

H Jonathan Klijn

Reviewing the Arts Jour E-157

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Short Review / Background Sketch

Papua New Guinea. Captured.

Photography “captures” a subject. Like a bug in a jar or laboratory frog splayed open for us to gawk at. Sometimes it is propped up in faux-regal style evidencing that we had come no further than when we caged the *Hottentot Venus* for nineteenth-century London freak-shows.

Sandro Miller introduced his 2019 photographic project *I am Papua New Guinea*, at Expo Chicago on September 19, 2019. The renowned photographer made three trips to the Pacific Ring of Fire islands, shooting four hundred indigenous people representing a hundred tribes. The collection focusses on scarification, mudmen, wigmen, crocodile rituals, talismanic dress, and fertility rituals.

Miller gained access to the isolated communities with the help of Australian photojournalist Torsten Blackwood. The confrontational newness of the experience to a people who have never seen a camera, nor interacted with white entitlement reads with gauche familiarity. Is it sadness? Tenderness? Indigestion?

It doesn't matter.

Because you are looking at beautifully lit, thoughtfully composed objects of unknowableness posed to within an inch of Bob Mackie circa '83. It is the face of what a hegemonic society represents, reflected in the expressions of cannibalized cannibals realizing they have been captured. Not by a sword. But by a lens.

I am Papua New Guinea

Expo Chicago 2019

September 19 to 22, 2019