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A Moment In Time

Seeing the world through a camera phone is not
really seeing the world, says artist Idris Khan.

by Tara Loader Wilkinson

Like most of us, artist Idris Khan takes photos every day. Mainly of his kids, Maude and Jago, but other stuff such as food, friends, sunsets, as most of us do. It was only when he realised he had accumulated 65,000 photos over the six-year lifespan of his phone that it hit him. He thought back to when his mother died in 2010, aged 59. A nurse from Wales who converted to Islam when she met his father, Khan's mother had exactly 380 photos to represent her entire life. The disparity inspired him to build an 8m-high public sculpture that now stands proudly outside One Blackfriars, a collection of luxury residences from developer St George on London's South Bank. Art is a central theme of One Blackfriars, with architects Simpson Haugh inspired by the Lansetti Vase for the building's unique shape.



“There are more than 95 million photos uploaded every day to Instagram. For me, the question was, what does that look like as a physical representation of time?”
— Idris Khan

Khan’s aluminium-cast sculpture, called *65,000 Photographs*, represents what those photos would look like if printed out and stacked on top of one another. Next to it is a miniature version dedicated to his mother, only a metre or so high, representing her 380 photographs. Stacked from the smallest 5x7 print on the bottom to the largest 12x16 print on top, like inverted pyramids, the sculptures convey a sense of fragility.

They are columns of time, towers with subtle edges of each photograph visible and tangible to the touch. The idea was to highlight the sheer volume of photography in the modern age and the almost forgotten art of photographic printing in a digitised world.

“There are more than 95 million photos uploaded every day to Instagram,” says 42-year-old Khan. “For me, the question was, what does that look like as a physical representation of time? By making a sculpture with all the photos, it’s like the rings of the tree, it is this period of my life in solid form. And it is quite moving to see that journey in a solid form.”

We are talking over the phone from his home in London’s Islington. Khan lives in a four-floor Grade II-listed Georgian townhouse, which can trace its foundations to the 1760s. His wife, artist Annie Morris (“she’s a whirlwind of energy”) and their children aged seven and six, who both harbour ambitions to be artists, have been instrumental in the interior décor.

Their home is warm and colourful, filled with travel pieces from India and beyond, lots of bright, cheerful fabrics and favourite works of Khan and Morris, as well as ‘swaps’ from artist friends past and present, such as Sean Scully and John Baldessari.

At their studio in Stoke Newington, both artists work together along with 12 assistants. “We’ve been together 24/7, probably since we met in 2007,” says Khan. Khan, who in 2017 was awarded an OBE from the Queen and weeks later won the American Architecture Prize for his design of Abu Dhabi’s Wahat Al Karama, a war memorial, has seen his profile soar exponentially. His work is now in the permanent collections of the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, the Saatchi Gallery,

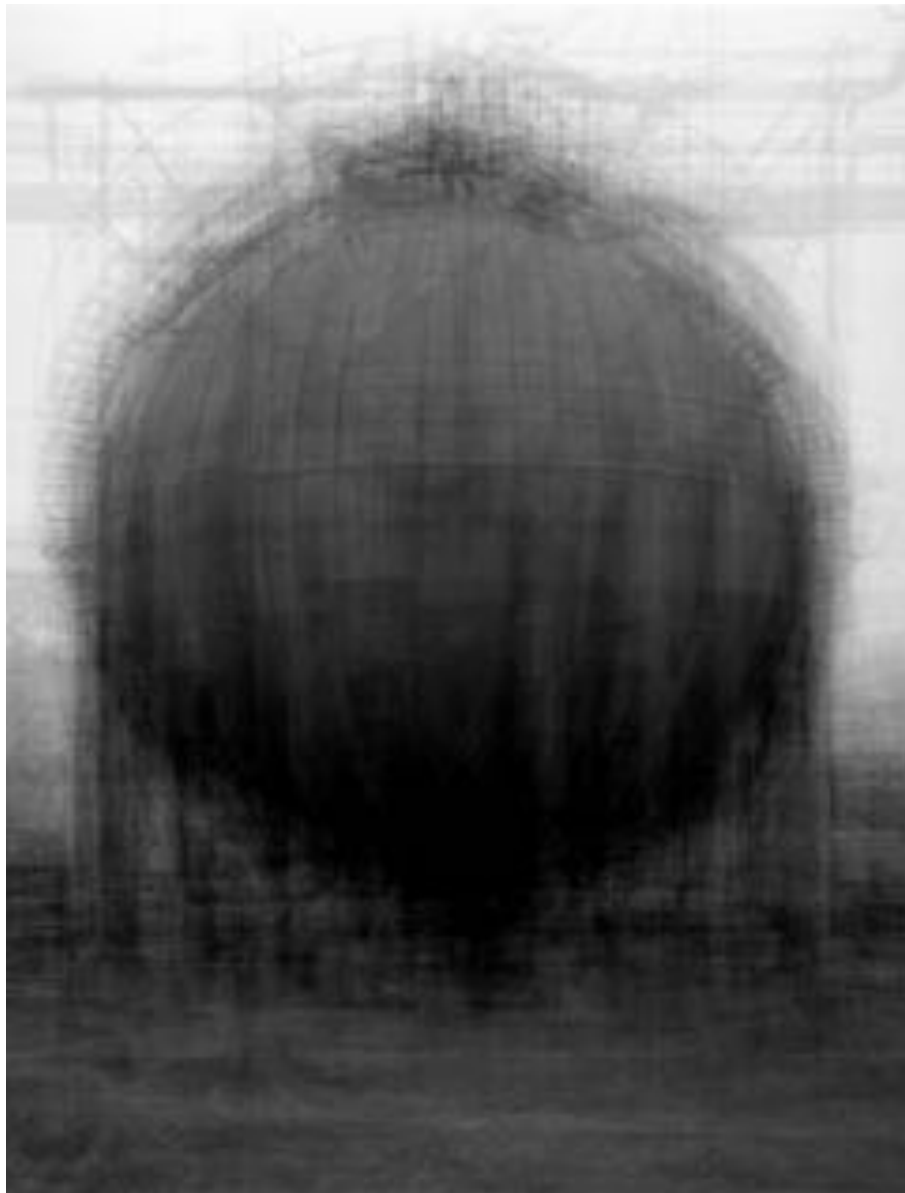
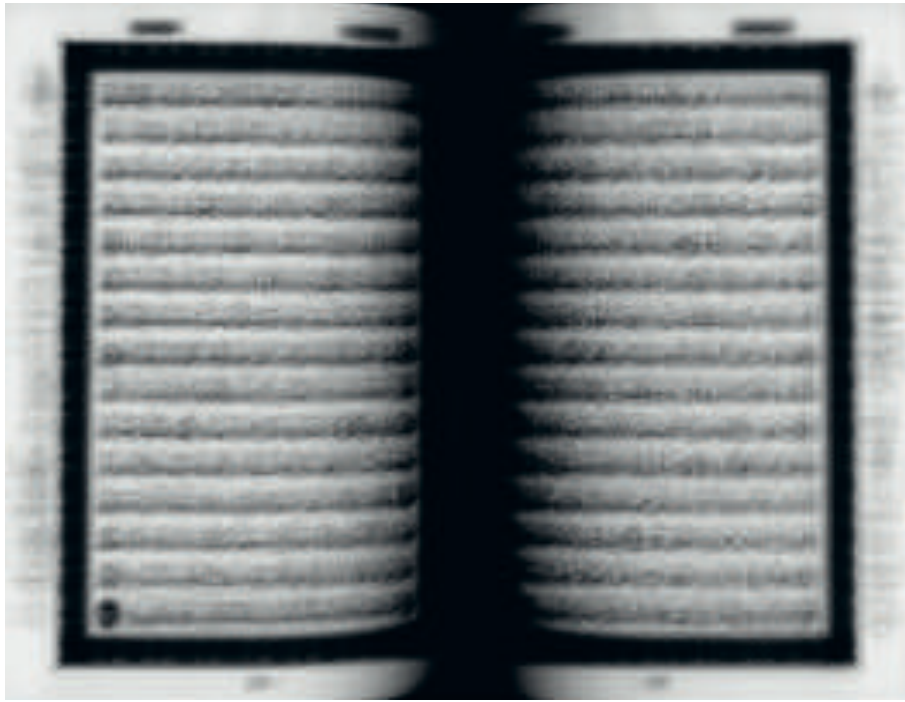


Portrait of Idris Khan in his Church
Walk Studio © Stephen White



Left: St George City, One Blackfriars. Right: Idris Khan
every...Bernd and Hilla Becher Prison Type Gasholder, 2004
C-type on Aluminium
134 x 105.2 cm





Top: Idris Khan, every... page of
the Holy Qur'an, 2004
C-type on Aluminium
136 x 170 cm
Below: Idris Khan, every ...
Bernd & Hilla Becher Spherical
Type Gas Holders, 2004
C-type on Aluminium
134 x 105.2 cm