



[Rosanne Pennella:](#) Photographs from New Guinea



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Detail from "Two Dani Men" (see below)

Self-decoration is a way of life handed down through the generations in New Guinea; my interest in the varying ideas of beauty around the world is what drew me to photograph there. In New Guinea, members of various groups decorate themselves similarly though there may be some whimsical, individual variation. The variation fascinated me, as, in some small way, it revealed the personality of people I could not communicate with easily.

I sought out the Goroka Highlands Festival because it is one of largest and most colorful assemblies of tribal groups on earth. Photographing there was a challenge because of the crowds of people and the difficulty of obtaining a good background for an image. But since the festival is an organized event where participants compete to look their best, most were very willing to be photographed and indeed were quite happy to pose. They seemed to be glad to have people acknowledge that they looked good by choosing them to photograph.

Irian Jaya was a very different experience. Trekking on my own from village to village in the mountains, there were no crowds and the people were living their normal lives, not competing for prizes. When dressed in the traditional war costume, with feathers and body paint, the male Dani are spectacular. One evening, I taught several Dani men to play a card game and gave them the deck of cards. The next day while they were dressed in their elaborately plumed headresses, with abstract patterns decorating their bodies, I watched them play the same card game with each other.

— Rosanne Pennella

Papua New Guinea

Held each year in the mountainous center of Papua New Guinea, the Goroka Highlands Sing Sing celebrates self-decoration. Dancing, drumming and chanting while dressed in traditional attire, approximately a thousand participants converge for this festival. Paint and plumage transform human faces into masks; groups of celebrants compete for prizes.



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**Mt. Hagen Man, Kula Group,
Western Highlands Province**
In a juxtaposition of tradition with modernity, charcoal creates the deep black pigment with commercially prepared red pigment and white-out completing the facial mask.



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Huli Man, Eastern Highlands Province
Manufactured pigments may be preferred to natural pigments because their colors are more vivid. Group members decorate themselves similarly but there may be some whimsical variation.



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Maina Gol Tiger Woman
Oil is mixed with charcoal to create a black sheen on the skin. The bare-chested Maina Gol Tiger Group appear to be a ghostly apparition of black and white stripes over dozens of bodies.



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Kepai Onu Men, Kukin Group
A bawdy dance enacting the sexual initiation of an adolescent boy. A line of men dressed as women pair off with a line of men dressed as men, depicting the first sexual experience of a boy.

Irian Jaya

Irian Jaya is the western half of the island of New Guinea, comprising the easternmost part of Indonesia. The name means "hot land rising from the sea." In the highlands of Irian Jaya live the Dani tribe, headhunters until twenty years ago. Today, the male Dani engage in mock war celebrations, wearing the traditional plumed headdresses, with boldly painted abstract designs on their naked bodies.



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A Dani Warrior Wearing a Penis Gourd

These gourds are grown specifically for this purpose. While many younger Dani wear Western clothing, penis gourds are still common attire in Dani culture.



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Dani Mummy

An important village elder who has been mummified. The mummy is kept as a talisman.



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Two Dani Men

Two Dani warriors peer out from the men's hut. In decorating themselves like birds the Dani illustrate their close spiritual kinship with birds.

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