

Where We Are

Proposal:

I grew up with a deeply rooted love for the natural world. This came, in part, from my dad's gardening, my favorite childhood book (a detailed encyclopaedia of animals), and summers spent in the rural mountain town of Sparta, North Carolina. I start to feel insane if I go too long without being immersed in nature, in the form of backpacking trips (for a stronger antidote) or weekend hikes (for a quick fix.) This past semester, an environmental sociology course has embedded within my loving appreciation for the environment a panicky fury for climate change and the industrialized society that's causing it. I feel anxious; I feel restless; I want to do something about it, and what I can do is art.

Ultimately, my project with this grant would be a body of color film photos exploring the relationships that human society has with the natural world (the physical *real* world.) Humans are the only species whose disappearance would actually enrich the world's ecology, rather than harm it. With that knowledge in mind, I struggle to decide what I believe: have humans really separated themselves from nature? Are they correct to consider *humans* and *nature* as two separate entities? These are some of the concepts I would like to grapple with this summer, in creating this project. As a catalyst for this kind of thinking, I'd ideally like to extract myself from society by backpacking through the mountains of Virginia and Tennessee -- two places that I consider to be home and therefore more conducive to analyzing my identity. As another layer to this project, I think it would be interesting to spend some time at *The Farm*: a nonviolent, intentional commune in rural Tennessee that holds the Earth as sacred. It also functions as a birthing center, which is very fitting -- I may be looking for a certain rebirth of identity this summer.

To prepare for this project, I would do a close reading of Thoreau's *Walden* and research Transcendentalism as well as other photographers. I'm currently drawing inspiration from Robert Adams, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, and Ansel Adams. Specifically, I would use my research of Andreas Gursky to inform my ideas of the industrialization landscape, and my research on Thomas Struth to inspire my photos of tourists. I would compare and contrast Robert Adams to Ansel Adams -- they both made photos of nature, but their work is vastly different. Ansel created overwhelmingly beautiful, calendar-worthy scenes -- yet something in most of them is lacking interest. Robert's photos are more plain, but they manage to "prick" the viewer. To use the language of Barthes, a French philosopher of the mid-1900's, Robert's photos have a certain *punctum* for me. They're photos of nature, but they comment on the human condition.

Having been armed with research and close readings, I would complement the photos I take with journaling and writing -- not only about relationships with nature, but also philosophy of film photography, as well as reflections about being on my own in the wilderness. I want to take photos of nature without any humans present, portraits of people I meet along the trails and at the campsites, self-portraits critiquing my own relationship with nature, and photos chronicling the more industrial / business aspect people impose on nature. In terms of personal goals, I hope I would come to some sort of conclusion for how I see human's role within Earth and

ecology. From a more formal photographic and aesthetic view, I want to push myself to create engaging and emotive photographs of nature -- photos that wouldn't be useful in brochures because they're not just pretty photos.

During my time spent backpacking and hiking, I would take medium format color film photos using my preferred film stocks: Portra 160 and Portra 400. Limiting my photos to one camera and only two film stocks (both of which are Kodak Portra) will help the final project have a level of consistency. The medium format camera would most likely be a Mamiya C220 - a twin lens reflex camera - that I can purchase from a friend for \$200 or a Pentax 67 borrowed from the art department. I'd need a lightweight tripod or monopod, and a long shutter release cable during the trip for the actual making of the photos. In terms of backpacking equipment, I'd mainly just need dehydrated food. My family loves to go backpacking during our vacations, so I'm set on most of the necessary equipment.

This project has inherent flexibility: if I were to receive the full amount of money, I could travel further and go to more locations for backpacking and taking photos. I could spend my whole summer focusing on this theme in my work. If I only received part of the money, however, I could still go on at least one backpacking trip and make as much work as I could with that opportunity. My main concern regarding this project is simply my fear of going on a backpacking trip alone -- something I've never done before. It would definitely be intimidating at first, but ultimately it would be a very rewarding, educational, and perhaps spiritual experience. I would recount my experiences and findings in my outcome report, along with some examples of photos. As for my final presentation / body of work, I think I'd like to make a photo book to compile my best photographs, journal entries, and anything else, like sketches or quotes from the people I meet. The places I feel most drawn to so far are Grayson Highlands State Park (particularly Mt. Rogers because it's the highest peak in Virginia), Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains (the highest point in Tennessee), and *The Farm*.

Timeline:

- Summer: Read *Walden* and research photographers who have pursued studies of nature. Purchase/collect necessary equipment. Go on backpacking trip(s); create photos; write about my experience.
- End of summer / fall: send the film to Lightside New York to be developed; scan it at UVA; start editing and making prints.
- Fall / spring: Edit down photos and plan how I'd arrange them in a book alongside pieces of writing. Work on the outcome report.
- Spring: Finish planning the book and writing the outcome report. Order the book from an online photo book service website such as blurb.com.
- April: Present my book and findings at the Annual Awards Outcome event.

Budget:

- \$200: medium format camera
- \$80: camera repair
- \$180: 6 bricks of film
 - Kodak Portra 400 (120) = \$30 per brick (5 rolls)
 - Kodak Portra 160 (35mm) = \$34 per brick
 - Average = \$32 for 5 rolls; \$6 per roll
- \$80: 30" shutter release cable
- \$400: carbon fiber (for its lighter weight) tripod
- \$240: film developing at Lightside New York for 6 bricks of film
- ~\$35: FedEx 2-day shipping
- \$270: 10 days worth of dehydrated camping food (\$9 per bag, 3 meals per day)
- \$80: a 20-page, 13x11" photo book created through blurb.com
- The final \$175: various travel expenses (gas); camping permits as necessary

Total: \$1500

For transportation, I envision myself driving. I want to stay within the Southeast because that is the land I'm more familiar with and connected to. Because of that constraint, I don't think I'll be buying any airplane tickets. If I need more money than the award amount, I will use funds from my job as a hostess.

Participation / experiences in the arts within the university:

On a whim, I took drawing 1 with Matthew Shelton my first semester at UVA. Since then, I've taken at least one art class each semester. In photography specifically, I've taken three classes so far: in Photo 1 with Alice Bailey, I learned the basics of photography, how to operate a film camera, and develop / print black and white 35mm film. In Photo 2 with Morgan Ashcom, I learned the different strengths offered with color film, how to use a twin lens reflex medium format camera, color theory, and computer editing skills. Now, in Photo 3 (with Alice Bailey again), I'm learning the alternative developing processes of cyanotypes and albumen. Last semester, I also took Drawing 2 with Barbara Bernstein.

In terms of extracurriculars, I've now spent a full year dancing with University Dance Club and two years being a member of the Photography club. The photography club is not as active as I'd like it to be, however, so I've been considering the idea of starting a club or society myself to focus on and appreciate the art of film photography.

Currently I'm also in a photography art history class which has greatly increased my appreciation for philosophy and theory behind photography, and now I'm considering a major in art history in addition to my already-declared studio art major. Looking ahead, I'm planning on taking the "art and humanism" art history class available this summer; next semester, I'll be taking intro to cinematography, two art history classes, and the Miller Arts Scholar seminar

(CASS 1010.) Unfortunately, the timing of CASS 1010 intersects with and prevents me from taking the view camera photography class -- this is why I think it's so important for me to create a lot of work this summer!

Participation in the Arts Scholars program: seminars, leadership roles, volunteer work, etc

As I was just accepted into the Art Scholars program, I have not yet had any opportunities for leadership roles and volunteer work. However, I'm very excited to take CASS 1010 next semester and become a very active member of the Arts Scholars community! I'm also greatly looking forward to the upcoming arts awards show on April 22nd, so I can meet more members of the Miller Arts Scholar program and see the work they've been able to create by being a part of it.