

CRAVE

Photographer Ruddy Roye Explores What Happens “When Living is a Protest”

By: Miss Rosen

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From the top of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke, delivering a sermon to the world, one that resonates in our mind’s ear whenever we hear the words, “I have a dream.” The timbre of his voice is permanently imprinted on our soul, his words among the most patriotic ever spoken. On the eighth anniversary of the brutal murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, Dr. King’s testimony was centuries in the making, calling forth the ancestors of this country’s earliest days.

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter,” Dr. King warned. There is an exquisite horror to the dying soul that lurks within the living body, feasting upon flesh and bone. It has been said that silence equals death; to speak against injustice and oppression is the essence of what it means to be American. These are the words that photographer Radcliffe “Ruddy” Roye carries within himself, revealing on his Instagram: “It is a creed I live by at whatever cost.”

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Born in Jamaica in 1969, Roye lives in Brooklyn where he works as a photographer. One of the youngest members of the Kamoinge Workshop, Roye is dedicated to telling the stories of his people through his platforms in both mainstream and social media. With over a quarter of a million followers on Instagram, Roye is able to reach the world directly, without having to compromise his vision in any form. He explains, "The media has a way of deleting the stories of people who society does not want to deal with. This is my humble way of putting these stories back in people's faces—forming a real and active dialogue about these issues."

A selection of these photographs is now on view in Ruddy Roye: When Living is a Protest, at Steven Kasher Gallery, New York, through October 29, 2016. The exhibition is being show in tandem with Power to the People: The Black Panthers in Photographs by Stephen Shames and Graphics by Emory Douglas, providing a powerful look at the ways in which African Americans have shaped the political discourse through resistance and self determination.

When Living is a Protest features 20 large-scale photographs accompanied by Roye's text describing his encounters with his subjects. By giving them a voice, he empowers them as collaborators in his work, taking them beyond the frame. No longer silent subjects for passive contemplation, Roye's subjects come alive, challenging, inspiring, and empowering us.

Many of the photographs are taken in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Roye's neighborhood, an historically black section of Brooklyn that is quickly becoming gentrified. Yet, despite the whitewashing and displacement that is taking place, the spirit of the people holds fast. In a post titled, "Facing the Darkness" taken on Martin Luther King Day in 2016, Roye photographed a community elder in front of a mural of Dr. King. He asked the elder if he remembered anything about the day Dr. King was assassinated.

The elder answered, "I don't remember much about that day. I just can't remember, but I will say this, he is still here."

Roye asked what he meant, and the elder explained, "We are still here, aren't we? They haven't been able to kill us all or drive us out of our neighbourhoods yet."

Roye observed the elder spoke without an expression. It is simply a matter of fact. Whether young or old, we all inherit the same mess—but life on earth teaches us that we have the power to be the change we want to see in the world, so long as we have the courage to align ourselves with justice and the strength to see it through. The struggle continues...