
LONG WA: THE LAST OF THE HEADHUNTERS

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ABSTRACT

Long Wa, North East India, bordering with Myanmar, home to the last living Konyak Headhunters of Nagaland; older tattooed men, surrounded by green prosperous forests, living a traditional way of life which is quickly disappearing.

The photography works, titled “Long Wa: The Last of the Headhunters”, is a series of images documenting the last living Headhunters of Nagaland. The medium used was intended to capture a moment in time to help preserve a disappearing culture. Conflicts caused by globalization, rapid development and government pressure within Nagaland are causing the Headhunters’ way of life to disappear.

This work experiments with High Speed Sync (HSS) studio strobe photography. This technique permits the introduced light to expose the subject while allowing the background details to be naturally lit by the sun. HSS photography adds a strong sense of presence and importance to the photographic subject. Using professional portable studio allows the photographer to bring studio quality lighting to the amazing outdoor settings.

Exploring the jungles and mountains of North East India in search of the feared tattooed men of the Konyak tribe I soon found respected warriors concerned with their disappearing culture and lost stories. With the use of HSS photography I was able to showcase the environment of their living conditions, while simultaneously allowing my subjects to stand proudly in my composition. This work is not to be seen as photojournalism but rather as an experimental form of visual ethnography.

KEYWORDS

Konyak, photography, visual ethnography, India, headhunters

Bio

(<http://www.webster.ac.th/academics/faculty/faculty20.html>)

Thomas Martin Ronald Groves is a Webster University Media Communications lecturer, holding his BA and MA in Media Communications and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education. He joined Webster University Thailand as a fulltime instructor in 2009 and was recently awarded Sverdrup Global Teaching Fellowship to teach communication studies in Accra, Ghana. He teaches photography, digital production, advertising and communications theory. He is an avid photographer who enjoys traveling around the world documenting the beautiful and unique.

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Hunters

While the elder Headhunters are the highest regarded in the village the next tier are the village hunters. The images below showcase a small percentage of the village hunters. The hunters in my images are starting the day on their way to hunt or during the actual hunt.



PHOTO 1: A master hunter prepares his morning tea. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 4, 2017



PHOTO 2: Two hunters share their muzzle loaded rifles to the author. Long Wa, Nagaland March 2, 2017



PHOTO 3: An elder hunter shares his traditional hunting outfit mid hunt. This outfit can only be seen on elder hunters. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 3, 2017



PHOTO 4: Son to the elder hunter in Figure 9 wears a more modern outfit seen on most younger hunters. The image was taken moments before a deer was shot. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 3, 2017



PHOTO 5: Many of the elder hunters do not spend as much time hunting in the jungles but rather collect honey from bee hives natural occurring in the forest. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017

Children

Children in Long Wa were naturally very curious of a foreigner walking around and taking pictures. To be respectful I communicated with the children's' parents prior to all photographs. Children are actively involved in household chores, watching over their siblings and learning their parents' trades.



PHOTO 6: A young boy poses for his first picture after working in the fields with his mother. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 2, 2017



PHOTO 7: Young boys playing with their toy guns and sling shots practicing to become hunters. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 8: Children gather in the village Morung¹ to watch the author use a camera. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 2, 2017

¹ Morung is a special building used for religious events, ceremonies and now often used for educating children on traditional ways of life.

Women

Women play a significant role in the Konyak tribes of Long Wa. They maintain the homes, raise the children, take care of meals for their families and are heavily involved in farming. While often not included in meetings I observed that most women held significant roles in the decision making process.



PHOTO 9: Konyak women wearing their traditional dress. The entire dress is normally only worn during ceremonies but often jewelry can be seen during everyday activities. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 2, 2017



PHOTO 10: A young woman looking outside of her home window. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017

Headhunters

A majority of the headhunters in the village made the effort to meet me while I walked around. They were curious about what I was doing in their village. Once a relationship was developed many of the elders wanted to share their stories. The headhunters can be easily recognized by their tattooed faces. A face tattoo symbolizes a successful headhunter. These tattoos carry great honour as they would have received these tattoos from the queen. The tattoos will be of a skull. The headhunter can receive a next level of honour with receiving a neck tattoo. After the sixth successful head removal they would receive their neck tattoo. The Naga Konyak elder headhunters will also wear an heirloom necklace made of brass. Each head on the necklace represents a human head taking during this ritual. It is important to note that while the ceremonial head and necklaces are not worn on a daily basis the spears and ear ornaments carry functional aspects to daily life.



PHOTO11: Konyak elder headhunter proudly wears his traditional outfit over his polo shirt. Long Wa, Nagaland.
February 27, 2017



PHOTO 12: An elder headhunter stands in front of his home in traditional outfit. His home proudly displays the Gayal skulls that he has hunted over the years. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 13: Deputy Angh of Long Wa proudly stands in front of his home. All homes are built by the community. The larger and more complex the architecture signifies the more respect and appreciation the village holds for the owner. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 28, 2017



PHOTO14: The youngest headhunter of Long Wa. Now in his 60s, he still wears his traditional symbols on modern materials. His spear replaced with a spear headed cane and brass necklace replaced with gold coloured embroidery. While his attire might not look as fierce this Konyak headhunting elder is still active with hunting in the wild. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 3, 2017



PHOTO15: Konyak headhunter waiting for tea to boil. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 16: Known for his hunting of Gayal and large birds this headhunter stands proudly in front of his hunting wall. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017



PHOTO17: Konyak headhunter out for a morning walk. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017



PHOTO18: A man, nearly blind and deaf, makes the necklaces of the Konyak headhunters. While these necklaces can be found for sale in other parts of Nagaland only a few are allowed to make and maintain the warriors' necklaces. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 19: A close up of a necklace being maintained. The man's hands in the picture show his years of dedication to his craft. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 20: A child plays in the mountain range of Long Wa, Nagaland. March 2, 2017