

PAN
AMSTERDAM

FLAT // LAND



Holding in Silence, Lamu (2025)

Fine art print in wooden frame with museumglass

The new series of Dutch photographer Annelies Damen (b. 1968) **LONGING FOR LAMU** is a photographic series on presence and erasure, identity and vulnerability.

For over two decades, Annelies Damen has returned to the Lamu Archipelago off the coast of Kenya.

Drawn to its rich coastal heritage, Damen found in the islands both a sustained source of artistic inspiration and a space for encounter. Through extended conversations with African and Swahili women, she came to understand the specificity of their faiths, skills and social systems, as well as the informal networks of mutual support that structure their daily life. Unparalleled and addictive, her world expanded in unexpected ways. Compelled by the women's radiance, dignity and resilience, Damen began to photograph them, allowing their presence and stories to shape the work.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lamu has long been a crossroads of African, Arab, Persian and Indian cultures. Over centuries, people from different tribes and regions, settled here. Each bringing distinct roots, traditions and identities. From this convergence emerged a vibrant Swahili culture, developing from the twelfth century onwards and which is still thriving today.

Yet the knowledge passed down through generations—how to live in community, share resources, pass on traditions and sustain collective life—is fading, and with it, cultural identity itself. The disappearance of this long-functioning ecosystem, prompted Damen to portray the women in Lamu as figures through which questions of presence and erasure, identity and vulnerability, memory and change are negotiated.

Faces and bodies are at times veiled by an incredibly seductive palette of colours and foliage, yet the gaze remains direct and luminous. This gaze asserts resilience within constraint, shaping the frame. A deliberate intervention that allows the work to resonate beyond its immediate setting, engaging broader cultural and natural realities.

Featuring portraits, still life's and architectural compositions, her series **LONGING FOR LAMU** operates simultaneously as a poetic reflection and critical testimony. Fragility is turned into witness; vulnerability into intimacy. **LONGING FOR LAMU** unfolds both as a love letter and testimony—a formal simplification that mirrors the precariousness of the ecosystem and the cultural knowledge under threat. Her works bear witness to a place where cultural memory, environmental balance, and human identity remain inseparable—and increasingly fragile.

Biography

Photographer Annelies Damen (1968) develops autonomous photographic projects with the world as her subject. Through her lens, Damen sensitively captures strong female imagery from a myriad of cultures. Her subjects appear deeply connected to their natural or architectural surroundings, creating a sublime interaction between figure and environment.

After earning her BBA at Nyenrode University and embarking on a promising business career, Damen chose a different path following a transformative year-long journey through Africa, traveling from Morocco to South Africa. During this time, photography became her main focus. Although she remains actively engaged as a member of the board of the family business Damen Shipyards, Damen pursued her passion by studying at the Academy of Photography in Amsterdam, where she graduated in 2006. Today, she balances her professional responsibilities with her artistic career.

In 2026 Damen was awarded in Italy The Collectors.Chain Prize 2026 by Art Defender for “Veil of Green”, from her series 'Longing for Lamu' at Italy's most prominent photography fair Mia Photo BNP Parisbas.

The Jury, composed of Cristina López Triana, Luisa Pavia, and Pierluigi Gibelli, and chaired by Walter Guadagnini, selected the piece for its extraordinary ability to bridge tradition and innovation.

“A possible harmony between the natural and human elements. An essential and chromatic composition that acts as a vehicle for positivity, offering a precious ‘pause’ within the often troubled flow of contemporary life.” The work was presented by the FLAT // LAND Gallery, as part of the Reportage Beyond Reportage section curated by Emanuela Mazzonis.