera shy.

When Cwik does capture a human figure in



Larry Cwik knows a good country when he sees it

his lens, it's often from the back, adding to the abstract, compositional feel. One of the most striking, "Man and Sea," shows a lone figure clad in a hooded black robe facing the sea. A milky mist rises off the water, while a stone jetty points toward the expansive horizon.

The subject of this photo, he explains, is an elderly man wearing a heavy, traditional garment at dusk. "The sea is omnipresent in that part of Morocco," says

Cwik, who hoped to capture the way inhabitants live in sync with nature.

Cwik's vision of Morocco is portrayed not through images of groups of people in action, but rather through a repetition of still lifes showing the patterns, themes and moods that captivated him. A six-minute video accompanies the photographs, and here the viewer gets more of the expected sense of vibrancy and activity one might associate with Morocco.

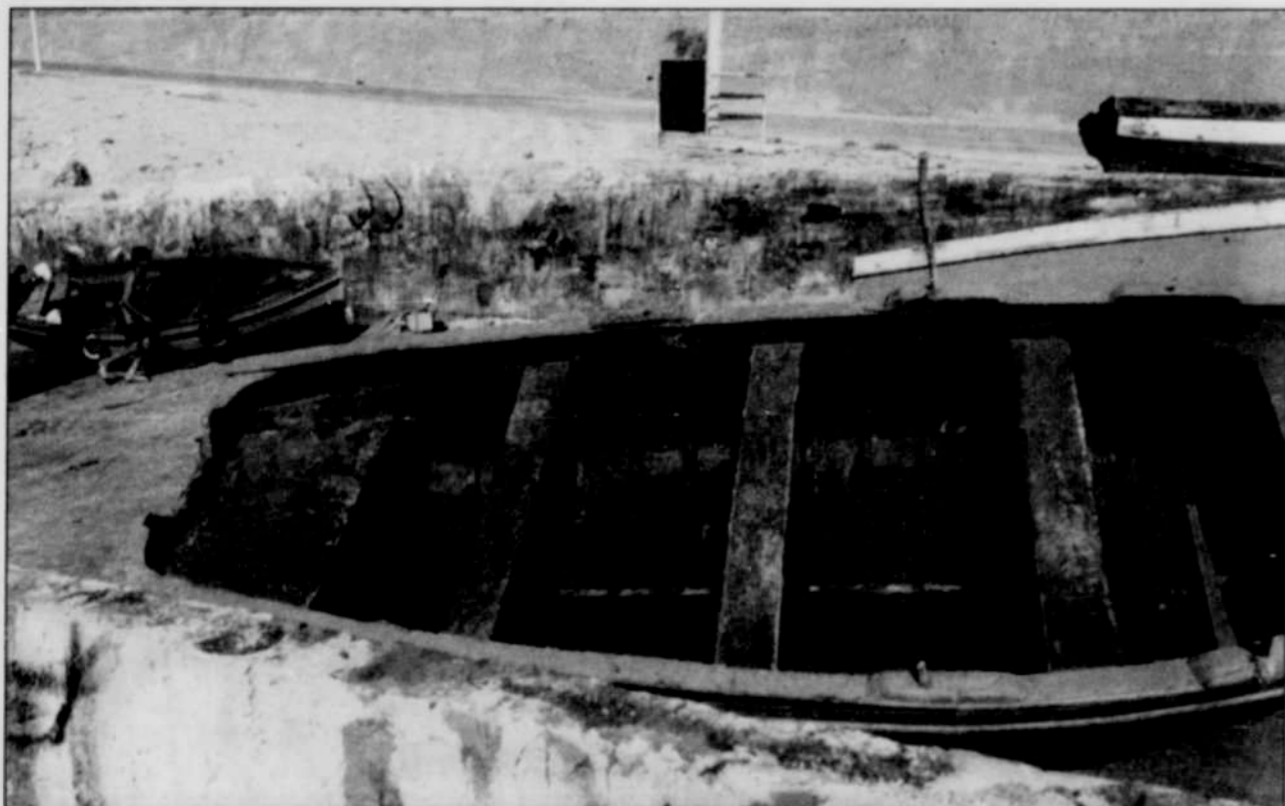
In addition to the main exhibit, Gallery 500 Annex is showing the collaborative work of Cwik and Portland State University art instructor Darrell Sanders, titled *Psychic Constructions Biomorphic Drawings*. Here one can discern some of the patterns also found in *Morocco*, like the decorative textures applied to adobe walls.

These colored pencil drawings began as an experiment between the two artists in an attempt to reverse the process of abstraction. Instead of using an object or idea and then abstracting it, the artists started with random thoughts and images and worked off one another to create a form. Some end products, like "Tribal Mask" and "Aquatic Harmony," are more recognizable than others. Individually and as a whole, the drawings convey a compelling sense of movement and journey.

It seems that Cwik, à la Bowles, does not accept his world at face value. He proves himself to be a traveler in both art and in life. **JO**

Morocco and pencil work Psychic Constructions Biomorphic Drawings are on display through May 29 at Gallery 500, 420 S.W. Washington St. #500.

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"Boy with Boats, Asilah" mirrors the vast blues of the Mediterranean

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