

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 related to what is currently known as the Swannanoa River in direct contact with gelatin silver paper. Ideally, each print will interact with the river itself by being fully or partially submerged within its waters 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 on 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.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Gelatin silver paper (any size); glass or plexiglass (optional); large binder clips or clothespins (optional); sodium thiosulfate (also known as “hypo” or “fixer”); graduated cylinders; metal or plastic processing trays; tongs; blank sheets of copy paper; light tight plastic bags or box; jugs for storage of exhausted fixer (if processing off site).

POSSIBLE MATERIALS FOR PRINT PRODUCTION

On-site, low-to-no impact collection of river rocks, vegetation, sediment, or various ephemera; prints on clear acetate of data from studies in the form of graphs, charts, lists or illustrations, archival images, etc.

PROCESS | PRE-PLANNING

Both before and during occupation of sites along the river, take time to consider how to be in respectful relation with the space(s) we will be working as guests within - the homelands of the AniKituwagi peoples, now known as the Cherokee. Think back upon your experiences living, working, and studying in relation to the river and all the beings that live along its banks and within. Are there particular locations or land/water relationships that have become important to you? Consider Dr. Zoe S. Todd’s exercise prompt intended to situate ourselves “within the watersheds that the [college] occupies [and to think about] the spatiality of the campus and also the connectedness to these broader watery relationships and how Indigenous homelands map onto watersheds so that state borders actually become kind of irrelevant. Water is fluid and moves, and it moves people and ideas and fish and all sorts of things.”

Try to consider the span of deep time and histories held within the river as you devise your approach and decide upon potential location and materials. Draw upon your knowledge of historic and contemporary perceptions of the river and its community members, now and in the past. Consider the web of entanglements that have and continue to shape this land - Indigenous relations from time immemorial; the work of enslaved peoples whose forced labor helped shaped this valley alongside settler, subsistence farmers; and modern and contemporary agricultural and industrial use and mis-use. How might your prints address the many disturbances these waters have endured, both ecologically and culturally?

¹ This project is intended to function in relation to a teaching exercise designed by Métis scholar, Dr. Zoe S. Todd, for her 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

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? Consider what type of situation you will create for the exposure. Will you entirely submerge the print in the water of the river or 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.

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. Once complete, fix the print by following the instructions detailed below.

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, saving them for potential future exposures, and quickly turn the paper over to keep any more UV rays from fogging the paper. If you will process the print on-site, simply place it emulsion side down in a tray of water. If you will be traveling elsewhere with the print before processing, place it within a waterproof and light tight box with enough water to cover the print until you are ready to process (not longer than 24 hours for fiber paper or the material may begin to disintegrate).

Prepare the fixer solution according to manufacture instructions (generally a 1:4 ratio). Process the print according to manufacture instructions. Use tongs to grab the print and let it drip off remaining solution into tray for 10 seconds before transferring to a holding tray full of water. Rinse completely fixed prints in a tray under continuously running water for 5 minutes for RC paper, and 20 minutes for fiber-based. Place prints upright on clean, dry surface for 24 hours or until dry. Prints can be placed under a stack of heavy books in order to flatten.

Exhausted fixer should be properly disposed of in accordance with university or community guidelines. Consider making a flatbed scan of the print to use for a potential database of images.

RESOURCE REVIEW & ADVANCED RESEARCH

Amplify Arts Alternative Currents Talk with Dr. Zoe S. Todd, in Conversation with Corson Androski

<https://www.amplifyarts.org/alternate-currents/2021/03/04ac-talk-zoe-todd>

- View video up to appx. 13 minute mark, or continue on if desired - it's a wonderful talk/discussion!

Neimanis, Astrida. Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

- Read excerpt from book's introduction, pp. 1-4 (access [HERE](#)).

Research the Swannanoa River in relation the portion encompassing campus, as well as its broader watershed.