



When the Land was Ours. White-owned farm entrance near Witpan. Hardap Region. March 2019

As a photographer, and a white woman at that, it is important—before releasing the shutter—to connect with the land and with our shared humanity; to capture history and her story, not fabricate it; and to make even a small difference where possible towards helping future generations to see.

Margaret Courtney-Clarke



The Caged Cats of Axab Pan. During the day Enkia Seonduru's cats are a threat to her baby chickens. At night they are released to hunt mice. Axab Pan, Omaheke Region. March 2019



Margaret Courtney-Clarke



The Wheelbarrow. Jakugberug Kavari, Kumbaza Xhao and their kids pull water home. Omongwa ("Salt") Pan, Aminuis, Omaheke Region. March 2019



The Water Point in a Storm. A whirlwind whips up across the Omongwa ("Salt") Pan and catches Prescilla Xhao and her family in chaos at the water well as they scatter for an imaginary shelter. Aminuis, Omaheke Region. March 2019



The Gleaners. Hendrik Langman and his wife Anna Goeieman and their three sons sleep in tents along the side of the B2, doing piece work cutting grass for Kavango cattle farmers. B2, Trans-Kalahari Corridor, Omaheke Region. September 2019



Sweet Treats. Oupa !Gubi holds gum from a Buffalo-thorn tree (*Ziziphus mucronata*), a favorite treat for his grandchildren. It is believed that the young zigzag twigs indicate that life is not straightforward. A thorn at the node, facing backward, represents where we come from, and one facing forward represents where we are going. Corridor 18, Omaheke Region. October 2019



Manketti Nut #1. Cgaesje Komtsa was born in the veld in 1940 and has spent a lifetime walking the Kalahari sands barefoot. Tjum! kui tsxau tzi #kaolaesi tjuho ("the village where we make crafts and teach children"), near Tsumkwe, Otjozondjupa Region. September 2019



Bullet. Dixgao Kaesje displays her smoking pipe made from an empty bullet cartridge, a relic from the South African Border War (from 1966 to Namibia's independence in 1990). Makuri, Nyae Nyae Conservancy, Otjozondjupa Region. September 2019

Margaret Courtney-Clarke was born in Namibia in 1949. After studying art and photography in South Africa, she spent the next four decades working as a photographer in Italy, the USA and across Africa before returning to Namibia in 2009. Courtney-Clarke's work demonstrates her particular dedication to rural cultures threatened by modernization and consumerism. Her publications include the acclaimed trilogy of *Ndebele* (1986), *African Canvas* (1990) and *Imazighen* (1996), as well as several collaborations with Maya Angelou. Steidl published Courtney-Clarke's *Cry Sadness into the Coming Rain* in 2017.

Following *Cry Sadness into the Coming Rain* (Steidl, 2017), which documents the seared landscapes of the Namib Desert and was shortlisted for the Deutscher Fotobuchpreis 18119, Margaret Courtney-Clarke now turns her lens to the bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. The inspiration for *When Tears Don't Matter* comes, in part, from her grandfather's photographs of almost a century earlier during his mandate as Secretary for South West Africa (now Namibia), some of which are reproduced in this book. 10,000 kilometers of formidable terrain take Courtney-Clarke across remote bushveld, sand and salt pans to drought-stricken conservancies, tenuous farming communities that function as holding tanks for "inconvenient indigenes," "cultural villages" and peri-urban squatterments, as far east as she could travel through the Namibian Kalahari Desert.

Largely invisible to the outside world, the bushmen today are dispossessed of their land: a "shadow people" sidelined by officialdom, economic inequity and outdated mythologies which present them as living in an "uncontaminated" state. In this complex country where notions of truth and objectivity (and whiteness) are constantly explored, the battle against disenfranchisement is largely unsuccessful. Courtney-Clarke's photographs lie at the crossroads between documentary and activism, and their basis is an unflinching empathy with her subjects—in her words: "What is crucial in this work is to give place to a voice in search of a listener."

*Margaret Courtney-Clarke's photographs show us the indignities of life on the periphery.* Rob J. Gordon

#### Exhibitions:

Somerset House, London, 2021

SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, 2021

!Khwa ttu San Heritage Museum, Yzerfontein, 2021

### Margaret Courtney-Clarke *When Tears Don't Matter*

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