

*Fieldwork for the Lost*

The Art Scholars Grant helped me to launch my 4<sup>th</sup> year thesis show, subsidizing the cost of a 4x5 field view-camera. Having my own 4x5 view-camera offers greater mobility and enables me to travel and conduct fieldwork. I am interested in how the camera functions as a research tool—how studio art functions as an academic subject, a subject of study that demands research. This summer I traveled around the south, primarily in southern Virginia and Tennessee, and made a series of photographs designed to investigate loss and acts of recovery. My research site: the hometown of a fellow university student who lost her mother two years ago. I made a series of photographs, both en route and on site, which turn to an injured landscape and find only an estranged figure.

At a certain point the camera ceases to be a recording device and begins to produce histories that never existed. A collection of photographs brings together elements of the world that do not naturally exist together, weaving together mixed or lost narratives. Photographs necessarily impose the past onto the present, and in viewing the image, we in turn imprint the present onto the past. There is an innately haunting quality to photographic images as an index of what *was*. Fascinated by the labor of memory and the work memory performs to aestheticize experience, I am interested in how the camera similarly invests in a process of mechanical hyper-remembering. These images both infer and deny reality, leading the photograph to have specific implications on loss and acts of recovery. The nature of photography embraces a certain performance of death by repeatedly fixing the world into still images. In his psychoanalysis of

mourning, Freud looks at the lamenter's desire to replace actual absence with an imagined presence.

This collection of images becomes that imagined presence. All taken in the southern summer heat, they focus on the liminal space between stillness and violence implicit to the exhaustion and aggression native to loss. Located in a wounded landscape, the traces of what once was become the framework for re-building exactly that which can never be rebuilt. I will continue to explore the concept of creating an imagined presence and the possibilities of recovering the lost through photographic fieldwork over the next year, culminating in a 4,000 word written thesis and a spring exhibition in Ruffin Gallery. I owe a great thanks to Evelyn and Stephen Colbert for their kind support in helping me begin my thesis project.







