

**Living Shrines of Uyghur China: Photographs by Lisa Ross
Rubin Museum of Art 150 W. 17th St., (212) 620-5000 Through
July 8**



Lisa Ross

Lisa Ross's 'Black Garden (An Offering)' (2009) at the Rubin Museum of Art.

Lisa Ross, a Brooklyn-born and -based photographer, spent 10 years on and off in the Taklamakan Desert of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China. Her primary interest was in mazars, sacred burial sites commemorating Uyghur Muslim saints. Westerners are rarely admitted to this region, an area of frequent clashes between the natives, a Turkic people, and the Chinese, but Ms. Ross had access because of her association with Alexandre Papas, a French historian of Central Asian Islam, and Rahilä Dawut, a Uyghur anthropologist.

The Rubin has on display 24 of Ms. Ross's archival pigment prints of mazars, as well as two 11-minute videos of natives coming to venerate their saints.

Ms. Ross is taken with the spiritual experience of the desert, a vast expanse of sand surrounded by mountains, as well as with the lonely simplicity of the mazars. Many of the mazars consist of sticks bound together and stuck into the ground; pilgrims attach bits of cloth to them to mark their visit.

In "Black Garden (An Offering)" (all images 2009) a low vantage point gives a single such mazar monumentality. Slightly more elaborate mazars are surrounded by crude picket fences forming small cribs, as in "Unrevealed, Site 2 (Red Masthead)" and "Unrevealed, Site 4 (Colored Cribs)." There are also photographs of offerings left by the pilgrims in thanks or in supplication.

These include "Bird's Head" and "Over Time #2," the remains of sacrifices. Doll-like figures made by shamans are left to aid in curing an illness or help a woman conceive.

By [WILLIAM MEYERS](#)

