

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film and Video

11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019

The Museum of Modern Art
The Department of Film and Video
present

NEW DOCUMENTARIES

A weekly program on Thursdays of films and videos
on social and political issues and the arts.

January 30 at 3:00 and 6:00 p.m.

Program in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2.

White Hotel. 1995. USA. 90 min.

Directed by Tobi Solvang and Dianne Griffin.

Directors present at 6:00 p.m. screening.

About the Film (from materials submitted by the directors)

When two women with a video camera follow an American HIV research team to East Africa, they are catapulted into an unimaginable land of joy and repression, promiscuity and sexual mutilation. They are drawn into circumstances which quickly shatter their objectivity and turn their journalistic inquiry into an intimate investigation of their own capacities to love, suffer, and forgive.

"White Hotel" is the name of the tourist residence where Griffin and Solvang begin their journey. The metaphor soon disappears as two white filmmakers join the rush of humanity striving for freedom. They arrive in Eritrea as people are celebrating their victory after thirty years of savage war with Ethiopia. Jubilant scenes of independence are juxtaposed with grisly shots of skulls. Screaming, intoxicated revelers are counterpoints to a prisoner of war's moving story of confronting his tormentor after the armistice. The film captures a magical country of extremes with luxury cars and mud-hut hospitals, where homosexuality is invisible and the increase in AIDS cases is the result of heterosexual sex and the widespread practice of female circumcision.

The women begin to point the camera at themselves when the situations that emerge become personal. As Dianne Griffin left for this trip, her father was killed in a train wreck. She chose to miss his funeral and continue the journey. In Eritrea, she is haunted by disturbing childhood memories and wonders if she could ever forgive her father. Tobi Solvang was called "the friendly one" by Eritreans and, while shooting this documentary on AIDS, has a vacation romance. An ironic mistake leads to the climatic moment in a work punctuated by emotion.

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