



## NEW YORK TIMES PHOTO CRITIC VISITED UK TO SPEAK ABOUT HOW HE SEES THINGS

By Arden Barnes, December 2, 2017



When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.

This proverbial phrase is applicable to Teju Cole, but his lemons were a short spell of blindness and his lemonade continues to be his artwork.

Cole, a New York Times Magazine photography critic, spoke to approximately 300 people in the Kincaid Auditorium in the Gatton College of Business and Economics on Friday, Dec. 1, 2017.

He began his talk with a PowerPoint slide stating “Making and Holding A Space.” He explained that he chose this title because it is how he chooses to understand his own work; the form and content, goal and end: how the work holds a space.

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He continued by showing excerpts and photographs from his award-winning novella, "Every Day is for the Thief," followed by showing work from his exhibition, Blind Spot.

Cole said his influences should be "...multiple and numerous. You should be influenced by the things you read and the things you see, but by everything as well...to have a quality of curiosity and realize that nothing is beneath you. That it can all feed your work."

His influence for Blind Spot, however, was an actual blind spot. He said he woke up one day unable to see out of one of his eyes. He was diagnosed with Big Blind Spot Syndrome, which occasionally causes him bouts of blindness.

He said this experience changed his approach to photography and seeing in general.

Seventeen pieces from Cole's exhibition Blind Spot are currently on display in the UK Art Museum.

Cole was asked to be the second visiting lecturer this year as part of the Robert C. May Lecture Series.

Janie Welker, the curator of the UK Art Museum, asked Cole to take part in this lecture series.

"He is such an unusual presence because he is a photographer and also the photography critic for the New York Times Magazine," Welker said. "He's also a writer....he is unlike anyone we've had here."

"I think he is a very different person. I try to bring in artists that work in very different ways so that students get a very wide range," Welker said.

Sophomore arts administration major Ashley Joiner was required to attend the lecture as part of her darkroom photography class.

"I think it is important students take advantage of these, beyond them being mandatory. I think that coming in and listening to speakers can give you a new perspective on how you should view your own work and how you appreciate other people's work as well," Joiner said.

Cole was the final lecturer for the series this semester. The series will feature the curator from the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago and Dan Estabrook, who works with 19th-century photographic processes, in the spring.