

COMPULSIVE OBSESSIONS

Obsessions sometimes come in strange places for photographers. Whether it's Dan Winters's collection of old, deteriorating negatives, Craig McDean's book on American race cars, Andrew Garn's images of a 130 year-old steel mill or Marissa Roth's book on the "forgotten islands" of the Philippines, it's all here in this month's Exposures.

WHAT'S YOUR (PHOTOGRAPHIC) OBSESSION? CONTACT SECTION EDITOR ANTHONY LASALA AT PDN, 1515 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NY 10036. E-MAIL: ALASALA@PDN-PIX.COM.

exposures

MARISSA ROTH'S PLACES OF THE HEART

BY JENNIFER WEAVER



"Cherry and her illegitimate son." One of the many images Roth captured on the streets of Manila.

The 7,000 islands of the Philippines are the forgotten islands of Southeast Asia, having never attracted a large number of tourists, or for that matter, much American attention, beyond a concern for the islands' military and strategic value. But for L.A. photographer Marissa Roth, it's a place that's anything but forgotten.

Roth first landed in Manila on a humid March morning in 1987, a year after the revolution deposed President Ferdinand Marcos. She was a photojournalist covering a medical airlift for *the Los Angeles Times*. From that first trip, she was rapt, spurring a ten-year personal and photographic obsession with the country and a new book titled, *Burning Heart: A Portrait of the Philippines*, (Rizzoli, 1999).

Only a few images in the book have been published before, and most depict the country's social and economic problems:

poverty, street children (at any given time, a million children live on the streets of the Philippines), prostitutes, indentured laborers of the rice and sugar cane fields. Religion is also central to the book, as it is to the country (85 percent of the country's population is Catholic). By all accounts, the book, shot entirely in black and white, is the vision of an artist. It doesn't aim to teach you anything academic about the Philippines. It's more like an exotic dream, a flicker of shadows, gestures and faces, leaving you with only a bewildered sense of the place and its people.

Roth, who has worked for 17 years as a photographer for such publications as *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Entertainment Weekly* and *Time*, contacted Filipina-American author Jessica Hagedorn, whose novels include *Dogeaters* and *The Gangster of*

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