

Tonia Indigo Hughes

It is impossible to forget the photography of Tonia Indigo Hughes. Her images illuminate beyond the camera reminding us about the fragility and fascination of life. Through her lens, she encourages us to look from within and experience how we grieve and survive after a death. Her work tells stories of past and present life that she aspires to preserve for the future.

I sat with the talented photographer as she shared intimate snapshots of her grandparent's deteriorated Georgia home after their passing. While this collection more than likely will never be on display, the one image she did choose to display tells an extraordinary story of her beloved family's home. Hughes has a unique process in choosing the images which best speak to her heart. She is unafraid to take as many pictures as needed to capture the right message. Her intimate collection was a way for her to capture her own grief. Through the stages of her artistic journey it inspired a new series of photos on grief, "Indulging in the Ashes."

Hughes photographs with an unapologetic lens opening a space for her subjects to remain free and expressive. She took candid shots of loved ones and nature in different stages of bereavement. Her images embrace the peak of life reminding us of our humanity, a greater awareness of ourselves, and the possibility of interconnection. They are a small window into the storytelling she emotionally sparks.

In her photograph entitled *The Last Supper* we see a woman lying on a dining room table surrounded by empty place settings. In the background a cherished china cabinet suggests how many beautiful holiday memories were created in this room. This powerful image embodies Hughes' suffering from the loss of her aunt, grandmother, grandfather, father, and brother, all in a sequential span of time. It attempts to preserve as many of her loved ones as possible. It is a rare opportunity to glimpse her process of bereavement in the moment that comes with the passing of her family.

Hughes' concerns turn from the personal to the global in another body of work entitled "Ice Age." Using a Holga camera she seized the majesty and scientific relevance of glaciers from the bow of a ship while traveling with her mother. While passing the glaciers, her mother commented on how much smaller and further back they were from the last time she toured. This observation moved Hughes into a state of dread capturing a moment in time symbolizing the end of the world.

Dense gray clouds obscure a ghostlike skyline in *Going...going*. In the middle ground, a dark landmass looms above the placid green water with bits of floating ice scattered in the foreground. There is quietness mixed with a sense of the unknown lurking in every corner of these glacier photos. Through her work she connects us to the greater complexities of political issues being what she calls, "a ripple in the water" to bring social change and awareness to our world.

Jessica Ayala