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Temporal Bliss: A space between life and death.

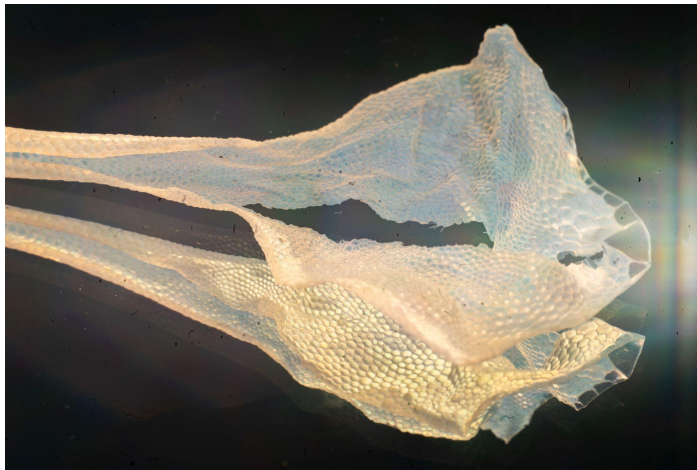
When I first started this project, I struggled with finding a path. I would race through topic after topic, creating a whirlwind of frustration and stress within myself. I started to think back to why I picked up a camera in the first place. I started photography as a way to connect myself back to the world after being diagnosed with anxiety at the age of fifteen. It began to feel counterintuitive to be feeling this amount of pressure over something that used to make me feel so light and understood. So I stopped “trying” to find my way. I stopped searching so desperately for a story that fit my narrative. Instead, I sat still, waited and looked at my world. I took note of how I experienced the world around me and the creative connection was almost instant. The moment I let the tension come and go as it pleased was when I began to see instead of just looking through my camera lens.

Our world is fast and constant. Day after day, it bubbles over for the sake of productivity, wealth and success. It ends up scorching me and many others because we can't keep up. Ashes to ashes, we all fall down, and they continue building, sweeping us aside as they go. There seems to be no time for stillness and silence. With this series, I wanted to create an atmosphere far away from the chaos of our society, far away from my own anxiety. Most importantly, I strived to create an appreciation for a more simple naturalistic human experience.

In our human experiences we share some similarities. As a whole, we tend to ignore and forget about these constants. One of these being life and death and the second being time and space. Life and time are things that we tend to dwell on to create

a productive sense of self. We use these constants as a catalyst that has no breaks. However, when one begins to think of death and space things seem more limited and constricted. They create a sense of doubt and paranoia that are hard to maneuver. All of the sudden there's breaks, but you can't put them back into drive. Through my work I create a cyclical path to follow that allows the viewer to dwell on the cyclical nature of life, death, time and space in a calm, still and inviting atmosphere. I create this space by using subject matter that I have personal connections to. I started collecting these materials as a way to ground myself during high points of stress. These items allow me a moment of peace and allow me to meditate on the natural world.

Photography is a medium that I've explored my whole life. My dad bought me my first film camera back in sophomore year of highschool. He personally funded my hobby and created a path for me to discover my love for capturing moments. Cameras are widely available and have a multitude of functions. From the beginning I noticed I was always using the camera as an extension of myself rather than just a tool for a job. I wanted to show others not only what I see, but how I see it. I want them to feel the connection that I have with my subject.



For my series I worked closely with preserved animal remains, insects and flowers to explore my relationship with life and death. To cater to these sensitive subjects, I focused on dramatic lighting and shadows that were naturally made from the sun. These preserved items are things that I collect to this day. Among the things I chose to photograph were a bee that I took care of in its last moments, a bundle of my pet hamster's fur, and my pet leopard geckos shed. These are items that I treasure because they help me remember that without death, you would never get to experience

the bliss that these life filled connections and relationships create. By having these specimens photographed with intense light I created a beauty that draws the viewer in. I use a specific color palette of pinks, oranges and blues to create an anchoring point in my pieces. As the viewer continues to observe from one image to the next these colors help tell a story about cyclical energy from one being to the other. Throughout the series I also included self portraits. In these portraits I can be seen holding botanical life and a mirror shaped as a heart. These images are included to speak towards the narrative of creating your own bliss as well. Bliss is something that is in arm's reach and can be created by oneself through understanding and experiencing your own beauty.



Gathering references for this project was extremely important to my creative process. I started with my older work, trying to work out similarities in the composition, technique and context of each photograph. I realized that I needed to look for what I wanted to photograph in other artists as well. The first thing that I notice when looking at a photograph is if there's any unconventional beauty to its composition. I tend to be

drawn to strong intense light, form and colors, and how they alter the subject matter. These aspects can create a subject with a strong and complex narrative that goes beyond the surface. These dramatic compositional choices can often be eerie, unsettling or even taunting. At times I feel like this admiration for beauty left me with no depth to follow. I found myself chasing beauty without any understanding of the narrative behind that beauty.

I started looking at artists like Francesca Wilkinson and Levon Biss. Wilkinson photographs botanical life in a documentative scientific style that enhances the color and form of her subject. It's more than about the natural beauty botanical life admits. Wilkinson's objective is to show all parts of the plant, even parts that would be buried underground. In their series full circle, they document the form of several varieties of Cyclamen. Her images are eerie and have an emotional weight to their atmosphere. These aren't conventional beautiful images of botanical life. Instead they are visually striking photographs that create a magnetic pull from viewer to subject. We are forced to look at every part of the plant. From its skinny bunched up roots, to its twisting reddish pink stems, all the way to its striking foliage. Wilkison photographed this plant because of its ability to grow in tough and harsh environments. The beauty of this plant comes from its ability to survive where others can not. This series showed me that beauty comes from understanding and experiencing a moment, rather than just seeing one.

In Levon Biss's work, he captures macro images of various preserved insects. These images are daunting at first. The form of a gigantic insect isn't something that would please everyone at first sight. I can imagine that most people would be repulsed or even feel physically uncomfortable. However, Biss contradicts this initial instinct by

enhancing the natural color of these insects. These images are taken against a black blank background that helps the colors pop out even further into the viewer's perspective rather than the subject sinking back further into the composition. In some of the photographs, the bugs are placed in a way that allows us to see the top of their backs, legs, heads and wings. In these compositions we are not invited to look at the bug's face. There's no eyes or mouth. No direct eye contact for the viewer to engage with. Only color, form and line that creates a beautiful enchanted experience. From this series I learned that beauty can be found anywhere, especially in the places we least expect it.

Death is a subject that is hard to talk about for most individuals. And even harder to experience. We tend to mourn the loss of a life rather than the end of one. Life creates unpredictable and intangible moments that can only be truly felt after death. Death creates a space in ourselves to be appreciative for the bliss we once had. Bliss is a complex emotion that most wish to feel all the time. However, Bliss is not the same as happiness. Bliss is a little selfish, intense, and blinding. It creates tunnel vision that leads you towards colorful beautiful light. You reach the end of the tunnel and feel the warmth of the light on your bare skin. Your eyes close. Your chest can finally take a deep breath. Time slows. This is the feeling of true bliss. However, the thing about bliss is that it's temporal. It's a feeling that will always come again, but will never stay forever. It's fleeting and fast, but it's necessary. Without grief, darkness, sadness, the feeling of bliss would be nothing but wishful thinking.

