

Miller Arts Scholar 4th Year Arts Award Outcome Report
Ava Lonergan

Project Proposal

Photography and Bookmaking

I intended to use my 4th Year Arts Award money to attend a workshop at Penland School of Crafts entitled “Alternative Photography and Books” in the summer of 2014 in order to immerse myself in an artistic community and explore two primary interests, photography and bookmaking. The workshop was meant to expose me to new skills that I would then use during the fall semester to create an edition of photobooks based on photographs taken for my 3rd Year Arts Award project. Photography professor Pam Pecchio was my advisor for this project, as I had worked closely with her over the course of the past year in a color photography class and a photobook class. Thus, she was very familiar with my photographs and my newfound enthusiasm for bookmaking.

Project Journey

I was able to obtain the grant money just in time to secure a place in the “Alternative Photography and Books” workshop at Penland (www.penland.org), which began July 20 and ended August 5. I arrived at Penland having no idea what to expect, but immediately fell in love with the school and the people. Brian Taylor, a professor of photography in the Department of Art at California State University, San Jose, taught the workshop with incredible spirit, enthusiasm, and knowledge. We learned about three different alternative darkroom processes—cyanotype, Van Dyke, and gum bichromate—with presentations and demonstrations for each process as well as 24/7 access to the photography studio to create work. One of the students in the class was a graduate student in University of Alabama’s Book Arts program, and he was a wonderful resource and mentor when we started thinking and talking about bookmaking. I left Penland with a hand-bound, hard-cover sketchbook with cyanotype printed covers (filled with notes and sketches from the workshop), a series of cyanotype printed postcards I mailed to friends and family, a series of experimental cyanotype and Van Dyke self portraits, a handful of small hand-made blank sketchbooks, a cyanotype/Van Dyke book featuring excerpts from Rimbaud’s *Illuminations* and photographs taken at Penland, and work from other artists obtained at the end of the session when all artists display and trade their work.

I met with Pam at the beginning of the fall semester to talk about the second part of my project, creating an edition of books, as well as my Studio Art Distinguished Major thesis. I was interested in using one or two of the alternative processes I’d learned at Penland to create my thesis work, but did not have a solid idea of what my thesis was about at the time. When we talked about creating an edition of books, the most important thing Pam told me was to remain open to different ideas and that I didn’t have to stick with my original proposal idea if something better came to mind. I was consumed with stress about my thesis project during the fall semester, coming up with ideas and discarding them just as quickly.

At the beginning of the spring semester, I still did not have a solid idea for my thesis, but I knew I wanted it to be about social media and selfies. After a tough initial

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critique in my photography class, an idea finally came to me—I would use the cyanotype process and print collages of social media iconography and selfies. The primary characteristic of cyanotype prints is the blue hue, which I believe is the overarching color of social media. My final thesis show featured a series of eight cyanotype prints displayed in handmade lightboxes (images below). In addition, I made a digitally printed, hand-bound artist's book to act as the accompanying artist's statement for my show.

Project Outcome

The first part of my project (attending the workshop at Penland) happened as planned. However, I ended up putting the skills I learned at Penland to use in a very different way than proposed for the second part of the project (creating work during my 4th year). Instead of creating an edition of photobooks based on my 3rd Year Arts Award project, I used one of the alternative printing processes to inform and create my thesis show. I'm very pleased with the way my thesis show turned out, and I don't think I would have arrived at that body of work if not for my experience and education at Penland School of Crafts.

I cannot emphasize enough how wonderful and transformative my experience at Penland was. I was incredibly inspired by my teacher and my peers, and began to see art and the process of creativity in a completely new way. It was an experience that helped me form a creative process for the first time and allowed me to tap into and express ideas in ways I never had before. In addition to broadening my understanding of photography, being at Penland exposed me to new materials and media I previously had no knowledge of or interest in. While I was attending the photography workshop, there were about ten other workshops happening in ten different studios simultaneously, including clay/ceramics, glass, iron, metals, printmaking and letterpress, textiles, and wood. Being able to share meals and living spaces with such a diverse group of artists and visit the different studios throughout my time there has since inspired me to explore printmaking, letterpress, textiles, book arts, and incorporating more sculptural forms into my art. I'm incredibly excited to return to Penland this summer for a letterpress workshop (thanks to a work-study scholarship).

To Michael Rasbury, Pam Pecchio, and those who have generously donated to the Miller Arts Scholars program—thank you so much for enabling me to further my artistic endeavors and creative process!

Images and contact information below.

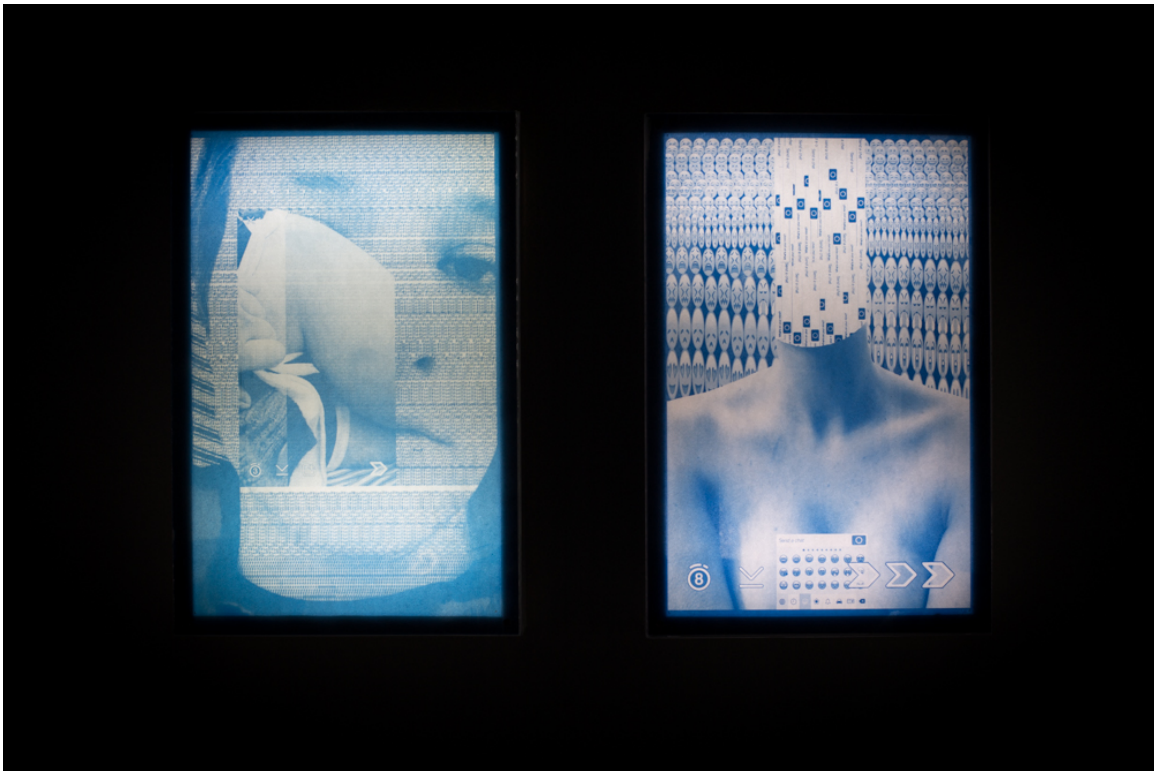
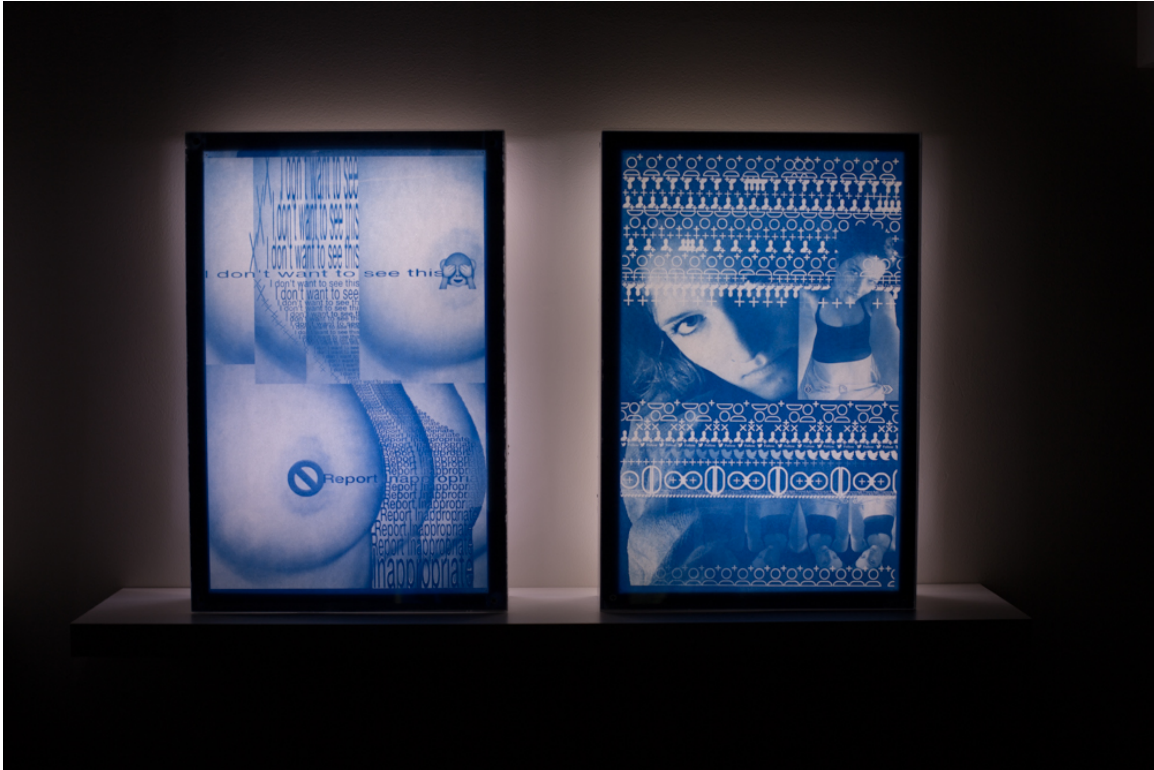
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Images

All photographs are installation shots from my thesis show, Ruffin Gallery, April 2015



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