

2015 PHOTO CONTEST

-Robekkah Ritchie
1st Place

Robekkah's photo "Reflections" was the winner of our first annual tea photo contest. Here, she reflects on "Reflections". We wanted to give Robekkah's work a full page spread, so you will have to turn the magazine to look at it in all its glory, as it is a horizontal piece.

What an honor to share my passion for the creative with all the Global Tea Hut members throughout the world! Though I studied fine arts and have been creative since I was very young, I haven't expressed myself through photography in quite some time. I spent a few months bringing my camera along on our tea excursions throughout Berlin, from under the spring cherry blossoms to summer lakes and at home compositions/tea sessions. Ironically, this image was the very first one I took with the photo contest in mind.

News of the photo competition inspired me to pick up my camera again and start experimenting more with the visual aspects that tea offers us. Tea touches all our senses, from hearing the water boil and be poured, to smelling the leaves and liquor, tasting (the obvious one), feeling the warmth of the bowl in our hands, entering our bodies and lastly taking it all in with our eyes. Of course there are layers upon layers to be explored within each sensory experience (not to mention the energetic side of it) but it was interesting also to try to express tea, which encompasses so many of our senses, using only the visual aspect of the experience.

As is the nature of art (and Tea for that matter), everyone will have their own experience, insights and interpretations. I am grateful to share with you some of my reflections on this piece and what it represents for me, and I am grateful that everyone will see and inter-

pret it differently. Reflections have a powerful symbology for me, and Buddhist teachings often use water as a metaphor for the mind. Only when water is unmoving can it then become clear, still and capable of reflection. Interestingly, "capable of reflection" in English can have two meanings, not just the act of reflecting, mirroring, or showing an image but also the ability to self-reflect, contemplate and meditate. Our inner world reflects and is reflected in the outer. This photo for me encompasses different kinds of stillness: stillness of the tea within the bowl, and allowing our focus to shift to an internal experience, etc. The reflection within the bowl is also one of stillness—we use the winter months for contemplation, bringing our energy inwards, as the leafless tree also represents. The tree reflected in the bowl (which was actually my first tea bowl gifted to me by my dear friend Shen Su) is outside the window above where we have our tea table, aiding as a constant reminder to the fluctuations throughout the year and within ourselves, ever changing and growing.

Tea has become such a powerful medicine for me, supporting my relationship to myself, others and our great ever-giving Mother Earth. Tea brings warmth and life into the cold dark winters, giving that healing connection to our green Earth when I feel I need it the most. It often feels like a whole world is contained within my tea bowl, and in many ways it absolutely is when I reflect on the countless forces that

have come together to create it. Within the stillness, we can connect to the vastness of our human experience and from it comes a great gratitude for the opportunity to share the many expressions of it; whether it be sharing silence with loved ones across the globe, or a photographic expression of creativity inspired by Tea!



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