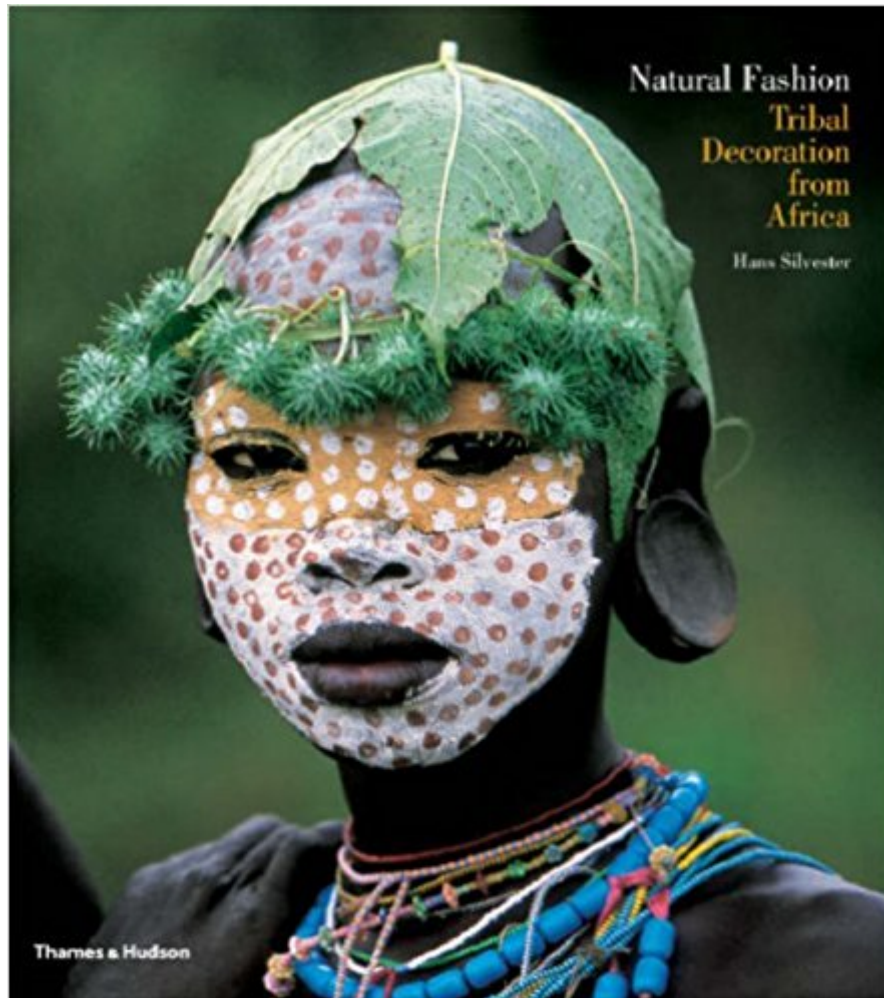




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Natural Fashion: Tribal Decoration From Africa



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I do not (yet) own this book, but I spent half an hour at the Metropolitan Museum of Art gift shop

recently in an absolute trance paging through it. The sole review here trashing this beautiful book struck me as so unfair that I feel compelled to write a rebuttal. The reviewer is concerned that this collection of photographs does not represent the daily lives and cultural practices of the people it represents. That in fact the attention these people are getting from tourists and photographers is encouraging them to show off and thus changing their cultural practices from what they were in isolation. All that may be true. But none of it obscures or in any way detracts from the undeniable truth that these are some of the most beautiful, creative, and uniquely adorned people in the world. To page through this book is to be transported momentarily into a world of sensual beauty that few of us even dare to imagine exists. The viewer who is open minded enough to appreciate it is gifted with an insight into the beauty of a people he/she might not have known even existed. Is that a bad thing? I don't think so. Does photographing these people and the attention that ensues change them? Probably. Is that a bad thing? I don't know. But I do know it is up to the people being photographed to decide that. It is up to them to decide whether or not, and in what manner, they want to be photographed, not some outsider who believes their culture should be left intact. In a globalizing world, I can think of many types of attention from the outside world that would not be quite so benign. If it was done without compulsion, which appears to be the case, then I think that broadcasting the beauty of a people for the world to see is a good thing. Change is inevitable. Hopefully this sort of attention will help ensure that the change is positive.

As a visual artist I can tell you that when I first picked this book up in my local library, the fantastic and surprising images nearly took my breath away!! I took it over to another artist's house and we looked through it together. Deciding right then to get our own copies. The wild painting on the beautiful black skin is very similar to the free and easy strokes in my own paintings. I am considering getting the other African related book by the same author.

Beautiful imagery. It will have you near tears... One of my most precious finds in recent months...the faces, the creativity, raw natural talent. Unbelievable. A wonderful book to draw inspiration from.

This is an amazing book. I am a painter and it made me want to get in my studio and start paintings, the textures, the patterns and then now and then the sad contrast of weapons and Nature's beauty, brings you right back to "real" world. I can't stop looking at the pictures, they draw you in. It is truly a beautiful people. The first time I saw it, was at a friend's house and I just had to go get it for myself. My friend offered to loan it to me, but that just wasn't enough. Thank you Hans Silvester for creating

this book. Lone Hansen, Bainbridge Island , WA

This is not your typical coffee table book full of big bright exotic photographs. It is big, it is bright, and it is exotic but the images of the young people of the Omo Valley are incredibly unique visions of mankind and nature. These young people paint their faces and bodies with natural pigments derived from the soils and clay of the area. Thus you see reds, yellows, white, brown, and grey. The children devise creative head adornment from fruit, seeds, leaves, branches, seedpods, and even animal skins and horns. The people are beautiful in their innocent nakedness. The use of flowers and leaves and twigs as bodily decoration occurs primarily around the head and as a head covering or decoration, much like a crown of leaves. Many cultures do this including the ancient Greeks or Hawaiian islanders. The reddish black skin of the people acts as a contrast to the off-white, grey, and yellow ochre body paints. The application of the pigments is often roughly drawn with a natural relaxed flair. There is rarely a painted face with the precision of a circus clown. Of course these young people don't go around looking like this every day since they have lives to live tending gardens and livestock. But neither do the images feel false. If someone came to the USA and took pictures of people going to midnight mass on Christmas eve, would we say the pictures were atypical of daily life in America, probably we would. But would we say the images were not part of the American experience and reality, probably not. These images give the same impression. These are young people dressing up with leaves and flowers and body paint, something they don't do every day but something that is indeed part of their culture. This makes the book fascinating and one of the strongest books of photography of Africans that I have ever seen. It is highly recommended.

As a collage artist with an interest in appropriating spontaneous and low-tech materials for the purposes of art-making, these images were a reminder that we are always surrounded by everything we need. The great outdoors is the greatest "art supply" resource imaginable. It is impossible to look through this array of inspirational photos and not be totally transfixed by the creativity, exuberance and personal expression of the subjects. This is a book that I will look at again and again, because it affirms the enduring power of the individual as well as the universal need to self-identify and be fully expressive. Magnificent.

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