

Face to Face

Whether we are young or old, rich or poor, living in the grandest cities or the most remote locations – our shared humanity unites us. These photos – from the Portrait of Humanity 2020 shortlist – prove it.

by **Michael Epis** *Contributing Editor*

As the world around us adapts to this new normal, humanity, our shared humanity, has never been more important. Individuality, community and unity are on proud display in the shortlist for the 2020 *Portraits of Humanity* photo competition. A selection of the shortlisted entries, published here, demonstrate the ways we are different, but more importantly, the ways we are the same.

Since the days when *all* of humanity would gather around a fire every night, religion has been a uniting force (although *two* religions can divide people), and that has never been more true than for this extraordinary church in Ethiopia, Abuna Yemata Guh, built into the side of a mountain. Keshi Assefa Hagos is the priest, celebrating mass in the church cave, continuing a 1500-year-old tradition on the site. The priest is barefoot, as are all his parishioners, who have to take off their shoes before they make the arduous – and potentially fatal – 45-minute climb up the sheer mountain face and into the secluded church. One legend has it that the church was carved into the mountain so that the devotees could be closer to God.

Religion comes in many forms, and Eustorgio Payaguaje (see over) is a *taita* – a *yage* shaman, *yage* (or *ayahuasca*) being a hallucinogenic plant in South

America, which brings him closer to God. The plants have been a part of religious life in Colombia for even longer than Abuna Yemata Guh has been around.

“I would only believe in a god who knows how to dance,” German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote – and dancing is what these *halmonis* (Korean grandmothers) like to do. Dancing can be communal (like a corroboree), it can be couples cheek to cheek, or it can be grouped individuals (a strange phenomenon that started with hippies in the 60s), but any which way dancing brings people together. These New York Korean grandmas know that dancing will put a smile on your face and a spring in your step.

Speaking of smiles, there’s no better smile than one that comes from a shared moment, all the more so if it is shared across the generations, like this one captured between a young woman and an older woman in Chennai, India.

And when it comes to shared humanity, just look to the kids in Napoli, who can gather and have fun at a moment’s notice – with or without crazy dress-up Carnivale costumes and face paint.

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Keshi Assefa Hagos leans against the wall of his Orthodox Ethiopian church, carved into a mountain overlooking a valley.
photo by Mauro De Bettio



Korean grandmothers dance the night away in New York City.
photo by An Rong Xu



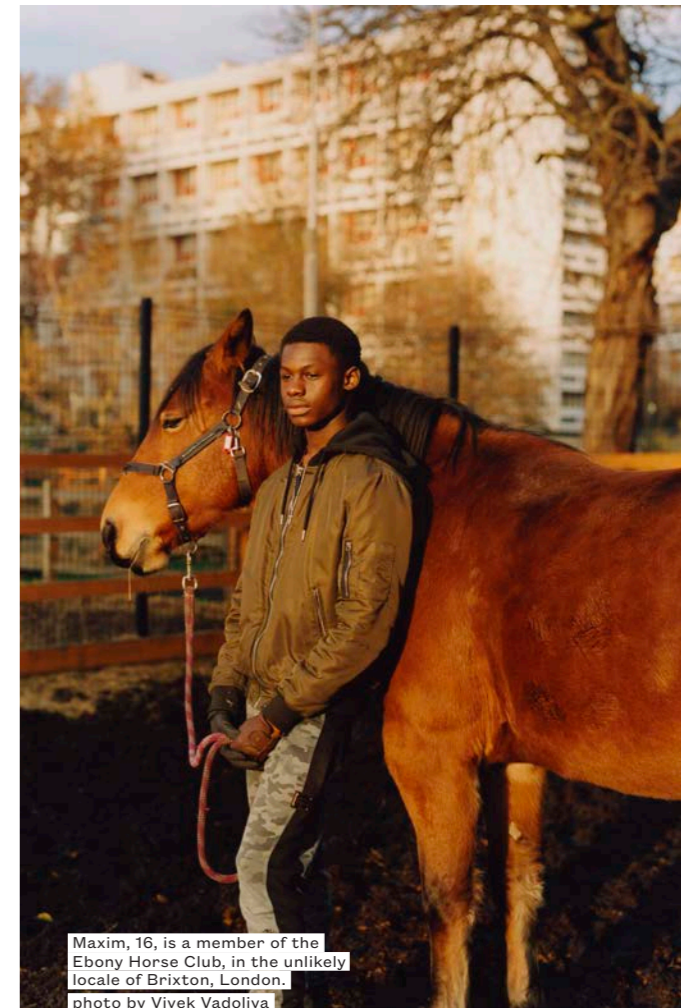
Taita Eustorgio Payaguaje, a Colombian shaman, holds an ayahuasca ceremony.
photo by Daniel Fernández



Children dressed up for Carnivale in Napoli, Italy.
photo by Tiberio Sorvillo



Two women share a moment in Chennai, India.
photo by Udayan Sankar Pal



Maxim, 16, is a member of the Ebony Horse Club, in the unlikely locale of Brixton, London.
photo by Vivek Vadoliya