

## Time and Place: A Review

Back in 2014, at Joel's exhibition *The Quest*, I observed the emerging signature devices in his work, which I referred to as "visual isolators" because they remove subjects from their everyday context to allow the viewer to contemplate the metaphorical connections between his images.

This style is still here in this body of work; only it is further refined and resolved, particularly with Joel's gently allegorical and symbolic gestures. The result is a deceptively simple expression of things that matter, philosophical musings that are worthy of our reflective thought. Joel does not need to say any more than he has already about this work, as the rest of its interpretation is up to us.

He gives some easy clues with some images though, such as the four seasons that mark the expanse of time in a year, but whilst fairly obvious, they deftly avoid cliché. Most significantly, these are not just representations of nature within time, but also of a man-made human presence.

The next image set becomes more complex, but still has clues. This is the duality of the day, with the ephemerality of a jet trail seemingly acting as a thread connecting opposites. They are a reminder that there is no white without black, no known without unknown, and no past without future. Ultimately, these images are a conduit to the present, where we occasionally realise what we have gained through realising what we have lost.

The third cluster of images appears to take this further, reminding us of the transience of life, and also that nature is susceptible to time too, not just us (after all, even though we are constantly trying to overcome it, we are just part of nature and the environment). The connection is our coexistence in time and place, and as soon as we make a mark on nature, this transient impermanence begins.

Photography is the perfect medium to document this, because it stops time at a moment that will never be exactly the same again, which is highlighted in Joel's artist statement when he writes of Susan Sontag's theory that taking a photograph is to participate in our own mortality. Joel tells me that his image titled *Simultaneity*, which depicts buildings in various states of decay juxtaposed with clouds in a uniquely patterned formation, was a lucky shot, that he "was lucky to be there". However, I suggest that just being there at that particular place, at that particular time, is not all it takes. As an artist, he was also looking for what others sharing that time and place may not have seen.

The fourth and final grouping of photographs linearly spans the gallery's longest wall and leads us to, I suggest, the time and place that constitutes life's journey. "Journey" these days is a fairly well hackneyed word that means "the act of travelling from one place to another [during a period of time]", but in this instance I prefer the alternate definition, which is "a long and often difficult process of personal change and development".

This is the wall that we must each read most of all through our own eyes. You may, or indeed may not see here notions of travel, history, culture, religion, affluence, consumerism, introspection, art, indigenous origins, fellow travellers, and civilisation. What you see is up to you, because it is your "journey" too. You will likely notice though, that there is only one person depicted here, who is conspicuously alone in a sea of people-less images. However, I suspect this wall is less the story of this particular person's journey, and more a representation, or a kind of "peep show" view, of someone Joel encounters on his journey.

In the second last image we see a clock tower measuring time at the courthouse, which in turn stands for the rule of law, and perhaps even the hope of justice, but it also shows a transition of light, from day to night. Towards night, and sharing the circular form of the clock face, the moon-like final image, appropriately positioned, looms like filmmaker Lars Von Trier's apocalyptic planet *Melancholia* heading towards collision with Earth. But on closer inspection, it is equally and entirely unthreatening, an overtly constructed world made of nothing more than clouds.

Either way, it is as if it asks us to consider the question:  
*In the end, did we make our journey worthwhile?*

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