

Lip plates provide protection against evil spirits for some Ethiopian tribes

Woman of the Karen hill tribe, Thailand with traditional neck rings



Red hair is much prized in Scandinavia



Matsés Indian with facial ornamentation simulating jaguar whiskers



An Indian Muslim bride during her wedding ceremony

England a tiny waist was prized, while tiny feet were preferred in China. And in Papua New Guinea, heads are bound from a young age because a long head is seen as beautiful in adulthood. Everywhere has its ideals of beauty – but what things are prized as beautiful is completely random.'

It's not just about beauty, but also about different cultural values. If you want to shock your granny in the UK today, you could get a nose ring and a tattoo. But in India, nose rings aren't going to rock the establishment – they're a sign of conservative values.

#### FACE PAINT

It's not just the women who use facial adornment to beautify themselves. Maori warriors traditionally had a full facial tattoo to make them more attractive to women. These tattoos, or Moko, are about more than mere good looks though: they convey status, rank, work, and even whether the wearer is on their first or second marriage.

Aboriginal Australians and some African peoples use scarification to decorate their faces in a similar way. Skin is cut and ashes are rubbed into it to make permanent marks that are more visible on darker skins.

Many African cultures believe that the material in the earring stops spirits from entering the body – and for some, it's the bigger, the better. Tribes in Mali and Ethiopia gradually expand the piercings in lips and ears to a great size, typically using inserts made from wood, ivory or metal.

And in East Africa's Masai tribes, even the length of your hair means something. Long hair sets you apart as Masai traditionally have shaven heads – it shows that you are a warrior, a baby awaiting a name or a woman unable to get pregnant. They also claim an official colour, red, and always wear some form of it.

#### ANIMAL MAGIC

In the Amazon, unusual piercings are all the rage. The Jaguar people of the Brazilian rainforest wear facial ornaments and tattoos to make them look like – what else – jaguars. Further

into the rainforest, the Matsés Indians are known as the Cat people because the women wear whiskers in their noses. These are made from the ribs of palm leaves and pierce right into their noses. No cats' ears for them though; their faces are made up with bright red dye and lines are drawn around their mouths, cheeks and up to their ears.

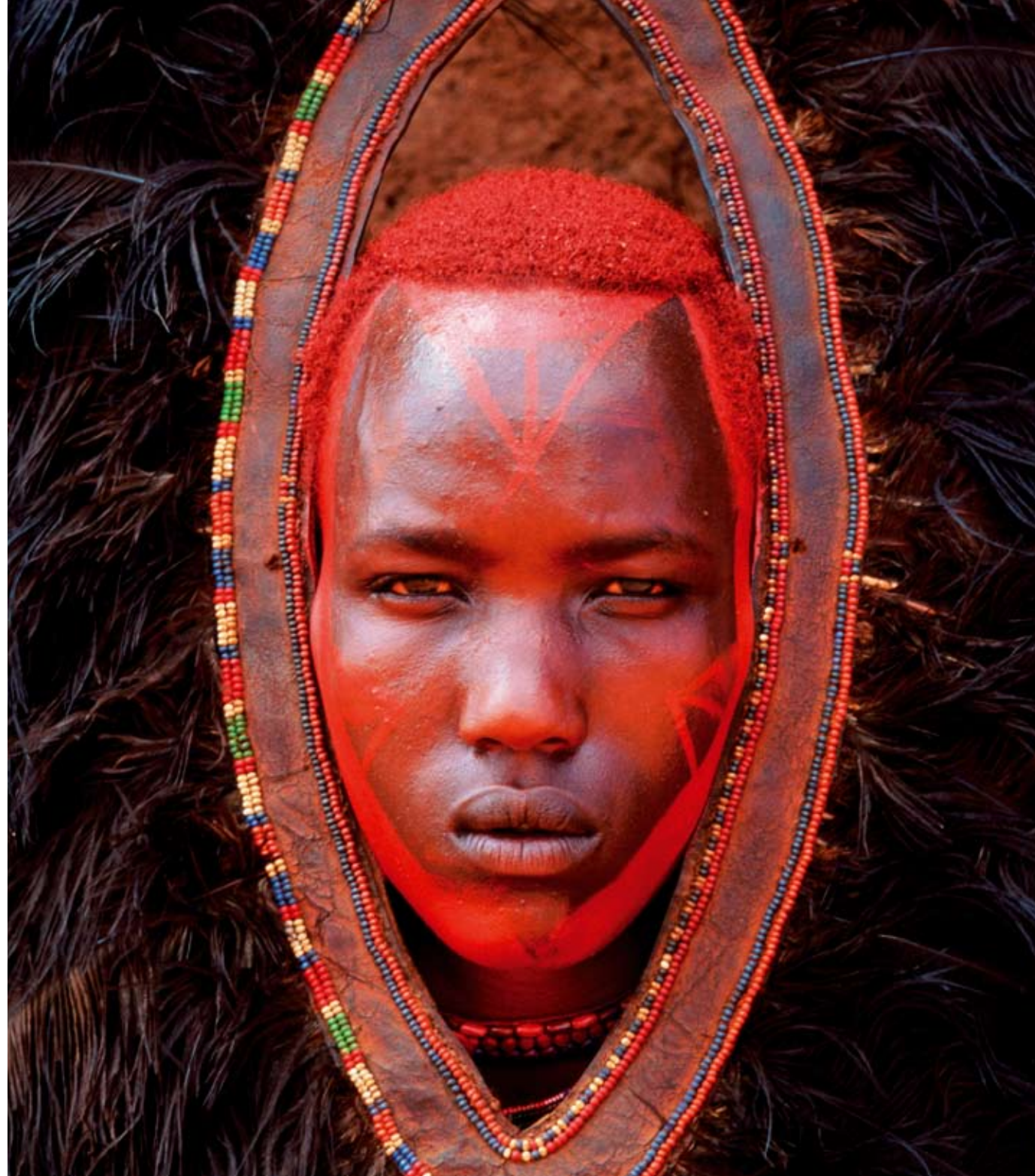
#### A PAIN IN THE NECK

The women of certain hill tribes in northern Thailand take the animal look to another extreme. Also known as the Giraffe women, the girls wear several brass rings round their necks, adding more and more as they grow to adulthood. Rather than stretching their necks as it appears, the rings displace their collarbone, and once fastened, they're there for life.

Myths abound about why long necks are coveted by the Paduang, including a suggestion that their necks are covered to stop tigers biting them in the jungle. Anthropologists agree that the most likely reason is that a long neck is seen as a sign of beauty, and the rings are an indicator of wealth.

With ideas of beauty varying so greatly around the world, it's no wonder the scientists are still puzzled. 'Why do different cultures find different things beautiful?' says Dr Robinson. 'That's still the \$64,000 question.' Perhaps beauty really is in the eye of the beholder...

Red is the colour for the Masai people



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# face VALUE

VIEW INVESTIGATES WHAT DEFINES BEAUTY

When Duncan Juvonen was at school, other children constantly called him names because of his bright red hair. Fast forward twenty years, and he's happily married to a Nordic beauty, leading a very glamorous life as an artist in Helsinki. His secret? That red hair again – the scarcity of red hair among all those Scandinavian blondes made his flaming hair colour all the more attractive to his wife. It just goes to show that culturally, the concept of beauty is far from a standard template.

Anthropologist Dr Jennie Robinson says that beauty is a complicated issue. 'There are two ways of looking at it,' she says. 'The evolutionary aspects, like symmetrical faces, are supposedly found universally attractive because they are a sign of good development and so good genes. Then there are the decorative extras – cultural traditions that are totally arbitrary, like waist size or hair colour, and which can be changed by individuals dieting or dyeing their hair. In Victorian