



Dark dreamer

**>> Photographer Elena Willis takes
inspiration from the deep**



CAPTURING THE SUBCONSCIOUS: Willis

by CHRISTINE REDFERN

"We've started work on the campaigns. We took some shots of vendors in markets selling dogs, and then we took shots in a restaurant that serves dog. Quite gruesome, as it comes on the plate with the full skull of the dog with the brains and all".

I received this message from Montreal photographer Elena Willis in an e-mail. She is not discussing images for her next art show, but photographs she is shooting in the Philippines for Global Action Network (GAN), an animal rights organization based here in Montreal (www.gan.ca). Willis has volunteered to take pictures for two of their upcoming 2008 campaigns.

When I met with Willis the day before she left town, our conversation started with her upcoming trip. "In the Philippines, GAN is trying to stop horse fighting, which is a brutal gambling sport where two horses are trained to tear each other apart in a ring. I'm going to shoot pictures of that and also the dog meat industry. The problem is not that people are eating dogs, the problem is that people are treating animals poorly. I don't know what this experience is going to be like. Now that it is getting close, I'm starting to think, 'What am I actually

going to face down there?”

The animal rights campaign is not the only place you’ll see Willis’s photographs in 2008. She is continuing to gain the public’s attention with her artwork. The subject matter of her often elaborately staged photographs comes from the world of dreams. Sometimes the images are inspired by dreams she had, at other times she recreates the dreams of others.

This fall, she presented the exhibition *Between Natures* at the Darling Foundry. One image called “Gopa’s Dream” depicted a dream told to the Buddha by his wife Gopa. Another work, “Aberfan 1966,” was inspired by dreams of foreboding experienced by the residents of this Welsh mining town before a mining disaster caused the death of 144 people—116 of them children.

In 2008, Willis will be part of an exhibition that opens Jan. 19 at the Eli Kline Gallery (www.elikleinfineart.com) in New York. Closer to home, her upcoming show at the Eleanor London Public Library in Côte-St-Luc runs from Jan. 10–Feb. 7.

Willis herself will start the new year dreaming in Paris, where she’s landed an artist’s residency from January to the end of April.

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