

TEXTILES

COSTUME NATIONAL

FOR HIS NEW BOOK, JIM NAUGHTEN CREATED TYPOLOGICAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF NAMIBIA'S HERERO PEOPLE, WHOSE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN CLOTHES ARE SYMBOLS OF THEIR HISTORIC STRUGGLE AGAINST COLONIALISM. BY CONOR RISCH

MANY NATIONS AND cultures remember military heroes, great victories, and fallen soldiers through statues and monuments. On national holidays, war veterans don old uniforms and medals, or wear clothing decorated with patches that denote their participation in a particular battle. Veterans march in parades or attend ceremonies that honor military service, and civilians pay their respects.

For his new book, *Conflict and Costume* (Merrell Publishers, 2013), British photographer Jim Naughten photographed Namibia's Herero tribe, for



The costumes and military uniforms worn by Namibia's Herero tribe commemorate their struggle against German colonialism.

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Jim Naughten had initially photographed the Herero after graduating university, but wanted to return to the subject with the photographic experience he has amassed.

whom commemorating their martial history is a practice ingrained in their daily lives. Naughten will also exhibit the work this spring at Margaret Street Gallery in London and Klompching Gallery in Brooklyn, New York. (Editor's note: Klompching Gallery is co-owned by *PDN* Creative Director Darren Ching.)

In 1904 the Herero, San and Nama tribes went to war with the Germans who had colonized the sparsely populated territory, which is home to the oldest desert in the world, the Namib. During the fighting, Herero warriors would appropriate the uniforms of fallen German soldiers and wear them as symbols of victory, and the Herero army, which is more a symbolic than a standing army, continues to wear German-style uniforms to this day. Colonial-era European fashion also remains an important part of the culture.

In photographing the Herero, Naughten was drawn to "the paradox that lay at the heart of the costume," he explains via e-mail from London. "The German colonists quickly became the Herero's mortal enemies, and nearly wiped them off the face of the earth, yet they wear an approximation of the German uniform and dress from that period. It's incredible to see this appropriation become such a powerful symbol of survival, defiance and strength."

Naughten first became aware of the Herero during a motorcycle tour of southern Africa in the late 1990s. He photographed the Herero then, and sold those pictures

JIM NAUGHTEN: “IT’S INCREDIBLE TO SEE THIS APPROPRIATION [OF GERMAN COLONIAL DRESS AND MILITARY UNIFORMS] BECOME SUCH A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF SURVIVAL, DEFIANCE AND STRENGTH.”

to *Marie Claire*. He also exhibited the work, which led to his first advertising job. “I had it in the back of my mind to go back and revisit the story with skills that I acquired since then,” Naughten says. “Other than maturing as a photographer and finding a ‘voice,’ I had developed better production and post-production skills.”

To photograph the Herero, Naughten used a V System Hasselblad with a Phase One P45X digital back. “I shot everyone in the midday desert sun and used a silver beauty dish to punch out all the harsh shadows,” Naughten says. “It gives the images a surreal feel, which seems appropriate with the story.” Naughten utilized a shallow depth of field “which resembles the heat haze and gives the images a timelessness, and more importantly it throws all the focus on the sitter.”

During his four months working on the project, Naughten relied on a local guide to translate and negotiate with the Herero, whom he paid for the pictures. “In terms of negotiating, the Hereros are tough cookies, and will not be messed around,”



Naughten shot all of his subjects in the midday desert sun, which gave the images consistency and emphasized the subjects and their clothing.



The unique color palette of the images is “actually how I see the colors, the desert and the people in my mind’s eye,” Naughten says. The photographer used a shallow depth of field to approximate the haze of the desert.

Naughten says. He directed his sitters very lightly, and “always told them their clothes looked beautiful. I particularly love the old-fashioned suits that many of the men wear. They dress so much better than we do in the West, I think.”

Naughten’s full-length, typological portraits show women in beautiful dresses, men in dapper suits and hats, and soldiers and cadets in uniforms that recall Germany’s colonial army, but that are accented with colorful reds and blues. The desert and cerulean sky lend a consistency to the backgrounds and serve to set off the colorful costumes. Naughten also made panoramic images of groups of Herero—one depicts a line of Herero cavalry marching, another a group of women in matching costumes of black blouses and full-length red skirts. Naughten’s color palette lends the images an otherworldly quality, and there is something fantastic about the combination of the costumes and the stark desert. “It’s actually how I see the colors, the desert and the people in my mind’s eye,” Naughten says. “I’ve shown the images to some Namibians who have said that I captured the desert so perfectly.” **pdn**