

Cameron Mankin

Project Proposal: It's Dangerous to Go Alone! Take This!

Project Overview

The title of this proposed project comes from the 1986 videogame *The Legend of Zelda* for the Nintendo Entertainment System. It is spoken by an unknown by an unnamed old man who gives the player their first wooden sword. Prompted by this phrase, by Norman Mailer, by Joseph Beuys, and by Captain America, I propose to make a series of wooden shields. Onto these shields I will collage paintings and prints. I will then carry whatever shield I am currently working on with me throughout my daily routine.

Why shields? The world is almost comically dangerous. Nuclear superpowers butt heads over diplomatic trifles. Closer to home, girls get snatched off the street at night and black college students get tackled by overzealous government officers. Danger is constantly imminent in a way that I find particularly fascinating and that is not commonly acknowledged. In his 1955 civil rights essay "The White Negro," Norman Mailer sums up the scenario neatly, saying that "if our collective condition is to live with instant death... then the only life giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger."ⁱ

How is a college student supposed to react to that? The final clause of that passage – "to live with death as immediate danger" – seems particularly crucial, but is far from describing the state of the average American. Well-fed and well-entertained, most of us seem to feel what Natalie Jeremijenko describes as a "crisis of agency."ⁱⁱ We know vaguely that there are problems, but we think that they can only be solved by economists and legislators, not by the individual.

My proposed shields would serve as both parody and protest of this state of society. The very absurdity of carrying around a shield for self-defense calls attention to and criticizes the state of affairs. A comparable work would be Joseph Beuys's *The Pack*, which the artist described as "an emergency object: an invasion by the pack. In a state of emergency the Volkswagen bus is of limited usefulness and more direct and primitive means must be taken to ensure survival."ⁱⁱⁱ *The Pack* is not intended as a practical object, but rather as a work of social sculpture, a term coined by Beuys in the 60s and 70s. The final piece is just as much the thoughts provoked in the viewers as it is the physical sleds and blankets presented in the gallery. Where *The Pack* challenges our reliance on modern conveniences, my proposed shields would challenge our complacency with regards to our personal safety. Viewers would see me carrying a shield and naturally want to know why. Suddenly, I have what every artist wants: the opportunity to talk about my work and my ideas with an engaged listener.

I have written all of the above with a degree of certainty, but there is much left to be discovered. As with any art project, much of the "research" as a more traditional science grant might phrase it, happens in the actual process of making the piece. The biggest question is "what images will I put on my shields?" My recent work in printmaking has drawn extensively on comic book art and design. I would be interested to see how these visual ideas might intersect and contrast with traditional heraldic design as might be typically found on shields. Heraldry actually has its own codified set of design principles like the "Rule of Tincture" which disallows certain

colors from being placed next to one another.^{iv} Interacting with this system sounds like an interesting area for exploration. All of this will help me generate images, but how do I make them relevant to the conceptual topics I have addressed above?

So what would the outcome of this project be? First and foremost, I will construct at least eight (but maybe more) shields. These works would constitute a body of work that I am proud of, can call my own, and can use to apply to grad schools or show in a gallery. Second, because the imagery emblazoned on my shields will be mostly printed, I will still have the blocks and plates for each of the images I make. These can be reproduced as more traditional prints or recombined in future collages. Third, in order to make shields up to the technical specifications I have in mind (both as sturdy and archival as possible), I will need specialized equipment. For instance, a shield press, used to curve the surface of the shield in order to improve its ablative and deflective properties, is absolutely necessary. Most of this equipment cannot be bought and will need to be constructed from schematics found on the web. I hope to walk away with all of this equipment for future use.

In terms of less physical outcomes, I believe this project will help me further both my technical and conceptual advancement as an artist. Constructing shields and shield-making equipment will improve my sculpture and carpentry skills. Making the images to emblazon on the shields will improve my printmaking and painting skills. Talking about the project and refining the message of my work will improve my conceptual reasoning. The project also is fairly unique, a trait that might help me catch the eye of some local gallerists...

The project as described above is fairly resource intensive, primarily in printmaking and carpentry materials. The funding I am requesting would primarily subsidize these materials with enough excess to account for any failures and learning mistakes along the way. It will also cover some portion of my living expenses for the summer. Last summer I had to work two jobs in order to stay in Charlottesville. With partial financial support from this award, I will be able to allocate more time to the research this project requires. Any decreases in funding will come out of that section of my budget first – I'd rather eat less than not do this project. Fortunately, as a UVA studio art major I already have access to a printshop and woodshop in Ruffin Hall. I also am lucky enough to have access to expert advisors and instructors - namely Professor Dean Dass, Akemi Rollando, and Eric Schmidt - all of whom I intend to consult regularly on this project.

I am excited to begin this project as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," in *The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men*, ed. Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg. (New York: Citadel, 1984), 344.

ⁱⁱ Natalie Jeremijenko, "Catalyzing Social Changes." Lecture, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, February 6, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments: Room 6" last modified February 4, 2005, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/joseph-beuys-actions-vitrines-environments/joseph-beuys-actions-6>.

^{iv} Charles MacKinnon, *The Observer's Book of Heraldry*. (London: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd., 1972), 40-42)

Project Timeline

- Summer 2015
 - Collect materials for crafting shields and making prints. I have set aside space for storage in a new apartment that I move into in June.
 - Construct shield making equipment.
 - Begin drafting images for shields and collecting collage materials.
 - Prototype shield designs. Shield must be sturdy enough to absorb blows, archival, easily mounted on a wall, and light enough to carry comfortably. I expect this will take most of the summer to get just right. The first shield that meets these specifications should be completed in time for the first day of class.
- Falls 2015
 - Construct full set of shields. I'll probably start with eight.
 - Begin painting and collaging onto shields.
 - Wear shields around. Continue to develop shield design based on data collected while wearing them. I suspect strap configuration and weight will be principle areas for improvement. Hopefully I'll engage in some interesting conversation along the way.
 - Write a thesis paper for my studio art distinguished major on this project.
- Spring 2016
 - Construct additional shields if necessary.
 - Continue painting, printing, and collaging onto shields.
 - Finish shields in time for studio art thesis show in Ruffin Hall. These exhibitions generally occur throughout April and last for about a week. Designing an installation that adequately conveys the project's performative aspects may be a challenge.
 - Present outcome report in April at event hosted by Miller Art Scholars. The presentation will likely consist of physical shields, plus a PowerPoint presentation on how they were made and my experiences wearing them.

Project Budget

Requested amount: **\$3000.00**

| Category | Item | # | List Price | Cost |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Living Expenses | Summer Rent (monthly) | 3 | \$ 385.00 | \$ 1,155.00 |
| | Food (monthly) | 3 | \$ 150.00 | \$ 450.00 |
| | SUBTOTAL | | | \$ 1,605.00 |
| Shield Press Materials | 2"x4"x8' Whitewood Planks | 4 | \$ 2.85 | \$ 11.40 |
| | 1"x8"x8' Cedar Board | 1 | \$ 17.88 | \$ 17.88 |
| | 3/4"x4'x8' Birch Plywood | 1 | \$ 44.97 | \$ 44.97 |
| | 4-pack 1.25"x10' Ratchet Tie-Downs | 1 | \$ 22.98 | \$ 22.98 |
| | Assorted Screws and Nails (estimate) | 1 | \$ 10.00 | \$ 10.00 |
| | SUBTOTAL | | | \$ 107.23 |
| Materials for 10 Shields | 1/4"x4'x8' Birch Plywood | 3 | \$ 25.62 | \$ 76.86 |
| | Titebond 128 oz Wood Glue Adhesive | 2 | \$ 27.77 | \$ 55.54 |
| | 15mm Leather Strap, 32" Piece | 2 | \$ 10.00 | \$ 20.00 |
| | Assorted Rivets and Burrs (estimate) | 1 | \$ 20.00 | \$ 20.00 |
| | 1/2" Cut Tack | 60 | \$ 1.01 | \$ 60.60 |
| | SUBTOTAL | | | \$ 233.00 |
| Printmaking Materials | 24"x48"x1/8" Clear Extruded Acrylic Plexiglass Sheet | 8 | \$ 24.95 | \$ 199.60 |
| | 1 lb. Gamblin Relief Ink for Block Printing (Black, White, Blue, Transparent Base) | 2 | \$ 51.80 | \$ 103.60 |
| | 1 lb. Methyl Cellulose Powder | 1 | \$ 18.08 | \$ 18.08 |
| | 1/4"x4'x8' Birch Plywood | 1 | \$ 25.62 | \$ 25.62 |
| | 128 oz White Acrylic Gesso | 1 | \$ 17.07 | \$ 17.07 |
| | 2'x4' Roofing Copper Sheet | 3 | \$ 103.61 | \$ 310.83 |
| | SUBTOTAL | | | \$ 674.80 |
| | Incidental Expenses | Duplicate Materials (in case of breakage) | | \$ 300.00 |
| 8' Rental Pickup Truck (move lumber) | | 1 | \$ 40.00 | \$ 40.00 |
| SUBTOTAL | | | | \$ 340.00 |
| | TOTAL | | | \$ 2,960.03 |
| | EXTRA | | | \$ 39.97 |

(Prices from supplier quotes and personal research. Any saving will be added to "Printmaking Materials." Any cuts will be taken from "Living Expenses.")