



***Tribes
Turn Trash
Into Jewelry***

Eric Lafforgue



The southern Ethiopian town of Omorate has become a stomping ground for the workers building the bridge across the Omo River. Bars have begun to pop up all over. Where there are bars, there are bottles. Where there are bottles, there are bottle caps. The neighboring Dassanech tribe, who inhabit the environs of the riverbank, have repurposed this fresh supply of used bottle caps by fashioning them into headdresses.



The more caps they have, the more confident they feel. Along with the traditional beaded necklaces they wear, this headdress is a fashionable accessory.



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).



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.





Southern Ethiopian tribes recycle everything. Old watch bands can make great necklace pendants for Hamar girls.



Mursi children began attending school due to government pressure. Simultaneously, there was a big vaccination campaign for the tribe. These teens can be seen wearing a collection of syringe caps around their necks.



The adult Mursi on the other hand use the syringes as bracelets. Everything that comes from the “modern” world has potential as an accessory. These items also show that the bearer has traveled around, visiting nearby towns.



Ever since mobile phones have made their way into the Surma tribe, the wealthier residents of the Tulgit purchase disposable prepaid phone cards that eventually turn into earrings.





Both men and women of both the Bana and Hamar tribes also wear these phone card earrings. The cards are made of rigid plastic, are geometric in shape, and are quite durable; in essence, they possess many qualities that the tribes value.

The Hamar tribeswomen say they like these cards since they represent the modern world. Even if they don't have a phone, these earrings are a way to keep up with the progress by turning the technology into fashion.





In the remote areas of Angola, members of the Himba tribe drink cans of Fanta and Sprite.



The Mucawana women collect these cans to make the “Kapapo” headdress.



Ethiopia's Dassanech also incorporate these cans in their headwear.



eric lafforgue
lafforgue@mac.com
www.ericlafforgue.com