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Book Reviews

The Last of Their Kind

Before They Pass Away

Advertising photographer Jimmy Nelson spent two years in some of the remotest places on Earth capturing the photographs for this book, subjecting himself and his team to Arctic cold, oppressive Amazon jungle heat and everything in between. He was searching for peoples and ethnic groups whose place in the modern world is increasingly threatened, either because the land they call home harbors valuable resources or simply because their societies are unlikely to survive the inevitable collision with the global consumerist economy that is lurking just around the corner.

Before They Pass Away performs a delicate balancing act that offers a timeless document with possibly some of the last ever visual records of cultures that will soon be forgotten, yet views its subjects with an artist's eye, producing subjective impressions that lack any feeling of distance.

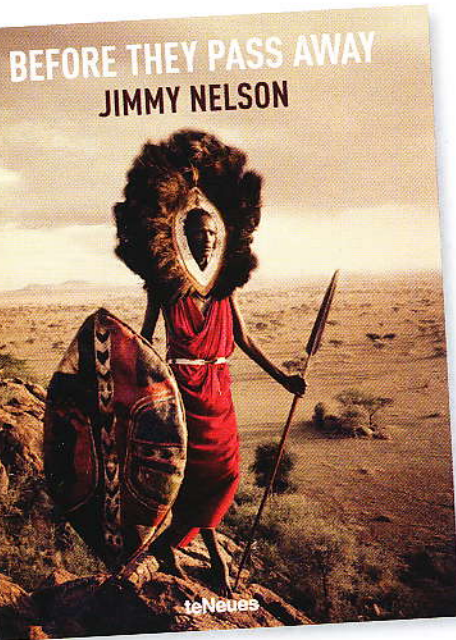
Nelson's approach makes it difficult to differentiate between his own artistic concept and the degree to which his subjects represent

their authentic selves in their everyday surroundings.

The book nevertheless manages to solve the potential conflict between art and documentation, thanks largely to Nelson's obsessive nature. He managed to establish a bond with all of his subjects, resulting in photos of unparalleled intensity. These unequivocal portraits present the viewer with clear, self-confident gazes that could only have been captured with a high degree of trust between the subjects and their photographer.

In spite of the wealth of exotic clothing, jewelry and archaic body paint on show, Nelson manages to compel us to countenance the unknown but somehow familiar individual at the heart of each image.

This concentration on the human angle makes it easier to contemplate the distinctive features of each of these endangered societies in an intuitive, non-scientific way, and the result is an impressive show of respect for cultural differences. (Robert Seetzen/tho)



Before They Pass Away

by Jimmy Nelson
Published by teNeues
408 pages, 402 color illustrations
Text in English, German and French
14.8 × 11.8 inches
Hardback
US\$150
ISBN: 978-3-8327-9759-1

Jimmy Nelson's images are carefully staged but nevertheless communicate a high degree of realism that gets the viewer thinking hard about what is familiar and what is truly foreign



Image: 2013, Jimmy Nelson, teNeues