

## **Repetition Reinforces The Revelation By Samuel John Butt**

A question had been on my mind.... how can I practice being a better photographer? There are so many different disciplines within the medium that answering this question is obviously going to look different depending on what area you want to grow in. On this occasion, I wanted to make the pre-production process as simple as possible and eliminate the potential of me having any reason to not create a new series of work. Simply picking a subject, getting out with the camera and making the work never quite seems to be enough but after some deep thought I identified that what was hindering me was the voice of the almost-ever-present internal perfectionist. Recognising that this voice has played a part in helping me to get to this place in my life, I thanked it for its opinion and then chose to listen to the voice from where the somewhat imperfect but achievable idea came from and set about packing my bag and making the 20-minute uphill walk to the site of what I've come to be call My Tree of Life.

This series came from the belief that repetition is a key component in developing, and reestablishing when lost, creative discipline. In the same way an athlete goes to the gym and works the same muscles to grow and strengthen their physique I hoped to achieve similar results in my photographic work. Even though the process is much more mysterious and fluid in nature, I believe it's important for artists to do the same. I have a lot of friends who are musicians. I'm often envious of the way that when a musician wants to practice their craft or simply just engage with it out of sheer pleasure, they can just pick up whatever instrument is their chosen medium and strum, pluck or tap away. Maybe this is just me but it's never felt quite so simple with photography.

The parameters were clear and simple: one roll of medium-format Kodak Portra 400 film, my current favourite camera, ten images of the same subject matter shot at roughly the same time of day. What began as a personal project then became strangely prophetic. Within 3 months of me making this series the country and large parts of countries around the globe were sent into lockdown with the majority of us having daily walks to the park being the only form of outdoor recreation that we were allowed/able to engage in.

And so we have the photo series connected to this essay. I've been visiting the park where this tree stands since I was a child, and in my late teens and early twenties started noticing it and became intrigued as to why it grew in the way it did. None of the other trees around it are anything like it and I feel like it resembles something more akin to what you'd see on safari as opposed to a park in the suburbs of south-east London. There's a richness to it. A sense that this tree has witnessed many stories. Narratives of love, loss and everything in between. The tree comes from the Bignoniaceae family and is commonly known as Catalpa or Indian cigar smoking bean tree because of the slender bean-like pods it produces.

One of the lingering thoughts I had was the fact that long after I die this tree will probably still exist. Hoards of children will climb it, hopefully other artists will paint, photograph or illustrate it. Or maybe they won't. Maybe I'm the only person who has noticed this tree enough to have felt that it's existence should be known beyond its physical presence in the park. And from here questions about the importance of nurturing and caring for our environment arose. How could I use the imagery I'd created to enable others to come and enjoy the beauty of this tree and the pleasure it's brought me to visit it every morning for the last week or so? And so a simple creative practice once again opens a vista of possibility.

As I made the final preparations for what you're about to see I had a conversation with my mum about the nature of palm tree's and the way they can bend without breaking. As she took a look at one of the previews of the exhibition prints she described seeing the journey of life as your eyes follow the tree from the ground, up through the trunk, continuing on to the branches and onto the leaves and fruit. The roots and the bottom of the trunk represent the early years of our lives. Rapid growth embedded within the confines of family and the immediate community we find ourselves around. Moving on up through the trunk and branches we get to the leaves that to her represented our 20's through 30's; years of flourishing "living our best lives" with a vitality that we believe we'll never lose; a sense that we're invincible and that we'll live forever. Then as you move over to the left we begin to notice our frailties, our limitations and discover we're often far more hard on ourselves than we deserve. Our branches are strong but as we begin edging towards the end, our imperfections begin to emerge in a far more stark way than they did on the right hand side of our lives.

If we allow ourselves we move into an acceptance of our fallibility; a self love and recognition that though we don't have the power we once did or thought we would yet we can arrive at a place of peace. The secret that some know but few are truly able to live within is that this peace is possible to attain at any point in the journey. This exhibition is my invitation to you to begin participating in that peace. A peace that transcends human understanding that calls to us in our daily lives to remind us that we have a purpose and significance to our lives far beyond our ability to produce, provide and progress. It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to Repetition Reinforces The Revelation.