

Blacker Than Any Blindness

A response to Michael Duran's new exhibition at Mermaid Arts Centre

In Blacker than any Blindness, I see in the trees' branches the human respiratory system and rivers of capillaries, associated more with the very essence of life than with death or grief. But I think at once it probably relates to my own relationship with death and grief and endings, which comes with a large dose of denial. Michael and I spoke the other day about grief and, strangely I thought, we both referenced grief for the end of a relationship, or a way of life, more so even than for death. Death does however have the upper hand in its monotony on grief. It is nothing if not decisive, and outrageously stubborn in its commitment to form. And so, grief is bespoke. It sizes you up with the keen eye of a master couturier and dresses you with its fabrics of loss.

We can mourn those who are still living just as painfully as those we have lost to death. Grief can be thought of as a time to hold space for adjusting to change that we do not want and do not ask for.

As I looked at the images of the trees and they transformed before my eyes into the branches of our lungs, I was transported then to thoughts of a slow death that we see played out before us every day. That of the planet that sustains us. The knowledge that we rip down these living lungs without a thought while pumping poison into the air instils in many of us a sort of horrified, disbelieving, slow-burning grief. I turned to the next image, that of the crow, and thought of how one of the things that scares crows the most is a shiny surface, because they are believed to fear their own reflection. But the crow is no dumb bird. It's one of the most intelligent in fact. So, what does it fear in that reflection of itself? We associate crows with their love of shiny things and with death. And this is the beauty of Michael's visual meditation of grief. The uncluttered images offer space for us to enter them, and see what we find.

If grief is an aftermath, then there was a before, and if there was a before there will be an after. At the very blackest moment, a moment blacker than any blindness, when the horror of loss threatens to consume, the very existence of this suffering is sending us a signal to say, believe it or not, this is not the end. Black is black because it has absorbed the light. Michael's work might just show us how to find it again.

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