

October 14, 2014

Our first stop was a visit to see the painted faces and costumes of the Huli. We walked through an arched gate, often of woven bamboo, which is always the entrance to the village. Once through the gate we walked around a narrow, mud path which ended in a large grassy opening. There were items for sale displayed on branches, such as necklaces, bilums, and dolls. I was excited about the beads here, but it turns out that all the beads are European. The traditional Huli necklaces are made of shells or seeds. The shells were once the Huli currency.



We walked around the corner and saw 2 men in Huli costumes (I call them that for lack of a better word. It really was their regular wear and sometimes still is) and painted faces. One was still putting on his wig and using a handheld mirror the way an actor would (more on wigs later). Although they were doing this demonstration for us, this is still how they dress (we saw men on the road dressed this way) and they still paint their faces for ceremonies.



Their faces were painted in red and yellow and they had straw through their noses. These colors once came from the clay in the surrounding area, but now come from the store. Thomas explained all the different bird of paradise feathers in their wigs and explained how the wigs are made (more on this later when we visit the wig making school). The men had several necklaces around their necks,



some made of shells, some made of cassowary quills. They also have a cassowary thigh bone which has the top painted red and has a slit in it where they hide their money. On their back of their necks they have a hornbill and pig tusks (all very Huli). Their lower fronts and backs (but not their sides) are covered with leaves like a skirt, or more like an apron with a back, and the sides are open. They also weave red little aprons from which they hang pig tails. The more pig tails they have, the richer they are. When they sell their pigs, the owner always gets the tail. While the men weave the aprons for themselves, the women weave them both for themselves and to sell. The men played flutes for us and posed for pictures alone, and with us.



While we were being taught about all this, another older man came into the clearing. He looked old, but as we know, there are no ages here, no record of birth and no record of death. But what a wise old face he had. He was not painted, and he wore western clothes (although no shoes – no one seems to wear shoes. All along the road everyone was barefoot). But he had decorated his hat with leaves and flowers which is the Huli way.



Our next stop was what Thomas called village studies. This was an opportunity to see a full village and visit the men's house and the women's house. You may remember I mentioned that husbands and wives do not live together and in fact are not allowed within each other's homes. Our first stop was at the men's house. If a Huli women even comes down the path, she can be fined many pigs, or can be sent back to her village and the bride payment has to be returned. The bride payment can be 30 pigs (Thomas actually said 2x15 pigs) or about 6-7000 kina. This man had three wives (they can have as many as 8-9 wives) and had to build each one a house.



On the way into the village we saw many of the villagers outside the gate. Once again there was a man with his grass covered hat and his machete. And children waving to us.

