

"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, sunny, hot, humid  
Tonight, clear to partly  
warm and humid, low 7-  
row, sun and clouds, high  
high 90. Weather map, 1

VOL. CLXII . . No. 56,153

© 2013 The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MAY 31, 2013

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 31, 2013

## Art in Review

# Weekend Arts II

The New York Times

### Lisa Ross

'Living Shrines of Uyghur  
China'

Rubin Museum of Art  
150 West 17th Street, Chelsea  
Through July 8

In 2002, traveling in the desert of the Xinjiang region of far western China, the New York photographer Lisa Ross came across a variety of wind-battered markers: branches fixed upright in the

sand and hung with flags; corral-like fences built around trees and stones; and boxlike enclosures of rough wood covered with swaths of printed cloth. Certain monuments were plain, barely distinguishable as made by humans; others looked like galleons under full sail. Many of the more elaborate examples were shrines to Sufi saints and objects of religious pilgrimage.

Ms. Ross returned repeatedly to the region, accompanied by an

Uyghur folklorist, Rahile Dawut, and a French historian of Central Asia, Alexandre Papas. Both have contributed essays to Ms. Ross's recently published book of photographs of the shrines. And a selection of pictures from the book makes up this small exhibition, organized by Beth Citron, at the Rubin Museum of Art. With its expanses of pale earth and wide sky framing wind-whipped Uyghur forms, the show is a heart lifter, confirming the idea that belief is, and always has been, a wellspring of visual invention, and that evanescence has an aesthetic all its own.

Although the show doesn't say so, applying the term "art" to these structures can be a problem. The Chinese government, eager to control an oil-rich region and reduce any strain of separatist fervor, has designated the Uyghur shrines as "cultural property," officially undercutting their religious function and promoting their identity as tourist attractions. Under the circumstances, their future is uncertain. But in Ms. Ross's photographs they remain what they were meant to be: spiritually functional, formally arresting, conscientiously fleeting.

HOLLAND COTTER



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

"Black Garden (An Offering)," a 2009 photograph taken in the Xinjiang region of China by Lisa Ross, at the Rubin Museum.