

Omo Valley Tribes

The Omo Valley in the remote south-west of Ethiopia still offers traditional lifestyles to the Suri, Mursi, Hamar and other tribes. Each tribe has unique styles of beautification, including scarring, lip plates, floral headdresses, clay paint designs, and symbolic jewellery. All of these tribes are known to be proud and resilient and, although they earn some money from tourism, they are ultimately cattle herders. Competition for land is fierce and there are frequent conflicts between neighbouring tribes, fuelled by the flow of weapons across the border from South Sudan.

There is much debate about the impact of cultural tourism on traditional ways, with optimists believing that tourism creates a space for cultural traditions that might otherwise be lost. The exchange may not only provide a source of income for isolated communities, but it could also encourage tribal groups to preserve unique practices and traditions.

Modelling for photographs has developed into quite a trade for some of these tribes, which doesn't always allow for the most authentic or candid shots. However, these photos still give an insight into tribal life in this lesser visited region, and they still incite an important discussion to form the basis of a wider understanding of cultures and traditions in Africa.

Resources

1. Omo Valley gallery: <http://africageo.com/5008>
2. Trevor Cole website: www.coleimages.com
3. Louisa Seton website: <http://louisaseton.com.au/>

This image was taken at a Suri tribal wedding, and perhaps portrays the inner strength of this young girl. The moment was candid and spontaneous, and the sweat from the dancing is apparent on her face.



TREVOR COLE



ABOVE For ceremonies, members of the Suri tribe decorate themselves with white clay found locally. The circle shapes are made by using a bottle top dipped in clay.

RIGHT This group of women are from the Mursi tribe. The lip plate on the middle woman denotes beauty and status, and might fetch a large dowry price of about 38 cows and an AK47.

OPPOSITE A Suri mother with facial paint, a lip plate and a headdress made from dried corn, stands with her child.



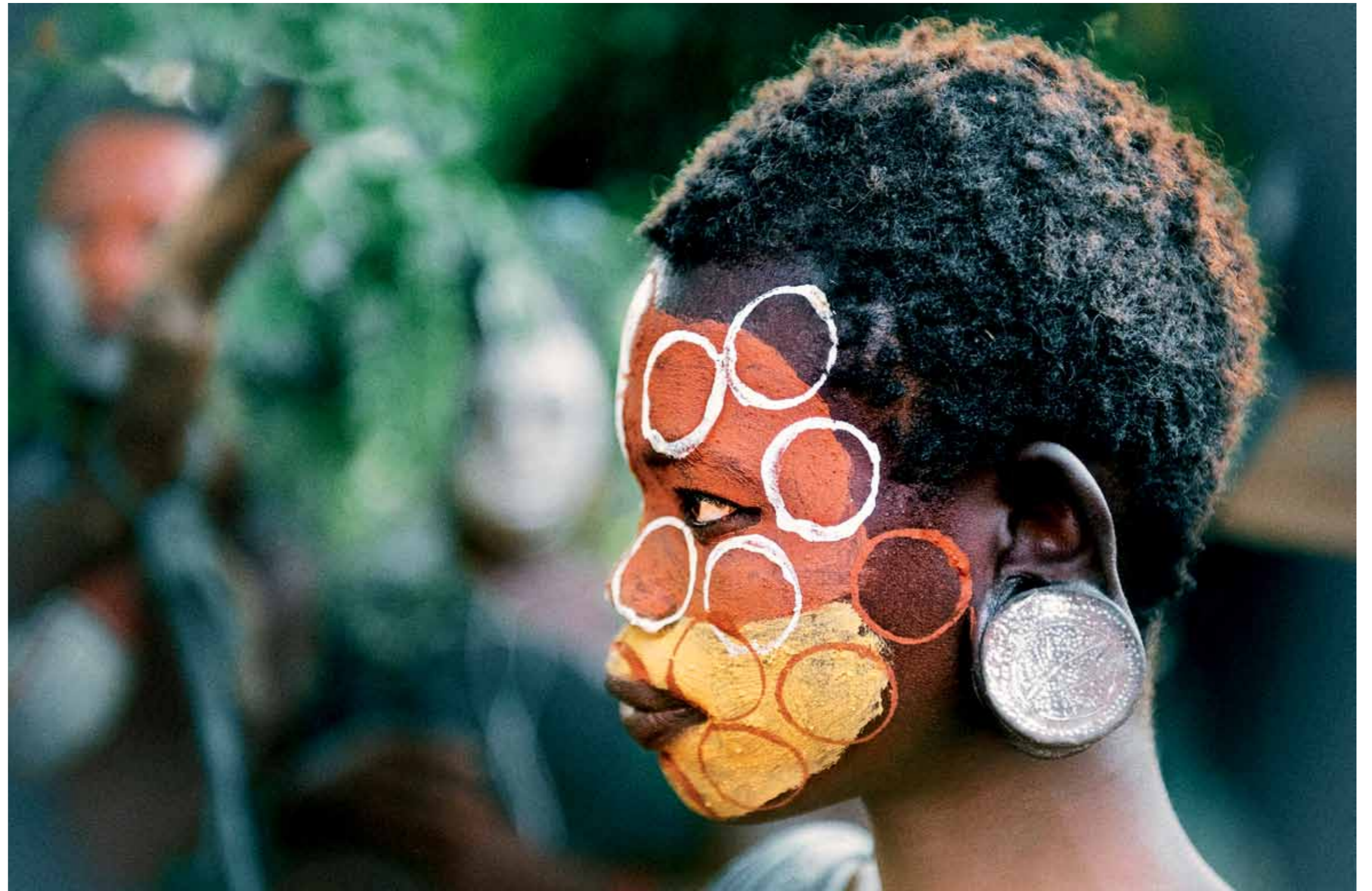
LOUISA SETON (2)



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LOUISA SETON



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ABOVE A young girl takes her facial art seriously and has cleverly created circles in opposing colours.

OPPOSITE This boy belongs to the Suri tribe, which love to decorate themselves with local flora on special occasions.



Three young Suri children show their best facial artwork, with an additional embellishment in the form of flowers.

PREVIOUS SPREAD Suri men stand in front of a clay wall in the village of Kibish, waiting for the commencement of a stick fight in which young men prove themselves.

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