

## These Crazy Close-Ups Of Seeds Reveal The Infinite Complexity Of Life

By Patrick James



The photos in this project--called Means of Reproduction--will help remind you that even the largest tree has humble (and beautiful) origins.

Some of history's greatest and most lasting discoveries have happened while scientists were looking for something else--or not looking for anything at all. So it's fitting that the photographer [Svjetlana Tepavcevic](#) found the inspiration for her series [Means of Reproduction](#), a collection of eye-popping images that detail the fantastic complexity of seeds, while she was on a walk. Created with a flatbed scanner, the images reveal just how intricate seeds are, and inspire all sorts of cerebral questions about life's origins: that the bounty of nature springs from tiny beginnings, or that even seemingly tiny things aren't really that tiny--if you know how to look at them.

"When I happened upon the amazing cocoon-like remnant of a seed pod, it stunned me," says the award-winning photographer who was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and now lives and works in Washington, D.C. "Once I learned it was an inner lining of a vine seed pod, I began to pay attention to other seed pods. The overwhelming purpose of life is to reproduce itself (given the right conditions, of course). I realized these small seeds and seed pods play such a vitally important role. They are a repository of information, of life's memory and evolutionary memory."

Since embarking on the project, Tepavcevic says she has often reflected on the fact that "this astonishing seed pod just presented itself to me without my looking for it." That realization drove her to incorporate "a sense of mindfulness and awareness" of her surroundings--not only for the sake of the project, but in terms of daily life as well. "If I walk, I pay attention," she says. "I look, really look, as I never know what I will encounter. In that way, there is mystery and surprise in ordinary moments. I never go on 'seed-collecting' missions. I simply look and pay attention."

For Tepavcevic, the images in Means of Reproduction are "a testament to life's enormous resilience," so the images she selects must stand the test of time. After making a final print of a seed, she files that print away, deciding to include it in the series only if it still inspires when she returns to it months later. Part of what makes a given image work is how it illustrates notions of perspective and scale.

"I think perspective is very important, in art and in everything else," says Tepavcevic. "To become a work of art, each small object is transformed into a large presence. A seed or seed pod becomes like a landscape or an environment unto itself. In prints you can observe details you can't see with a naked eye, or in small JPEGs online. The scale in artworks is important. Having a different perspective can change how we look at these seeds and seed pods, and what we see and perhaps how we relate to them, and as well as how we relate to other living things, beings, or phenomena we cannot observe."

A recurring motif in the series (and, of course, in nature) is the circular form: "Round objects are such a prevalent form in nature and in the universe," she says. "I keep coming back to it because the circular form is so simple, though probably deceptively so, and also symbolic. Sometimes it's a small detail I love the most, such as an outline of a bird I saw in a California black walnut seed pod. Once I went for a walk in my old neighborhood in Los Angeles, and I saw a tree that was cut down. I broke off a small branch, smaller than the palm of my hand, containing a bunch of little leaves with seeds in the middle. The little branch itself reminds me of a tree. When I look at that image, I always think of the tree that no longer exists because it was an inconvenience to a human. I remember every single tree or place where I found them, and in that way, I feel connected to those life forms and to those places."

Head [here](#) for information on ordering prints of Means of Reproduction and more of Tepavcevic's work.

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