



OH THE HUMANITY

The first-ever Brian Lanker photography retrospective at the Schnitzer will knock your heart out

Walking through the shadows and spotlights of the silent Barker Gallery where a Brian Lanker show is being hung, artist Lynda Lanker remembers her late husband. This is the first time she's seen a retrospective of his work. His massive photographs dwarf her as she passes by.

Gazing at a photo, Lynda recalls a question she once posed to a *LIFE* photo editor and friend.

"Well, what is it that sets Brian apart from the other photographers that shoot for you?" she asked.

Brian can do anything, the editor responded. "He's so versatile. I can send him on any kind of a shoot and he can bring something back."

Looking up and down the gallery where his work hangs is proof enough. A sea of faces look back, from Rosa Parks and David Bowie to Muhammad Ali and an Oregon horse logger in 1975. Lanker captured all subjects like kings and queens, whether it be the taut curves of *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit model Elle Macpherson or the broken-down figure of a high school football player after a game.

"He was just fascinated with life and humanity," Lynda says. "In a way, I almost think of him as an amateur anthropologist."

On Jan. 22, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art opens *From the Heart: The Photographs of Brian Lanker*, the first exhibit of his work since the world-renowned photojournalist, and former *Register-Guard* director of photography, succumbed to pancreatic cancer at age 63 in 2011.

From the Heart is also the first-ever retrospective of Lanker's portfolio, which is mostly shot on film, an amazing feat considering the serendipitous and innovative scenes he captured.

"The generosity of spirit that you see in the images is a reflection of Brian's character," says Jill Hartz, JSMA director and curator of the show. In Hartz's essay in the book *From the Heart*, which was the catalyst for the exhibit, she writes that it's unusual for photojournalism to

hang in a museum, adding that Lanker had the rare touch that could blur the line between art and journalism.

The book and exhibit chronicle his teeth-cutting days in the '70s at the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, considered one of the best "boot camps" for photojournalists, to Lanker's more recent series on dance across the United States in all its forms, shooting everything from ballroom to "grinding" in the clubs.

It was at the *Topeka-Capital Journal* where Lanker found his chief mentor and longtime friend, the journal's director of photography Rich Clarkson, as well as future wife Lynda, who he met while photographing her for

"Moment of Life," a black-and-white series on childbirth that won Lanker a Pulitzer in 1973 at the tender age of 24.

"The key in Topeka was Rich Clarkson," Lynda recalls. "He was very intense and a really tough boss." Clarkson will be in Eugene for a panel discussion at the museum Jan. 23.

The collection also examines his passion for athletics — look for Prefontaine, Bruce (now Caitlyn) Jenner and Olympic gold medalists — and the *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women who Changed America*, a groundbreaking 1989 book and exhibit that traveled the world. Lanker, who worked with Maya Angelou on the project, developed an intimacy with the women pictured, seen clearly in the eyes of Angelou, author Alice Walker, soprano Leontyne Price, activist dancer Ruby Dee, Clara McBride Hale, the humanitarian who created a home for children who were born addicted to drugs, and many more as they hang on the walls of the Schnitzer.

Lynda says her husband felt humanity very intensely. "He had an amazing rapport with his subjects," she recalls. "He photographed people so beautifully and I think he really loved people and they could feel it."

Lynda has recently gifted a collection of 75 vintage silver-gelatin prints from the *I Dream A World* project to the JSMA. "I think we're the only museum in the world that will have that," curator Hartz says.

Many people were involved in bringing the exhibit to life, Lynda notes, but most of all she wants to recognize Lynne Lamb, Lanker's assistant of 20-plus years, who coordinated the majority of the show.

"Her world changed drastically," Lanker says of Lamb after her husband's death. "This has been a great opportunity for both of us to see Brian's legacy." ■

The public opening reception for From the Heart: The Photographs of Brian Lanker runs 6 to 8 pm Friday, Jan. 22, at the UO's Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art; FREE. The museum hosts two conversations Saturday, Jan. 23: "From Photograph to Art Book" (11 am) and "From Topeka to Eugene: Telling the Story" (2 pm); FREE. For more info, visit jsma.uoregon.edu/BrianLanker.



DAVID BOWIE, 1992, BY BRIAN LANKER