

Body of Work



Photographs from 'Human Tribe'
by Alison Wright
(2017)

Introduction

Alison Wright is an acclaimed documentary photographer and visual storyteller whose work spans more than three decades and over 150 countries. Known for her deeply human approach, Wright's photography focuses on people and cultures often overlooked by mainstream media. Her images have been featured in major exhibitions such as *Grit and Grace: Women at Work* at the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, which showcased portraits of women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America striving to create better futures in challenging environments. Her collection from which this Body of Work is drawn, *Human Tribe*, celebrates the diversity and shared humanity of people around the globe, emphasizing that despite cultural differences, our fundamental desires and struggles are universal.

Wright began her career as a photojournalist, covering global issues such as human rights, indigenous traditions, and the impact of conflict and natural disasters on people around the globe. Her assignments have taken her from the mountains of Nepal to the streets of Havana, always with a commitment to portraying individuals as more than symbols of their cultures. Wright has combined her craft with advocacy, founding the Faces of Hope Fund to support the communities she photographs.

What sets Wright apart is her ability to counter exoticism – the tendency to romanticize or stereotype foreign cultures. Instead of framing people as mysterious or romantic, she situates them within their lived realities: their homes, work, and families. Her portraits often include contextual details that tell a fuller story, and her captions name individuals rather than reducing them to anonymous stereotypes. Through this approach, Wright invites viewers to see her subjects as equals, on their own terms, rather than distant curiosities for our amusement, entertainment, or titillation.

Her work appears in National Geographic and the Smithsonian. For us, Wright's photography offers a perfect chance to discuss representation, authenticity, and the methods of visual storytelling. In a world saturated with Instagram aesthetics and curated travel fantasies, Wright's images remind us that the most compelling images are those that honour complexity and accept our shared humanity with others.

How to Alison Wright's photography

Alison Wright published *Human Tribe* on September 28, 2017. The book features over 160 portraits taken across every continent, celebrating the diversity and shared humanity of people around the world. This Body of Work presents some selected images from *Human Tribe* for you to annotate, explore, and study.

Alison Wright's photography invites us to look beyond surface impressions and engage with the complexity of human lives. Her work resists the temptation to exoticize, instead framing her subjects with dignity and individuality. Rather than presenting people as anonymous representatives of a faraway culture, Wright situates them within their lived realities, photographing them at home or in a place of significance for them so that each image becomes a story rather than a spectacle. This narrative approach challenges the selective representation often found in travel photography or Orientalist art, where cultural difference is exaggerated and fetishized.

Stylistically, Wright aims to create connection rather than keep her subjects at a distance. Portraiture is a defining feature of her work. She often photographs at eye level, creating a sense of equality between subject and viewer. Her use of natural light and colour palettes conveys warmth without romanticizing. Compositionally, she includes environmental details that root the subject in a specific geography, resisting the timeless, 'otherworldly' framing of exoticized imagery. Even when her photographs are visually stunning, their beauty serves understanding rather than fantasy. Captions ensure this by naming individuals and sharing personal details, reinforcing the idea that these are real people with agency, not cultural curiosities.

When studying this Body of Work, notice how Wright walks the line between aesthetic appeal and authenticity. Her images are undeniably compelling, but they do not invite passive admiration; they encourage empathy and recognition. In a media landscape saturated with curated travel fantasies, Wright's photography offers an alternative, one that prioritizes respect, understanding, and human connection. After exploring her body of work, return to consider these questions:

1. How does Alison Wright ensure her subjects are not exoticized?
2. What techniques define Alison Wright's photography?
3. How do her images invite curiosity about her subjects' lives?



Crocodile tattooing, The Sepik River, Papua New Guinea



Duka from Hamar tribe holding a gourd, Omo Valley, Ethiopia



Hunters at the Altai eagle festival, Mongolia



Malagan ceremonial mask, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea



Monk getting head shaved, Rangoon, Myanmar



Komono, a maiko with umbrella, Kyoto, Japan



Tangyio, on The Sepik River, Papua New Guinea



Tibet girl, near Manigango, Kham, Tibet



Tibetan nomads, Kham, eastern Tibet



Marian and Vivian Brown, famous San Francisco twins



Hato Hiala, Hamar tribe woman at Dimeka market



Port Loko, Sierra Leone



Sinhulpalchowk, Nepal



Kalevi Vasara and Jouna, Sami people in old barn, reindeer farm, Lapland, Arctic Finland



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Priest (Kase Demia Kebede) at house of Merkorius Church, Ethiopia