



Ethiopia's Bottle Cap Headwear

ERIC LAFFORGUE



Where the Omo River meets Lake Turkana around Southern Ethiopia, the Dassanech people number around 60,000 and are the country's southernmost inhabitants. The only way to reach this tribe is to cross the Omo River in a hollowed-out log, a dangerous 5-minute boat ride as the current is strong and the ferryman is not. You often share the log with goats and sheep.



Tribes do not let anything go to waste. They collect everything and bottle caps are no exception. There is an ample supply from the bars in Omorate, a dusty town where drinking beers and cokes is the only way to have fun.



Traditionally nomadic pastoralists, the Dassanech have begun to settle on a more agricultural lifestyle on the banks of the flooded Omo River. They live in small huts made of everything they can collect (e.g. wood, metal, plastic). Their villages look like a cross between a refugee camp and a collection of bird nests.



The headdress is composed of coca cola, fanta, and beer caps. Some feature locks from China and watch bands. The goal is to build something that shines, glistens, and makes noise when they dance.



Dassanech children love to dance. They bang on the ground until a cloud of dust builds. Some of these children already wear bottle cap hats.



Usually, members of the tribe are eager to sell anything they fashion. However, when it comes to the bottle cap hats, they refuse. They consider them part of their identity now.

Old women like to add feathers and broken watches to their headdresses. They almost always have some heavy necklaces on as well. The more adornments, the more confident they consequently feel.





The most fashionable outfit consists of complementing the bottle cap hat with fur from an animal such as a cheetah (left) or a colobus monkey (right).



This is Miss Bolo, the most beautiful girl in the village. Within a year after this photo was taken, she married a warrior and had a baby. When I came back and showed her this picture, she felt such nostalgia for once having been the talk of the town.



So as to not mess up their headdress, the Dassanech sleep on a wooden pillow in huts without window.



Dassanech men opt for a clay wig in lieu of the bottle caps. This clay bun is one of the most sophisticated hairdos in the entire Omo valley.

Making this bun takes hours and it lasts but a few weeks.

A man places a feather on top to show that he's killed a dangerous animal or an enemy. Kenya's Turkana tribe often crosses the border and steals their cattle. This results in tribal warfare with lot of wounds and deaths.





Androgyny seems to be part of the Dassanech culture as young men love wearing women's jewelry. Women on the other hand have big muscles from all their hard labor. The most difficult tasks such as fetching water or collecting wood are their responsibility.

eric lafforgue

lafforgue@mac.com

+33633053451

www.ericlafforgue.com