

Deciding Influence: Brandon Ballengee, Charles Darwin, Joseph Mallord William Turner

on Saturday, 19 October 2013.

'Influence' is the topic of this blog which discusses a work of art entitled, "A Habit of Deciding Influence." The subtitle of this work. "Pigeons from Charles Darwin's Breeding Experiments," reveals three forms of influence that inspired **Brandon Ballengee** (</artist-index/item/brandon-ballengee>) to spend three years producing this handsome portfolio of prints. Two 'influences' originate with Charles Darwin. One is provided by the esteemed 19th century painter, Joseph Mallord William Turner.



- Darwin served as the inspiration for Ballengee's "Species Reclamation via Non-Linear Genetic Timeline" that attempts to breed backwards to reclaim a form of a species that had disappeared. Darwin set this precedent by conducting a controlled breeding experiment in an attempt to "breed-back" a wild form of pigeon. This wild pigeon had vanished because breeders had intervened in their natural evolution to produce more decorative varieties. The specimens that were bred by Darwin factored significantly into his research into evolution. They were discussed extensively in Darwin's landmark books, "Origin of Species" (1859) and "The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication" (1868). Ballengee comments, "These experiments were critical to his hypothesis about the way selection occurs in nature as well as under human influence. In many important ways, they were like the Rosetta Stone of evolutionary theory."

- Darwin's priceless pigeon specimens are the subjects of Ballengee's photographic prints in the portfolio. Each is a meticulously detailed close-up that not only reveals the intensity of the artist's fascination, they also establish the rigorous and detailed

observation involved in conducting such experiments. Ballengee explains that this series began in 2003 when he discovered that Darwin's historic specimens of pigeons had never been photographed. Thus, he committed to filling this omission from the historic records.

- Turner influenced the background Ballengee devised for these photographs. Ballengee reports that they were meant to recall the ethereal splendor and continuous flux evoked by the clouds that appear in Turner's renowned paintings. Turner was a contemporary of Darwin's who, like Darwin, reveled in the wonders of Earth - visual spectacles and biological structures. In reality, the cloud imagery is derived from high-resolution scans of the laboratory cotton Ballengee used during his own experiments.

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