

# COUP

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## 'Windows to Africa' with Mario Gerth's African Portraits

By Nikita Gomes Achadinha – September 8, 2011

Mario Gerth went on a three-and-a-half year trip around the world on his bicycle when he was 27 years old. He encountered the African continent when he cycled from Cape Town to Cairo, where he met tribal people, and says he was “fascinated by their nomadic lifestyle, their way of thinking”, and their ability to live so close to nature. He says that since this trip, he has been back to Africa eight times, each time to capture images that are now part of a series of work he calls 'African Portraits'.

Gerth African preserve the people he met believes that might not and thus he them now as century. He the pictures



on', he found these people and took pictures of them as they were; “wearing animal skins, shells, metal ... horns”. He says they were “decorated with nature,” which is the “total opposite of what we do”. By 'we', he is referring to Western civilisation and non-Africans. Gerth was amazed at how appreciative and thankful the people he met on his travels were for the simplest things, like their animals and food. He explains that this appreciation is seriously lacking in Europe and other places in the world.

explains that Portraits aims to culture of the on his journey. He these cultures exist in 25 years wanted to capture they are in the 21st says that none of are 'fake' or 'put

“Africa is [referred] to as the 'chaos continent' in Europe – I must show [that it is] the opposite,” says Gerth. His mission with this work is to change the European perception of Africa. “I want people to stand in front of these pictures and look deep into their eyes, the windows to Africa.” If you take a look at Gerth's work, this is exactly how you will feel; you are looking through windows of Africa. The photographer wants people to be sparked into learning about their past because he believes that Africa is where it all started, where all our ancestors are from.

The purpose of African Portraits is to tackle real-life issues facing societies today. Gerth encourages people to appreciate Africa and respect its people instead of sucking it dry for its “oil, minerals and trees”. He hopes these portraits will get people to question the lives they are living: “Nomads of the modern day – dressed in tight jeans, connected with cellphones, [armed] with a notebook. Always stressed, always in a hurry, running from one appointment to the next meeting.”

Such a strong message that, I believe, should not only be shared with the rest of the world, but with our fellow Africans, too!