

MARKING TIME WITH(IN) THE WATER¹

This exercise offers an opportunity to produce a unique, camera-less photographic print exposed and developed by the existing light of the sun over a prolonged moment. Images will be created by placing objects and materials found within or around the pond at Villa Barr (loose, non-root attached vegetation; sediment/debris; rocks, etc.) in direct contact with analog, photographic paper. Ideally, each print will interact with the water itself by being fully or partially submerged during exposure.

The nature of this process is inherently durational, requiring mindful observation and patience. The amount of time necessary for UV light to visibly imprint a trace of the material(s) onto the paper depends upon the conditions of exposure including time of day and amount of available light, but in most instances an acceptable print can be made within 20 minutes (though longer times can yield very different results). This type of photography differs from traditional, documentary style work as the resulting images are abstract and not always easily decipherable. This exercise asks us to consider what alternate modes of photographic visualization reveal, and how these techniques might benefit ecological studies and creative projects that center watersheds and their inhabitants as integral members of the community.

PROCESS | PRE-PLANNING

Both before and during our engagement with the pond, take time to consider how to be in respectful relation with the space(s) we will be working as guests within – most recently, the home of David Barr and Beth Dwaihy-Barr, who shaped and tended to the land, digging out the spring fed pond and planting the trees. But, as David Barr acknowledged,

“In the deepest sense, the trees were never mine. Nor was the land. [...] It will live on without me.”

As you plan your approach and decide upon potential location and materials, consider the span of deep time and histories held within these grounds and the pond that holds just a portion of what flows from the spring below. Consider the web of entanglements that have and continue to impact this land and its watershed – effects of climate change in the distant and recent past on aquifer levels; the forced displacement of the original caretakers of the land, Indigenous peoples whose descendants may continue to live nearby; the work of settlers who modified the land for subsistence farming; and modern and contemporary agricultural and industrial use and misuse. How might your prints address the many disturbances the territory holding this pond has endured, both ecologically and culturally, as well as the importance of pond ecosystems as nourishers of many Beings (both terrestrial and aquatic, observable and invisible)?

PROCESS | EXECUTION

Once you are ready to begin, gather your selected objects/materials and think about the physical properties of the items you will place in contact with your sheet of paper. How translucent or opaque are they? Do they have sharp edges or soft? Will you arrange and/or overlap multiple objects, or work with a singular item? How thick or thin are the materials and will it be physically possible to keep them in place for a prolonged period? Will you entirely submerge the print in the water of the pond, only partially, or not at all? You will need to work quickly once you set up your print for exposure, so be sure to sketch out your compositions by placing materials on sample sheets of copy paper to explore formal possibilities.

¹ This project is intended to function in relation to a teaching exercise designed by Métis scholar, Dr. Zoe S. Todd, for their Indigenous Ecological Ways of Knowing course at Carleton College, as well as its expanded form produced as the 2021 exhibition, *Alluvium*, organized by Allis Conley and Coron Androski along with Sarah Rowe at the Amplify Arts Generator Space in Omaha, Nebraska.

PROCESS | EXECUTION (Continued)

Determine where you will make your print and have all materials ready. Take the paper out of its light tight bag and place it emulsion side up (the side that immediately starts to turn color). Arrange objects/materials on paper and position for exposure. Depending on your choice of material/location you may need to use a sheet of glass or plexiglass pressed against the material/paper and clipped or held down. Heavier objects will generally function as a weight, with no need for glass on top (though, be mindful of water movement shifting objects). Leave materials to develop for at least 20-minutes before checking exposure by very slightly moving one part of an object.

PROCESS | FIXING & DRYING IMAGES

Once you determine your print has been exposed to sunlight long enough to produce a visible imprint on the paper, carefully remove the materials and quickly turn the paper over to keep any more UV rays from fogging the paper. Place the print emulsion (image) side down in the black plastic box full of water, replace the lid.

Prints will be processed with fixer, rinsed, and set out to dry.

PRODUCTION STEPS

1. Retrieve a sheet of paper and lightly (and legibly) write your name on the backside in ballpoint pen. Place the paper in a black, light tight bag until ready to expose.
2. Complete a Photo Release/Consent form.
3. Review Process | Pre-Planning section. Spend some time wandering the pond's periphery as you consider your approach. You might bring a tray or small bag along to collect materials that strike you. A small towel or a rag may also be necessary to dry your hands.
4. Review Process | Execution section. Retrieve a piece of paper from the materials table to use as a surface to sketch out composition ideas with your materials.
5. Retrieve any desired tools from materials table such as trays, sheets of glass, or clips.
6. Decide upon your site for exposure. Remove your photographic paper from the light tight bag and quickly position your materials on top of the paper either in or with the pond water. Cover with glass or clip down, if necessary, or place paper in tray along with water and materials.
7. Note the time when you begin exposing your print to the sun. Check the print after 20 minutes. Is there enough contrast between imprint and paper base? Do you see sufficient detail based on shape and translucency and/or opacity of materials? If not, let the print sit longer.
8. When satisfied with the level of imprint, remove objects/materials from the print and quickly turn over so UV-rays no longer touch the image side (lightly cover with light tight plastic bag, if necessary, but do not place wet paper inside plastic bag as it will harm the surface of the print). Bring print to materials table and place image side down in black plastic bin (take lid off and put back on quickly).