

# Black and White in Colour

Ceremony & Ritual | Perspective | Voices & Views

I once thought black and white photographs were exactly that - empty of colour, frozen in another time.

But after years of studying old images in an effort to better understand myself and my culture, I've come to realise they are anything but colourless. When seen in context, they reveal stories: layered, powerful, and sometimes unexpected about who we were.

This photograph is of Mase Iva of Kwaradubuna, my clan, published in *The Papuan Villager* around 1930. At first glance, it appears stripped of colour.

Look closer, though, and the story shifts.

When I began researching the ornaments he wore: their names, meanings, and English translations, the image changed entirely. Mase was in transition, moving into adulthood through a process that required six months of seclusion, restraint, and discipline. With that knowledge, the photograph no longer felt distant. It felt alive.

I've included the names of the ornaments and their translations so that, in a way, you can colour the image with your imagination.

Black and white photographs don't remove colour. They invite patience. They ask us to look longer, to read more carefully, and to understand what sits beneath the surface.

Seen through that lens, this image is anything but black and white.

It is full of colour: if you know how to read it.

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