

Beyond the Mountains: The Interior Life of Afghanistan

Photographs by Lisa Schnellinger, 2002-2010

The exhibit's path takes the viewer through chapters in a decade of change in Afghanistan. It begins with images of the people and land carrying their history into the present, and moves through the country's recent changes into a potential future yet to emerge.

~ Carried ~

Center front gallery



1. **Classic:** Strength and beauty reverberate in the limbs and features of Afghan people as much as in their land. This man wears a pakool, an Afghan style of hat. In leather version the pakool can be unfolded to carry water.



2. **Folded In:** Thousands of villages are tucked into the mountain folds; hundreds are reachable only by donkey path. Their physical separation contributes to the durable influence of tribes and alienation from a centralized government.



3. **The Shawl:** Like fabric, villages are woven together and connected to the cities through a network of relationships, forged slowly over hundreds of years. Elderly people preserve the oral history and keep personal accounts of reciprocity.

Left rear wall



4. **In Whose Eyes:** His features show signs of suffering mixed with gentleness. Closed or serious expressions such as this man's offer a cloak of dignity for Afghans under the gaze of an outsider. The turban, traditional headgear for people over 40, garners respect.



5. **Mountain Waves:** Two-thirds of Afghanistan rides on waves of mountains, with villages scattered among them. Rocky and filled with a wealth of minerals, it is a landscape that has formed the character of its people and affected their historic politics.



6. **On Foot:** Along with millions of other Afghans, the nomadic kuchis became refugees as they lost both grazing land and herds in three decades of war. This woman, her child and their family improvised a lifestyle on an aimless road.

~ Shifting ~

Left gallery



7. **Descent into Layers:** More than 2,000 years old, the capital city of Kabul is situated in a mile-high bowl of mountains. Its layers of personality unpeel and rewrap themselves as transient residents move over and through it, again and again.



8. **Blue Bottles:** A shop selling traditional blue glass pieces framed a street tableau in Herat – figures of past, present and future passing before a blurred, cracking window.



9. **In Common:** In the early days of rebuilding, Afghans welcomed foreigners as partners in reconstruction. Common goals were as mutually recognizable as facial features.



10. **Emerging Green:** After the fall of the Taliban, a five-year drought lifted. The return of green hills and flowing water has been a source of joy throughout the country.



11. **Reconstruction Worker:** International aid programs have helped build schools, bridges, government offices and health clinics. The building trades became a source of steady employment.



12. **At Her Desk:** In 2004, after returning from years as a refugee in Iran, Zainab Mohammadi became a business reporter for Pajhwok, the first independent Afghan national news agency. She now is studying law at Kabul University.



13. **High-Level View:** Family homes, built as walled compounds, can be difficult to distinguish from government and industry buildings when seen from the air.

~ Engagement ~

Rear center gallery



14. **R**epresentation: Shinkai Karokhail, member of the national assembly, speaks at informal gathering in her home village of Chinar. Dialog with constituents – conducted by a woman in the seat of honor – is symbolic of change underway in Afghanistan.



15. **R**unning: Playing children run among the walls of Chinar village - with a grand backdrop of mountains - on the far outskirts of Kabul province.



16. **A**udience of **E**lders: Haji Sanak and other village elders listen intently to Karokhail during the discussion. The conversation ranged across education, security, roads and property rights.

Right rear



17. **T**he **G**ate: Walls and gates offer freedom for the family dwelling within their private space, and a vantage point to observe what is outside.



18. **O**pen: Curious and unafraid, the girl stared back at the world as visitors in her family's house talked about politics.

~ Learning ~

Right gallery



19. **B**acking: Most girls in Mohammed Agha village attend their new school in relative safety, as it has strong support from the village elders and education officials.



20. **T**urning a **P**age: This two-room library at a new girls' school in Logar Province was built through a fundraising effort led by the photographer. Much of the money is raised from the sale of Afghan handicrafts.



21. **Madrassa:** At the Omari Farouq mosque in Faizabad, the mullah, Abdul Samad, leads religious studies for dozens of young children during their break from public school.



22. **Recitation:** Asked who his best student was, Samad nodded to Rowaida and replied, "She is." Carrying her brother Ramin, she was a calm island amidst rambunctious boys.



23. **New Crop:** Badakhshan, a large province in the northeast, was formerly a major opium poppy producer. However, this year it has converted to growing wheat.



24. **Cricket Pitch:** The popularity of cricket, volleyball, soccer, and weightlifting, as well as recreation like flying kites or watching movies, is one indicator of greater leisure time, freedom and security.

~ Potential ~

Right rear walls



25. **Stitches:** Traditional patterns are embedded in needlework of modern clothes. Afghan handicrafts, like those displayed behind this young woman, are sold through cooperatives to internationals as well as locals.



26. **Born in Prison:** His name, Abdullah, means "servant of God," and he is among the young children raised by their mothers who are serving time.



27. **Long Wait:** Like other prisoners, she was uncertain when she'll be brought to trial or how long she would be held.



28. **The Dove:** Inside the lofty dome of a mosque in northern Afghanistan, a white bird finds room to take flight.

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