

Kia Wassenaar
Miller Arts 4th Year Award
Outcome Report

Documentation and Distortion Through Film

In the Spring of 2019 I proposed a project to produce a series of environment-oriented film studies. Shot mostly using a GoPro and DSLR camera, the product of “Documentation and Distortion Through Film” has been three videos that fall somewhere between documentary and landscape painting.

Having previously worked almost exclusively in 16mm film, it was very freeing to make use of digital cameras. The cost of buying and developing film was no longer an issue, which allowed me to film more often and for longer stretches of time than I have been able to in the past. This was especially important in the context of this project because the longer I was able to document a space, the more accurately it seemed to be captured.

Additionally, using digital cameras allowed me to record the sounds from the spaces I was filming. In editing my footage, I was amazed by how important sound is in creating a space. The ambiance of an environment depends just as much, if not more so, on its sounds as on the way it looks.

Almost half of the budget for this project ended up going towards the purchase of a GoPro and high quality sound equipment. I was also able to purchase an 8mm fisheye lens that is compatible with my DSLR camera. Having access to the right equipment is what allowed me to make creative choices freely. Balancing authentic documentation with apt aesthetic decisions was one of the most challenging facets of this project, and in the end is one of the defining qualities of the films. Being able to consciously draw the viewer’s attention towards the process of documentation and then away from the process and towards the subject itself was what really made this project interesting and new for me as a filmmaker.

The process of making these films was also surprisingly meditative. I often found myself alone in nature, just setting the camera up and letting it record. Trees were a great subject of interest for me in this project, as well as spaces where nature had reclaimed something man made. Driving around in smaller nearby towns like Waynesboro and Crozet proved very fruitful in finding these kinds of overgrown industrial spaces. I also put money towards a trip to Philadelphia in the Fall of 2019, where I chose to document a more urban environment.

Ultimately, out of all the footage I shot for this project (over six hours), the more natural environments were most interesting. I noticed things in that footage that I’d never paid attention to. Leaves falling. Birds flying in formation. The way the wind blows across tall grass.



(16mm colorized film still from documentation and distortion project)

Despite the lean towards digital equipment, I did still shoot a good deal of actual film. However, I realized about halfway through that the aesthetic qualities of film weren't well suited for the project of documentation, largely because of the time constraint (one roll of film is only about two minute and twenty five seconds). I plan to turn this footage into another project that focuses on trees as the seasons change. All of the films produced as part of this project will be available on my website, kiawassenaar.com, in the coming weeks.

I am incredibly grateful for the support of the J. Sanford Miller family in making this project possible. Having the opportunity to experiment freely in film has been one of the most rewarding parts of my four years at UVA and has allowed me to grow immensely as an artist.



(DSLR colorized still from documentation and distortion project)