



Natural Fashion: Tribal Decoration from Africa

Hans Silvester

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An unprecedented series of images showing the Omo people's imaginative body decoration and embellishments.

The scene of tribal conflicts and guerrilla incursions, Ethiopia's Omo Valley is also home to fascinating rites and traditions that have survived for thousands of years. The nomadic peoples who inhabit this valley share a gift for body painting and elaborate adornments borrowed from nature, and Hans Silvester has captured the results in a series of photographs made over the course of numerous trips.

In this region of East Africa, the rivers that run through the dry savannas are home to abundant flowers, papyrus, and wild fruit trees, and this luxuriance becomes an invitation to creativity and spectacle. Within hand's reach, a multitude of plants inspire fanciful and ephemeral self-decoration, and the Omo react spontaneously: a leaf, root, seed pod, or flower is quickly transformed into an accessory. As in the West one might don a hat, people create caps from tufts of grass. As one would knot a tie or scarf, they ornament themselves with banana leaves or a stem laden with flowers. These decorations are embellished with butterfly wings, buffalo horns, boar's teeth, colorful feathers, and the like, and are further enhanced by body painting with pigments made from powdered stone, plants, berries, and river mud.

Here is a priceless record of a unique and increasingly fragile way of life, one threatened by conflict, climate change, and tourism. 160 color illustrations.

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