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NATURE RECORDS ITSELF: CONCEPTS OF TRUTH AND REPRESENTATION IN NATURE FILM AND NATURE TELEVISION SHOWS

by

RASHAAD SEBASTIEN ROSALLE
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the School of Visual Arts and Design
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term
2016

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of nature photography and film came new ways to understand and interpret the natural world. Prior to the 1910s these formats involved a more scientific and objective approach to recording nature. This aesthetic was abandoned in favor for narrative recreations and Hollywood structure after the 1930s. It is my belief that the dominant use of anthropomorphization, manipulations of setting and animal life, and rugged explorer motifs, all have lead to a loss of a more contemplative and meditative appreciation of nature within the Nature television and film format. It is my goal to explore through a series of videos how one can more naturally represent a setting through the use of perspective and compositional framing, matching the natural rhythms of a setting through editing and motion, and being conscious of the viewers sense of placement in a space. I intend to visually demonstrate how a more organic, situated, and less Hollywood-style of interpreting nature can lead to a deeper and more meaningful appreciation of it.

To Hani and Scruff

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Professors Phil Peters, Jo Anne Adams, and Brooks Dierdorff for your mentorship and guidance. I've learned so much from working with you all. Your insights and thoughtfulness have made me a better artist and communicator. Thank you to my many colleagues and friends that have helped me think differently about my work or donated time to assist me on projects.

Thanks to faculty Jason Burrell, Stella Sung, and Keith Kovach. My colleagues Daniel McSwain, Brian Tortorelli, Dominic Diapalo, Alex Katsaros, Reuben Rogak, and Reina Castellanos Bermudez. To my team that aided in my productions and projects. Thank you Steven Molloy for mucking through lagoons with me. Thank you Eric Andre Orlang, Mark and Katie Angelini.

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LIST OF TERMINOLOGY

Camera obscura – a pinhole camera system popularized in the 1800s that projected an inverted image through a lens and mirror system on to a surface

Diorama – a three-dimensional model recreation of a space, often integrating nature elements or figures

Dolly shot – A film camera shot where the camera is mounted on a moving object and moves directly forward or away from its subject

GPS - Global Positioning System, integrated in to devices that delivers and marks time and location date through a global satellite system

Panorama –a physical representation of an image with a wide-viewing angle

Phantasmagoria – a form of macabre theater popularized in the late 1700s through 1800s that implemented fanciful stage direction combined with magic lantern projections.

Port – Nautical term used to describe the left-side of a forward facing boat or craft.

Starboard - Nautical term used to describe the right-side of a forward facing boat or craft.

Tracking shot – A film camera shot where the camera moves alongside its subject

Virtual Reality (VR) - 360° form of interactive entertainment that requires a user to wear a headset connected to a computer or media device that generates spatial three-dimensional visual imagery

INTRODUCTION

> "Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of one sense alters the way we think and act – the way we perceive the world"
>
> – Marshall McLuhan, The Medium is the Massage, 1967

America's fascination with nature and representations of it can be linked to the early 19th century landscape painting. This style of "American Scenery" as American painter Thomas Cole referred to it as, was able to propagate the dissemination of viewings of American Landscape that were inaccessible to most people at the time (Cole, Essay on American Scenery 1836). These often times, idealized and Romantic-styled representations of settings such as the Catskill Mountains of New York State or Florida's St. Johns River were linked tightly to the industrialization of the United States and developments in engineering and technology (MacDonald 56). An underlying theme in these early American Landscape paintings was that of the "assumption that wild nature was essentially divine…" (57). This sense of divinity or the sublime, meditative feeling that comes over a viewer as their eyes rove over the painted nature setting would offer a new type of emotional resonance of nature with the spectator. As described by Simon Morley, "The sublime experience is fundamentally transformative, about the relationship between disorder and order, and the disruption of the stable coordinates of time and space. Something rushes in and we are profoundly altered" (Morley 12).

The emotional impact of the meditative in nature representation further advanced with the development and usage of the panorama for landscape imagery. Born in Europe in the early 1800s, the format was presented as either a 360° circular painting or a scrolling horizontal landscape image (57). These proto-films were toured heavily across the United States and

afforded a new level of immersion and spatial-awareness to the viewer. Now a sense of life and movement was being inserted into these once static settings. Alongside the developments in panoramas came the constructed, simulated space of the diorama. In his formative docu-series "Ways of Seeing (1972)" John Berger states that "Perspective makes the eye the center of the visible world,…". With these new perspectives on nature imagery came new modes of understanding and appreciation, viewers were beginning to experience a more participatory feeling in this naturist aesthetic.

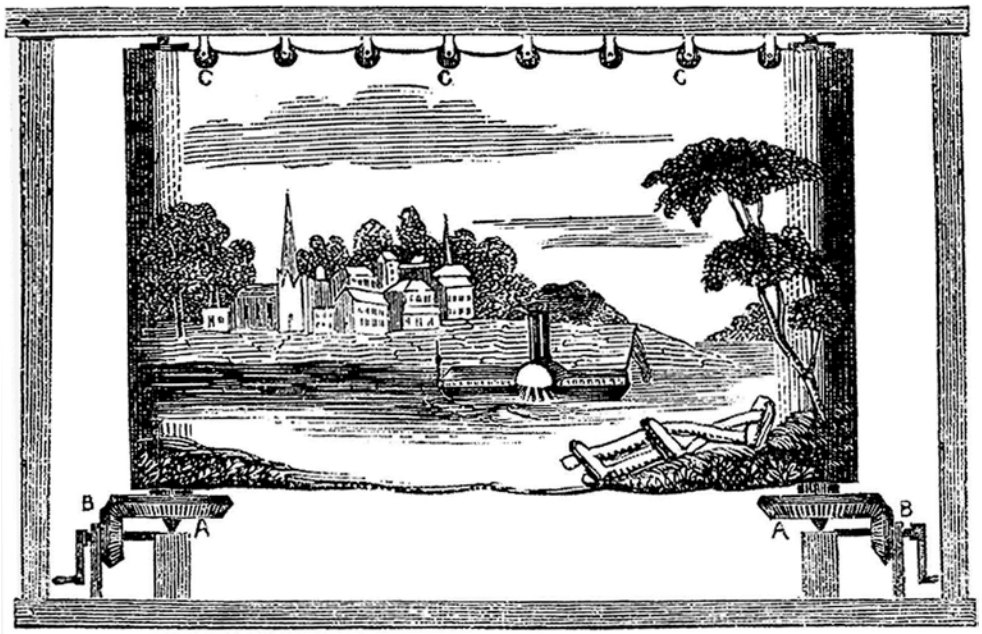


Figure 1: Moving panorama illustration, John Banvard, 1848

As early as the 1820s stirrings in the then nascent domain of photography had begun. Claude & Nicéphore Niépce, William Talbot, and Louis Daguerre all were experimenting independently in the quest to produce the first photograph, but it wouldn't be until 1839 that Daguerre would formally announce the invention of daguerreotypy (Solnit 14). Though Daguerre's method initially led this new format of reproduction and representation it would be

Talbot who's process "produced a negative image and the possibility of printing multiple positives from that negative" (15) that would dominate. As applied to the nature setting, this advancement in photography allowed for comparatively rapid results and a cheaper means for reproduction and dissemination. One point that must be noted though is that while "Photography was faster than painting,…it could only portray the slow world or the still world" (16), meaning that while a more authentic and seemingly objective image was being produced a sense of motion and movement was now diminished due to the need for long exposure times.

Enter Edward James Muggeridge, or Eadweard Muybridge as he would come to be known. Based out of San Francisco, California, the bookclerk, technician, inventor, and photographer would begin his own studies in the field of the still image around the mid 1800s (29). Alongside other creators he would begin to experiment not only with landscape as a subject, but in the manners in which it could be spatially represented. The use of large format negatives referred to as "mammoth plates" allowed for large format printing, creating a new sense of scale for the landscape image (41). Carleton Watkins would master the format of the landscape photograph as art through the 1860s, working diligently to move the genre forward into a highly aesthetic, respectable pieces that invoked a deep sense of mood and visual harmony. Muybridge while working in the same settings and timeframe would steer his images in to more dramatic and experimental representations of the space, revealing new psychological states and associations through his approach on the medium (45-46). He would push the usage of implied movement, water and reflectivity, skies and theatric shadows to help immerse the spectator in his pieces.

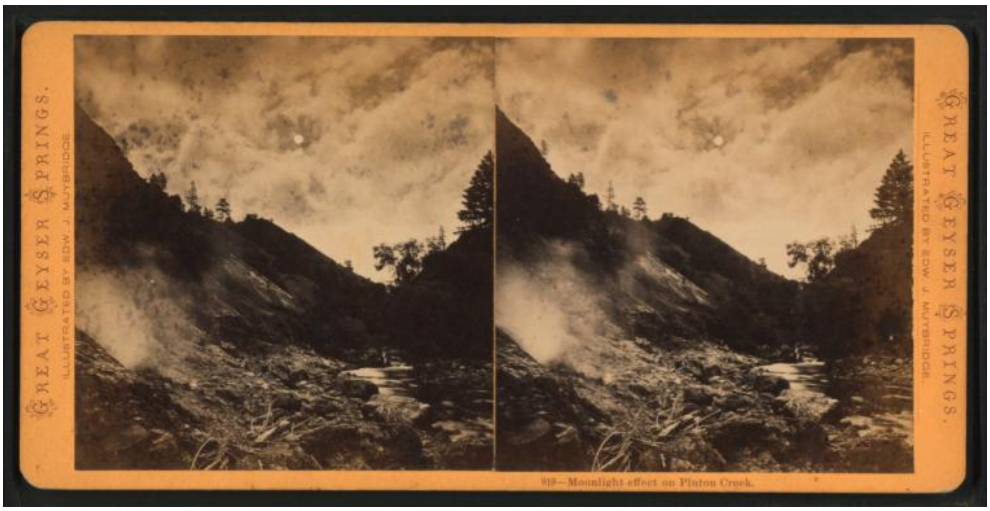


Figure 2: “Moonlight effect on Pluton Creek”, Eadweard Muybridge

Further landscape work in the nature/landscape format by Muybridge and his colleague’s came in the production of stereographic cards that brought a deeper and more visually dimensional representation. Popularized in the 1850s, the stereograph was “made to be seen in a viewer that let two photographic views taken simultaneously from slightly disparate positions merge into one three-dimensional image” (41). Well into the late 1800s Muybridge and his colleagues would continue documenting landscapes and the industrialized expansion of the US railroad system; this expansion allowed new access to various settings and a new type of landscape image in conflict with ever-expanding construction.

The next jump in representation for nature came in the form of a new type of moving photographed image. In 1872 Muybridge took up the challenge of proving via photographic evidence that a horses legs entirely left the ground while running. It was in 1877 that through the use of a custom “apparatus of twelve cameras operated by trip wires and electronic shutters, [that] exposed the true nature of a horse’s gallop wherein all four feet lift off the ground” (Mitman 8). Though historically it must be noted that alongside Muybridge many of his peers

had predicted this next technological shift and/or worked to develop their own time recording hardware such as William Henry Fox Talbot, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Sir John Herschel (Solnit 81). Here we see the push for a technology to match the artists' operational intent and output more closely. This is a theme explored and deconstructed in great detail in the seminal text "As We May Think" by media theorist and inventor Vannever Bush in his 1945 essay on technology augmenting human understanding and interpretation. These shifts in technology would directly portend the nature film format.

By 1878 Muybridge had fully realized both flash photography and high speed shutter rates, allowing the capture of moving images in what would appear to be total stillness (but for implied movement and motion cues). This freezing of time as a frame in a larger image sequence allowed for a new understanding of human and animal movement. Paul Virilio would describe the new manner in which these stills images were interpreted as being:

> Prompted by the artist to follow the progress of a character's action, the spectator, scanning it, has the illusion of seeing the movement performed. This illusion is thus not produced *mechanically* as it would later be with the snapshots of the chronophotographic apparatus, through retinal retention – photosensitivity to light stimuli – but *naturally*, though eye movement. (2)

New modes of recording the natural world were altering the public's understanding of embodiment, the subjects and spaces around them, and the interpretation of a once unseen world. Between the late 1870s and the mid/late 1880s Muybridge would be deep in his motion studies;

creating proto-films of animals, human movement, hospital settings, and the mundane (Solnit 220).

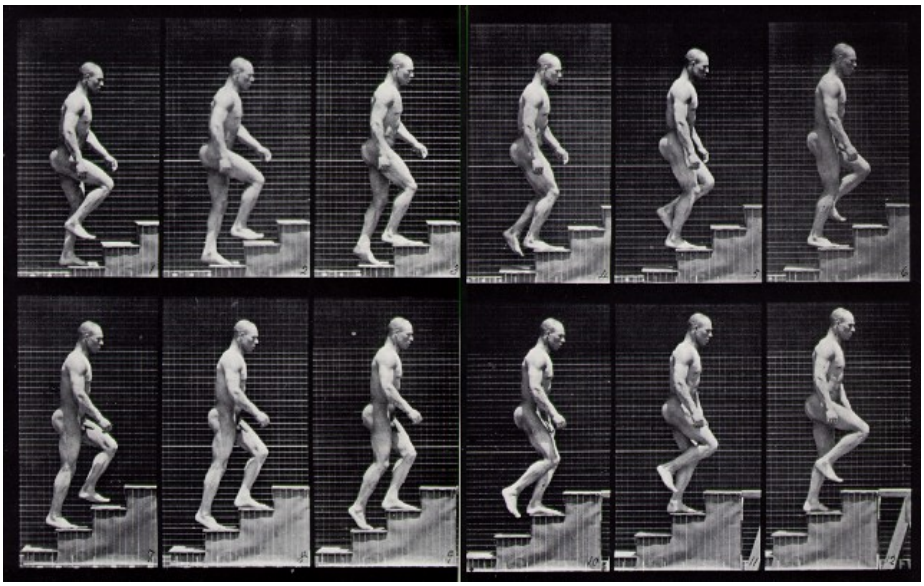


Figure 3: “Man ascending stairs”, Eadweard Muybridge, 1884-85

It must be noted that these proto-films could only be viewed through the use of projected zoopraxiscope animations (zoetropes) or seen as a printed multi-image sequence. With developments of inventors such as Thomas Edison, George Eastman, Etienne Marey, and the Lumière Brothers, the world would formally be introduced to what would become known as the moving picture by around 1895 (228-231).

With the birth of the motion picture in the early 1900s came the continuation and evolution of natural landscape representation. The earliest films were either of trains moving across the nation or many of the waterfalls and vistas that had been painted for almost a century in America. Waterfalls and nature landscapes would become commonly used subjects because “Nineteenth Century painters had trained audiences to appreciate them…” (MacDonald 58). In addition to the “function of their stillness” (58) it was mechanically easier for a camera to be

trained on a static vista and to emulate the feeling of serenity that looking at a nature painting previously communicated. While nature was being recorded and spread in this new format the technologies associated with it were too. MacDonald further states that these early films seemed more "fully concerned with representing the spread of technology than with depicting the natural wonders mentioned in their titles" (58). He goes on to list such titles as "Panoramic View of Albert Canyon (1901, Edison)", "Gap Entrance to Rocky Mountains (1902, AMB)", and "Panoramic View of Mt. Tamalpais Between Bow Knot and McKinley Cut (1906, AMB)". The struggle between authentic and objective representation of nature and new technological manipulations and methods would continue on in to the 1920s.

The format of early nature films had roots in scientific study and lacked formal narrative structure. Derek Bousé states that "Like the evolution of species, the history of wildlife film reveals no moment when its subject burst into view fully formed. Rather, it came slowly into focus,…" (Bousé 37). Early naturist films were often times limited to a trained camera simply watching a creature in a natural (and later simulated) habitat. The viewer would apply their own meaning and connections to the work, much like in the case of Dziga Vertov's experimental non-narrative film "Man With A Movie Camera (1929)". The nascent genre would soon find increasingly more usage of simulation, fakery, and Western narrative tropes. Economically a film that anthropomorphized a creature, assigned or created a struggle where there was none, or tapped in to latent fears of natural untamed expanse, or indigenous people would guarantee a broader audience. Robert Flaherty's "Nanook of the North (1921)" would be one of the earliest films that would typify all of the abovementioned tropes yet at the same time pass for an authentic representation of Eskimo peoples in Northeast Canada (MacDonald 60). This aesthetic

of finding a natural space and crafting a fictional story with staged animals and interactions would be perfected by Walt Disney Studios in the 1940s (Mitman 109).

Moving forward to the domain of television, by the 1950 and 60s shows such as "Zoo Parade" and "Wild Kingdom" would introduce animal and human interactions to a national audience (133-134). The idea of animal personalities, species-based temperament, and humor would become even more linked to the animals and their nature settings (137). Additionally the continuation of the rugged-explorer in a newfound setting motif would further dominate the domains of nature on film and television. These narrative and aesthetic holds on the genre have continued to maintain influence on contemporary productions. This leads me to my research and aesthetic interests in this recorded medium and subject. Through my thesis work video pieces I made a deliberate effort to make the viewing experience of nature transformative, forcing myself and the viewer to acknowledge the immense beauty and scale of the natural world.

Artist Background

My personal interest in nature and representations of it can be linked to the place I was born and the first early ocean settings I became acclimated to. I was born in Los Angeles, California in the mid 1980s and moved to Puerto Rico for a year at the age of 5. Here I was first familiarized with coastal views and the archetypal beach setting. My family and I then moved in 1990 to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida where I further explored beaches, mangroves, and lagoons in my area. During this time I also began to fly more frequently to my parents' homeland of Trinidad. I would spend summers and school vacations at the most southern point of the country, spending time in the village of Bonasse, Cedros as well as Columbus Bay. It was in this part of Trinidad

that my mother's parents established their family and roots in the community.

In Bonasse and Columbus Bay I experienced the idea of the infinite and expansive nature of the ocean and bodies of water. I felt a profound sense of comfort and serenity on the Columbus Bay coastline, staring out at the ocean from early morning to late evening. I watched as the ocean darkened as local rivers drained in to it, the evening tide slowly rising. The perpetual repetition of the water and its restorative and destructive qualities were made clear to me. Many of the same coastlines I visited as a child in Trinidad have now eroded or evolved, a reminder of how sensitive and reactive the planet is due to human activity.

As a graduate student and media producer I was able to build further on my interest in nature and its representation through a grant partnership with the University of Central Florida and the National Park Service. I had the opportunity to design and oversee the fabrication of several devices intended for the remote-viewing of Canaveral National Seashore animals and habitat. I first designed an ATV trailer system that carried one of Brian Tortorelli's earlier "Turtlecam" iterations (Fig. 3-6) and oversaw and assisted with the design and build of a relay antennae-pole intended for receiving and sending video signals wirelessly (Fig. 7). Building on the work of Professor Philip Peters and Brian Tortorelli I was able to design my own rig in 2013 (Fig. 8-10) with the explicit intent of remote-view observation of animal life in lagoon-like coastal settings.

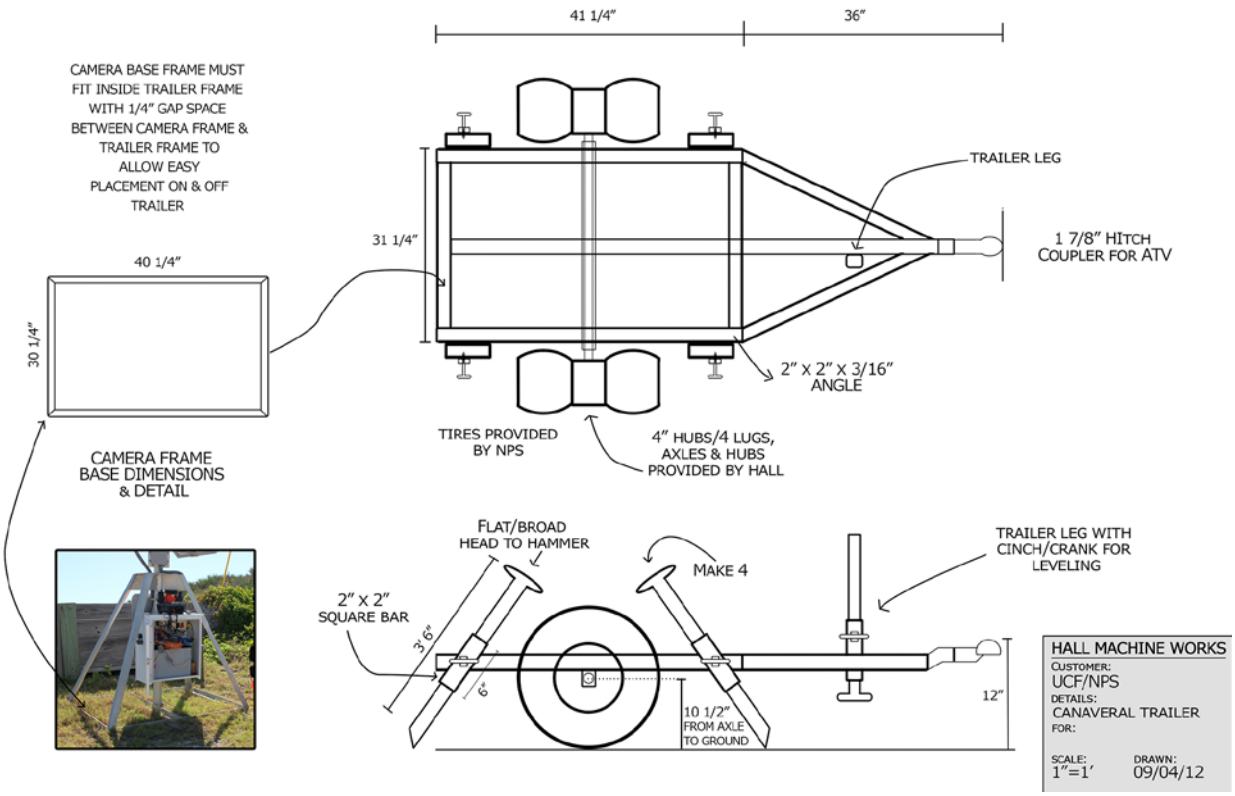


Figure 4: ATV Rig Wireframe, By Author, 2012



Figure 5: ATV Rig at Hal's Machine Shop, New Smyrna, By Author, 2012



Figure 6: ATV Rig Side-view, By Author, 2013



Figure 7: ATV Rig Side-view Detail, By Author, 2013

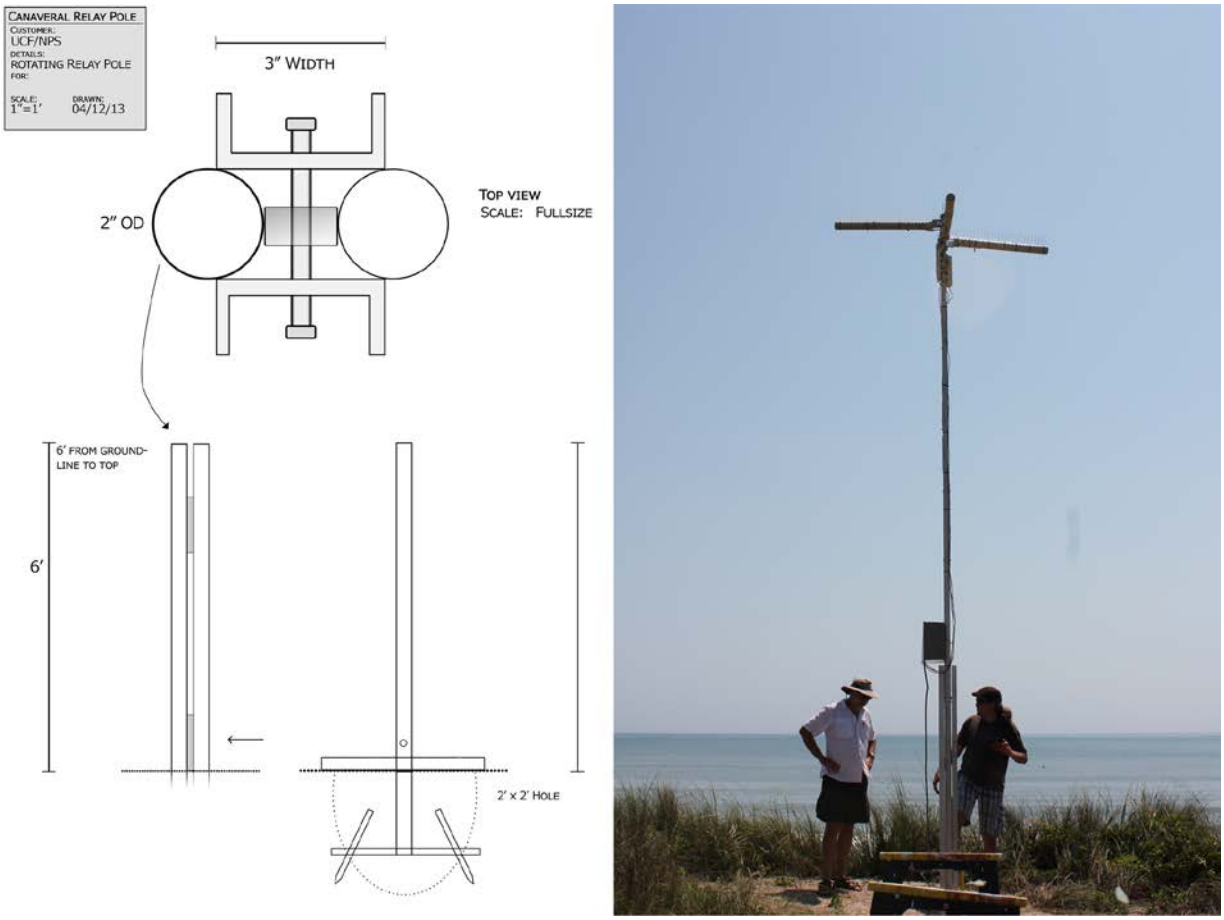


Figure 8: Relay Pole Wireframe and On-site Installation at the Canaveral National Seashore, By Author, 2013

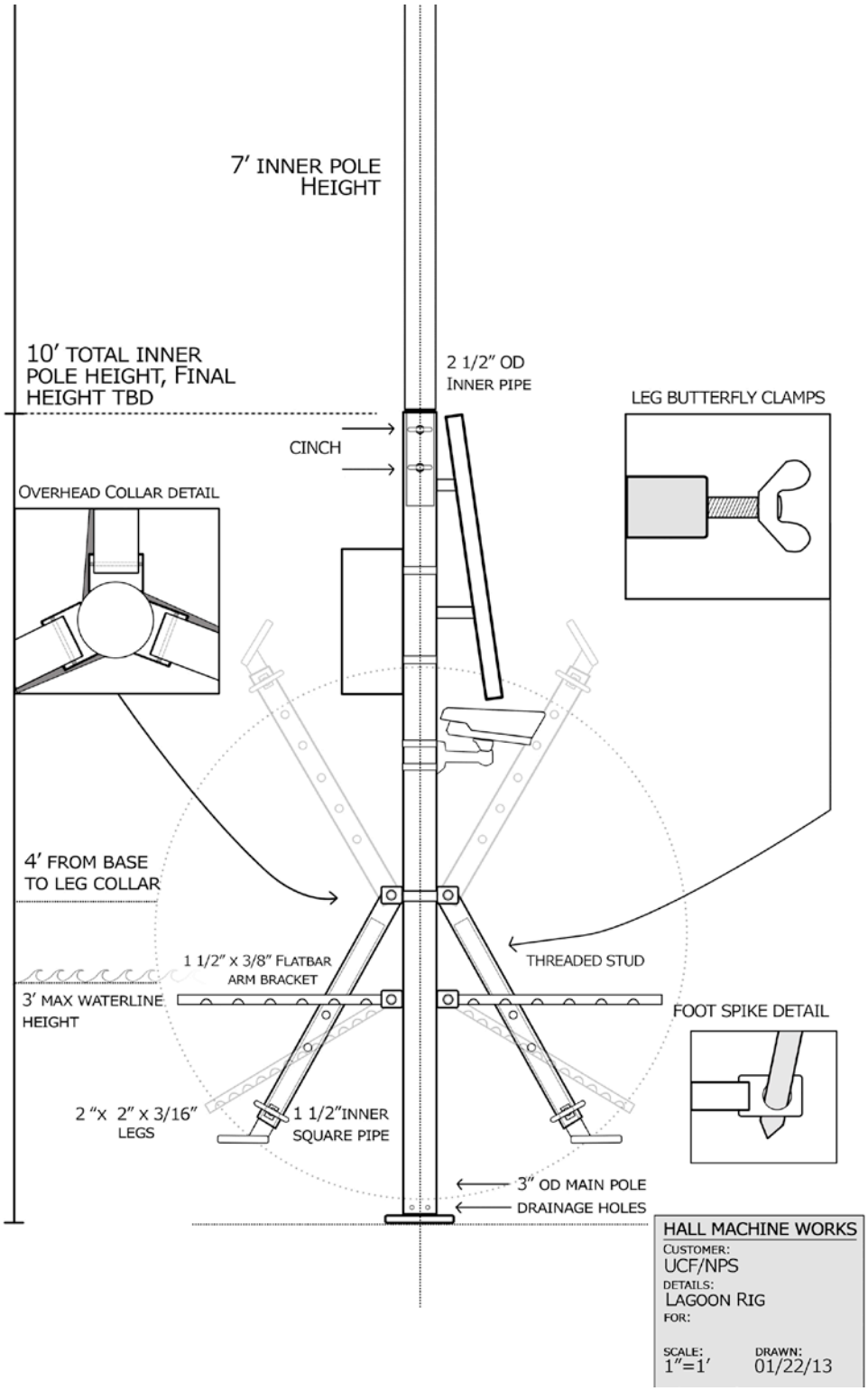


Figure 9: Lagoon Rig Wireframe, By Author, 2013



Figure 10: Lagoon Rig Fabrication with Peter Tivey and Lagoon Rig launch at the Canaveral National Seashore with Brian Tortorelli and Phil Peters, By Author, 2014



Figure 11: Lagoon Rig at Canaveral National Seashore Visitor Center Dock, By Author, 2014

Through the design of these systems I developed a deeper fascination with the motivation designers and artists have in constructing devices that extend or afford a new way of looking at and interacting with the natural world around them. Muybridge's belabored work on his image recording machines motivate me to continue crafting and exploring unique recording techniques and hardware.

In addition to my Canaveral viewing machines I began to explore different ways to both record, sample, and project nature within natural spaces. My 2015 projection piece "Belonging" was created on-location at Azalea Park in Orlando, Florida. It was crafted specifically to a song titled "Belonging" from experimental music producer Alfred Darlington's moody and spatial record "The Light Bridgade (2014)". I bounced a series of animations off of the stream underneath the park bridge and on to the bridge walls. Essentially using the water as a reflective surface and palette and the walls as projector screen. By manipulating the water and sand of the water surface I was able to achieve a textural and organic quality to the animations and projections. My second projection piece ""Procession On The Horizon" uses a series of coasatal views at varying depths shot at the Canaveral National Seashore as source material. The videos are overlaid with waves of blue tones that mimics the color gradation one sees when looking out at the ocean. When projected at eyelevel the viewer will feel immersed in the color spectrum and waves that crash through the screen. This video also is tightly linked to its sound component. I visually interpret the rhythms, ethereal synths and sounds of new-age composer Iasos's song "Procession On The Horizon" from his 1983 album "Wave #2: Elixir". Through this continued series of projection-based works I found a connection between the viewing-machine rigs, the manner in which they could afford new perspectives to the viewer, and how their recordings

could be sampled and reintroduced in to new spaces. My desire to better understand and explore the medium of Nature Film & Television and Video Arts became a more serious impulse and artistic motivation.



Figure 12: Still from 'Belonging' projection video, By Author, 2015

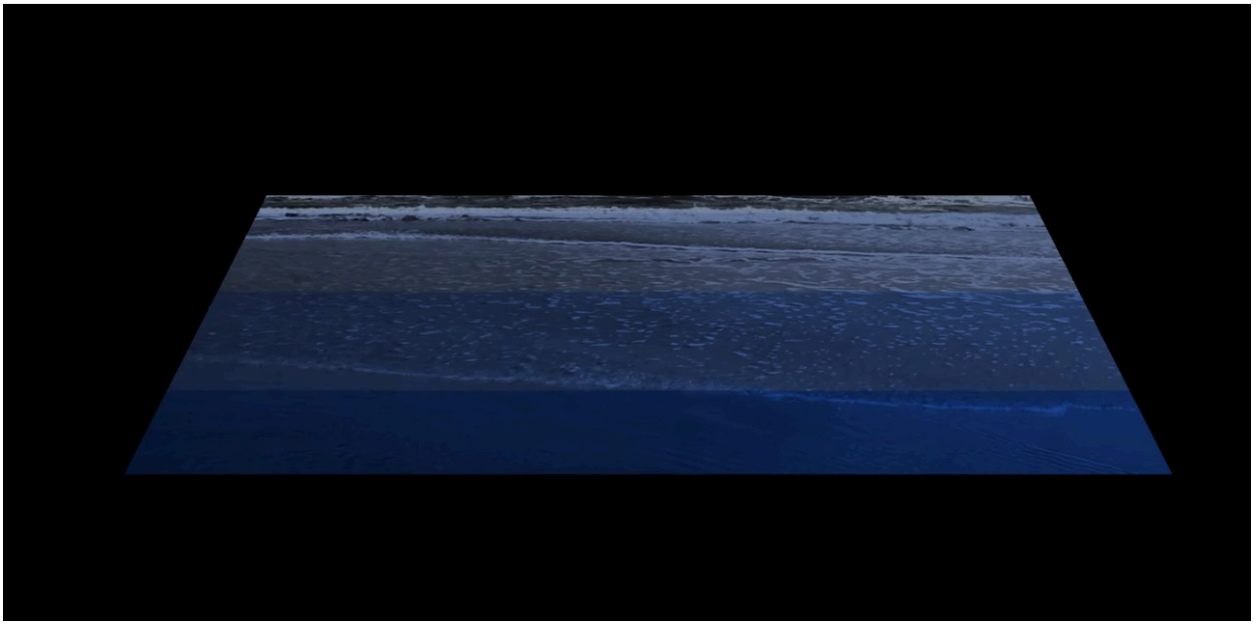


Figure 13: Still from "Procession On The Horizon" projection video, By Author, 2016

ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIUM

> "The characteristics of the film lie not only in the manner in which man presents himself to mechanical equipment but also in the manner in which, by means of this apparatus, man can represent his environment."
>
> –Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1936)

Through my research of current and old films, TV shows, and time-based visual art-forms related to nature, I found a few particularly troublesome aesthetic styles that I personally felt damaged and undermined appreciation of nature. Rapid cutting and composition styles unrelated to setting, distracting music, shaky cam, and over-the-shoulder camera from a rugged explorer's perspective were a few of the clichés that have become unavoidable in the dominant modern Hollywood style. To better understand both the tropes and aesthetics that are commercially popular in the nature film and television genre I will explore some of the key productions that would come to define the format.

Nanook of the North: A Story Of Life and Love In the Actual Arctic (1922)

One of the earliest films to market and promote itself as a formal nature-work and documentary was Robert J. Flaherty's "Nanook of the North: A Story Of Life and Love In the Actual Arctic (1922)". Ostensibly the film is intended to be an "actual", authentic account of life for the indigenous Eskimo inhabitants of Northeast Canada. In reality this film is a fictional work, typical of the "brave savage" sub-genre of films during this time-period. While the settings and characters were real it's representation of the Eskimo's and their lifestyle was crafted to suit the Western filmgoer of the time. The lead Eskimo character "Nanook" is described as "the kindly,

brave, simple Eskimo" in the film's introduction. The title cards then continue to state that "the rigor of the climate no other race could survive". Sponsored by Sir William Mackenzie and recorded between 1910 and 1916, the film chose to keep its director and Eskimo crew off camera. The manipulation in reality came through the Eskimos performing day-to-day actions, stringing together natural disaster hurdles and impediments for narrative effect, and the occasional interpersonal character conflict. The viewer acts as observer to the action and predicaments Nanook and his village face. While the film has its charms through simple animations, illustrations, and striking landscape imagery it ultimately is a fictionalized glimpse into the trying outdoor lifestyle of the other.



Figure 14: Stills from "Nanook of The North", Robert J. Flaherty, 1922

The Living Desert (1953)

This classic Walt Disney production was created as part of the of the "True-life Adventure" series in 1953. Directed by James Algar, the film focuses on the animal lifestyles of a host of creatures from the Monument Valley, Colorado. Framed as an authentic documentation of animal life the film begins with the title card "This True-Life Adventure is a drama as old as time itself. Nature sets the stage and provides the actors. Only through the endless patience of skilled photographers has it been possible to view this strange and unusual world". The film is interspersed with simple animations, dramatic music and narration, and stunning wildlife imagery. Florid phrases such as "this is the land of the mirage, where seeing isn't believing" add a sense of mystery and excitement to the overall tone. The film uses Disney's anthropomiphization technqiues in combination with either funny, serene, or suspenseful music punctioating the actions of such animals as tortoises, coatis, bobcats, and snakes. Each animal represents a human set of traits; the coati being described as "an immigrant from Central America" that are "born bandits, even to the masks on their faces". Instances of animals being goaded or paired together to create onscreen action take place throughout the film. The entire film is framed through the Western domestic house-hold lense of 1950s America. This type of film bridges the gap between Nanook of the North and The Silent World in that the producers use the framing device that the viewer is seeing what is purported to be the real and uniterupted lives of animals with the action that their struggles, suffering, or confusion create. This particular blend of the family life and wild continue to find their way in to both fictional and nonfictional works involving anuimals or nature.

The Silent World (Le Monde du silence) (1956)

Regarded as one of the first full-length, color Nature films this 1956 film was co-directed and produced by Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Shot over the course of two years, the film follows the exploits and antics of Cousteau, Louis Malle, and a team of divers and fishermen on their journey from the Mediterranean Sea through the Indian Ocean. The defining aesthetic characteristics of this film include the use of color combined with new underwater-videography technologies. The story carries the tradition of the rugged explorer(s) traipsing through unfamiliar nature settings. While there are occasional flashes of beautiful sea imagery and underwater vistas the violent and exploitative approach of Cousteau's team make for a difficult viewing experience and betrays the beauty and serenity inherent to the ocean setting. Scenes include the mass slaughter of fish through dynamite explosions, harpooning of whales, and antagonizing sea turtles for joy-rides through the ocean depths. Several moments of experimental underwater videography and editing take place. Trailing shots of divers riding underwater propulsion devices make for some exciting and immersive underwater adventure. The sound used in the film is both ambient and occasionally broken up with scoring by Yves Baudrier. We hear the dissonant, tonal, prepared piano sounds and music become orchestral and grand during an intense dolphin chasing sequence as well. Though over sixty years have passed, the impact of this marauding adventurer aesthetic and sequencing style of film can still be found in contemporary nature film and television shows such as "Man vs. Wild (2006)" and "Naked and Afraid (2013)".

INFLUENCES

My personal quest in my production and visual art has always been to communicate feelings of the transcendent through nature spaces. In “The Poetics of Space” Gaston Bachelard describes that “Far from the immensities of sea and land, merely through memory, we can recapture, by means of meditation, the resonances of this contemplation of grandeur” (Bachelard 183). The impulse to transfer the feeling of entropy, scale, and fascination to my viewers guides my work. Contemporaries also working within these guidelines and subject matters range from the computer generated sceneries of Rick Silva’s “En Plein Air” Series to the “Mountainfield Studies” video installations of Florida artist Dawn Roe. Silva’s focus on nature is as sample source and direct visual and spatial inspiration. Through advanced usage of softwares like Photoshop and Cinema 4D he samples and reinterprets nature spaces into 3d abstractions and animations, blending the organic forms and rhythms of a space with a digital component. Dawn Roe’s “Mountainfield” work explores projected representations of mountainous regions, occasionally juxtaposing them with fabrics and textures that interpret and mimic the lines and shapes of the nature spaces. Both Silva and Roe have played with bringing these naturescapes in to new projected settings.

As a mixed media artist I find direct influence in numerous media types. When I see an image I immediately begin to feel and mentally explore associations with sound, tempo, color spectrum, mood, and kinetic rhythm. The deep connection I feel with the following artist’s all stem from their ability to connect across my aural and visual spectrum to water settings and nature locales, as well as their deep connections to the sounds and sights around them.

Claude Debussy

> "His was the art aesthetic applied to life. Both life and art were governed by the same bent for the sensuous, the select, the rare, the different."
>
> - Oscar Thompson, Debussy, Man and Artist (1967)

My first major influence was the French composer Claude Debussy. Though his work dealt in the sonic domains his contemplative aesthetic and approach to sound have heartfelt connections to nature and space. He was "a poet of the nuances of Nature. For the most part this was Nature at its most intimate, Nature at its most atmospheric, rather than Nature in its more majestic and grandiose moods" (Thompson 22). Always one to approach composition from an inventive and distinctive stance, Oscar Thompson describes Debussy as:

> …the determining factor in the music of the first third of the twentieth century, because of the doors he opened and the restraints he cast aside. Harmony was freed from the so-called laws of extension. The straitjacket of development was put away. Form became less a cadre for ideas than the pulsations by which those ideas ran their course. (17)

By escaping the rigidity of the older forms of classical production and style Debussy opened up new modes of interpreting and representing sonic spaces. One of his most famous examples of this came in the form of his moody composition, *La mer* (1905). Formally titled *Mer belle aux Îles Sanguinaires,* Debussy first began working on this seascape-styled composition in 1903 and

premiered it publically in 1905 (158). The defining characteristics of this piece connect directly to my work in that Debussy set out to create a piece that emotionally and sonically emulates the many moods of the sea. The compositions in *La mer* represent and interpret the rising and lowering of tides to the tumultuousness and serenity of ocean water. Beautifully using melody, repetition, and dynamic range to lull the listener in to this dreamlike nature space. I've applied this interpretive approach to my own work and recording method, asking myself how best to communicate the feelings and views that overcomes an individual in these nature settings.



Figure 15: Portrait of Claude Debussy, Joseph Muller

Bill Viola

> "…Viola's art gives time a palpable presence, recalling the shape-shifting tactics of the stream…"
>
> -John G. Hanhardt, Bill Viola, 2015

The visual equivalent to Claude Debussy for me in regard to nature, rhythm and representation is mixed-media artist and video arts pioneer Bill Viola. Viola's work explores connections between space, perception, mood, and nature with an elegant and meditative approach. His works focusing on water and the view helped influence the way I connect my own feelings toward water-based nature spaces and expanses. Thematically works such as "A Portrait in Light and Heat (1979)", "The Reflecting Pool (1977-1979)", and more recent pieces such as his "Tristan Project (2004)" series, and "Ocean Without a Shore (2007)", all play with the sampling and integration of natural rhythms and movements of heat, fire, and water. Vanishing point, implied depth, and scale all help pull the viewer in to these immersive and highly spatial pieces. His inventiveness and inimitable approach motivate me to continue pushing to explore how nature and the human psyche are so intrinsically linked. John Hanhardt states that:

> For Viola, video and audio became the means to consider what art might become. Because he was not caught up in the avant-garde movements of Fluxus, Conceptual, Process, or Performance art, he could determine his own path, which was a self-reflective one both in terms of his presence in the work and what he was learning about world culture and mysticism. (43)

Ivan Aivazovsky

While Florida has its very own rich nature landscape painting tradition through the works of Alfred Hair and his fellow Highwaymen, I looked toward the works of 19th century painter Ivan Aivazovsky as influence for representing moody water spaces dynamically. The Russian-born painter was a master of the maritime and oceanscape painting format. His images such as "The Wave (1889)" and "Among the Waves (1898)" were noted for their use of perspective and detailed representations of tumultuous ocean water rhythm and movement. As Gianni Caffiero and Ivan Samarine state, "Legends have always surrounded Aivazovsky and his work. At an exhibition in Paris in 1842, the public, convinced of some trickery, looked to see if there weren't perhaps some lights or lanterns burning behind canvases" (Caffiero and Samarine 11). It is this realism and literal sense of immersion that his canvases communicated to me that helped shape the way I shot and projected my video pieces.



Figure 16: “Among the Waves”, Ivan Aivazovsky, 1898



Figure 17: “The Billowing Sea”, Ivan Aivazovsky, 1889

Aivazovsky relationship with the Russian Imperial Navy afforded him access to officers, seamen, and expeditions. Here he would create sketches and reference imagery that he would later incorporate in to his paintings. Alongside his use of perspective, his technical mastery of realism deepened the sense of what oceanscape imagery could invoke emotionally. Caffiero and Samarine describe:

> The transparency and sense of depth Aivazovsky achieves in the depiction of his waves is one of the painter's most distinguishing features. Again, by use of thin glazes and infinitely gradated colour washes he attains an almost watercolour-like effect. The water is more agitated now, and the surface is alive with foamy white splashes. Bottle green or milky turquoise, the light seems to penetrate the surface, drawing our gaze within. (109)

Kozyndan

Multimedia artist's Kozy and Dan Kitchens heavily integrate nature themes and motifs in to their illustrations and panorama images. This LA-based duo travel the world in search of unique aquatic and land settings, documenting their trips through photograph, videos, and sketches. Upon returning to their studio spaces they craft intricate pastiches of the animals and settings they had visited. Applying the images to various mediums whether that be traditional illustration formats, panorama formats, photography, or moving-image. The team works very closely with musicians and producers, interpreting their sounds and aesthetics in to harmonious and vibrant visuals. An interesting evolution in their work began when they started to transfer their static, room-wrapping panoramas in to VR and 3d spaces. Taking their kinetic and colorful approach to the next level of interactive viewing. I feel the work I've done alongside my thesis video and projection series and will do in the future will continue to take influence from their use of creating patterns and color palettes through nature imagery.

Les Stroud

Noted for his pioneering television series “Survivorman”, filmmaker and musician Les Stroud has most influenced my approach to physical exploration and research of spaces as an impetus for creating unique and immersive video experiences. The journey to finding your image or location essentially becomes a part of the artwork and communicates a deeper intimacy and connection with your recorded media and your viewer. Beginning with his multi-part TV series “Stranded (2001)” and later Discovery Channel iteration “Survivorman (2004), Stroud has crafted Nature television and film focusing on surviving and negotiating unfamiliar nature spaces while elucidating the cultures, history, and fauna that are particular to these settings. Most notably he records his Survivorman show alone, trekking through settings with multiple cameras and recording gear, painstakingly setting up shots at multiple angles for coverage and artistic effect.



Figure 18: Stills from "Survivorman" Season 1, Episode 6 "Mountains", Les Stroud, 2005

Prior to shooting an episode Stroud deeply researches his settings and engages and studies with local inhabitants. This process helps lead to a production that more authentically represents the space and people he presents to a television audience. Stroud states that:

> It's really only a matter of observing and then speaking the truth of what I see and what I am told by locals. When a native in the Amazon jungle tells me they can never remember it becoming so dry and that the weather is changing like they have never known - I believe them for they have no cause to lie. When I see pollution, I do not seek to hide that fact or cover it up and likewise when I see something pristine then I seek to celebrate that fact and highlight it in my work. I don't seek authenticity or try to approach it, I just try to be it.

Citing nature as "the original inspiration" and impulse to create his work, Stroud goes on to describe the intrinsic connection between his work and nature:

> For the most part one does not exist without the other. Sure I write love songs and might produce a film that is not about nature, but the bulk of my motivation and energy and effort is spent on nature imagery both in word and visual. I seek to motivate and inspire through my artistry and I figured that nature is a better motivator and a better inspiration than I am, so I feel it is my job to lead people to that nature and let the earth take care of the rest.

VIDEO PIECES

To demonstrate my situated and more organic approach to recording nature I heavily researched several key locations at the Canaveral National Seashore Park. The place has significant personal value to me in both its rich Timucua history and as a major causeway for the late 1800s and early 1900s industrialization of the Canaveral area. The locations I required had to have easy access to coastlines and waterways in order for me to visually research them, be shallow enough to safely measure water depths and directionality, and have low human interaction. The projects each went through several phases through their completion: location scouting and research, prototyping, final builds for each video apparatus, and lastly post-production and installation views. The research phase entailed me heading out alone to each location several times a week to GPS (Global Positioning System) pinpoint them, create photo and voice notation, measure tide depth and direction, as well as factoring in the aesthetics and perceived serenity of each location. During this phase I had to be sure that there were minimal chances that humans would potentially enter a shot, disrupt any of my recordings, or the chance that a viewer would see passing boats and planes in the frame. I realized firsthand in a modern society how difficult this process of trying to represent seemingly authentic and untouched nature actually was.

After completing my research phase of a location I would begin work on prototypes or demos of each rig. With my research notes I built and tested a prototype of the necessary floatation devices and camera stands. This process was photo documented as a way to track my construction and as an image reference for me to use in conversation with other designers and mentors. Upon the completion of the demo I returned to Canaveral either solo or with a

production assistant to then test on-location. During this testing process I could see both the type of shots I was getting, the way the water or surroundings interacted with the pieces, and ways to streamline and refine the builds. After the demos I regrouped and applied any necessary corrections or modifications to the final builds. This phase ensured that when I performed my final shoots that I had eliminated most of the potential technical or aesthetic problems that the setting would present. Though, as I would learn even in this phase, one cannot predict every issue entropy raises as applied to nature. Every piece would have to be able to bend to its setting despite the technological parameters and safeguards I had created. Each project varied on the amount of post-production refinement required, but all visually had to feel cohesive. Matching color qualities and composition across the three was paramount.

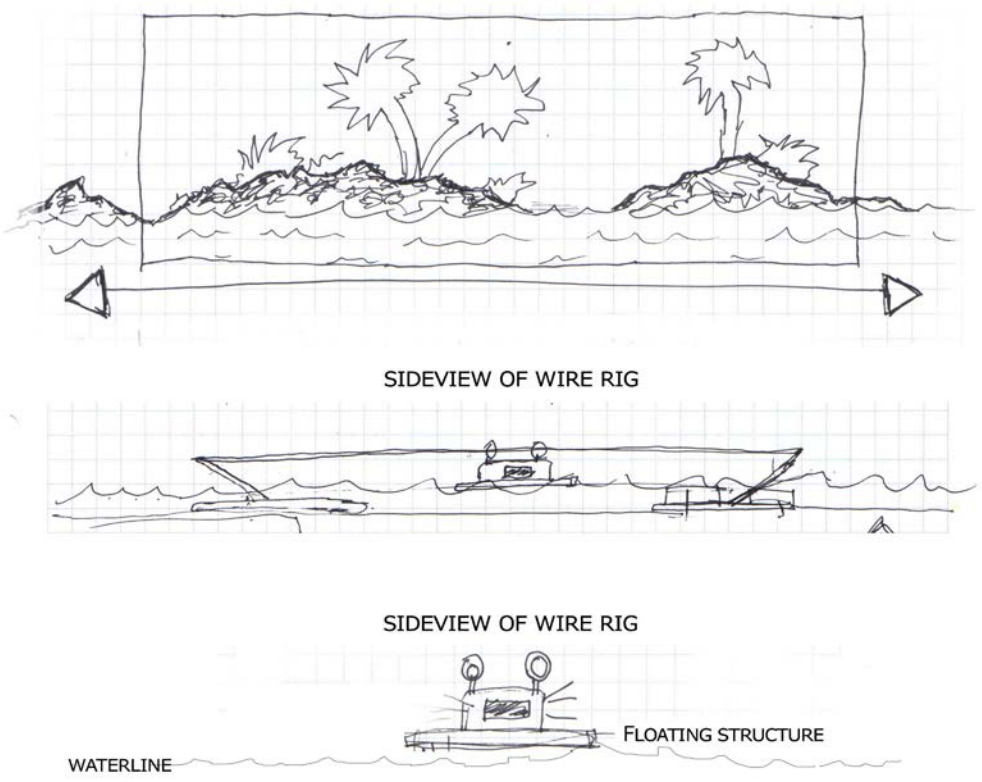


Figure 19: Project 1 Wireframe Draft Sketch, By Author, 2016

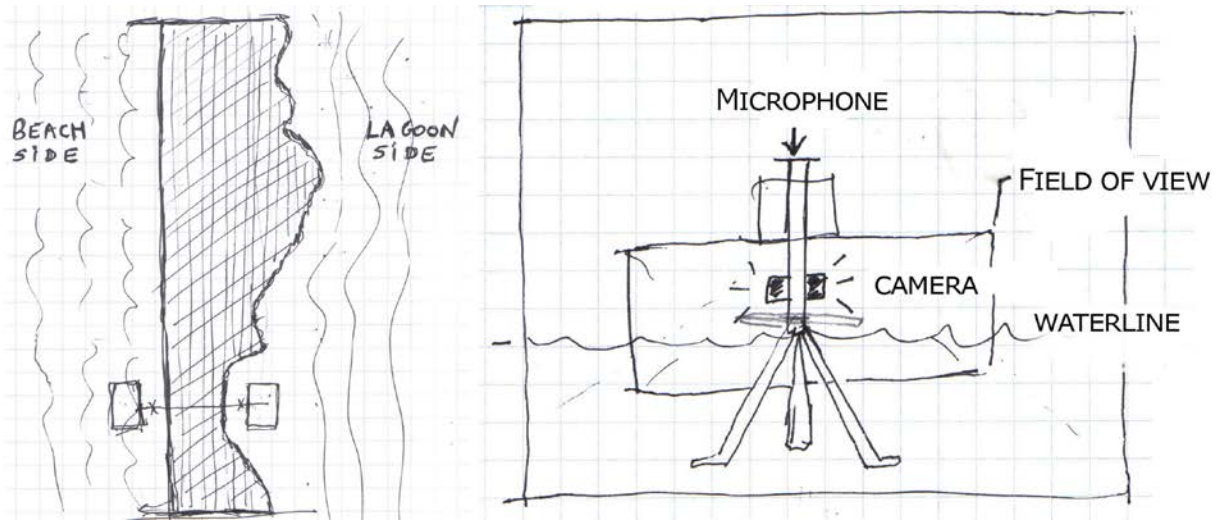


Figure 20: Project 2 Wireframe Draft Sketch, By Author, 2016

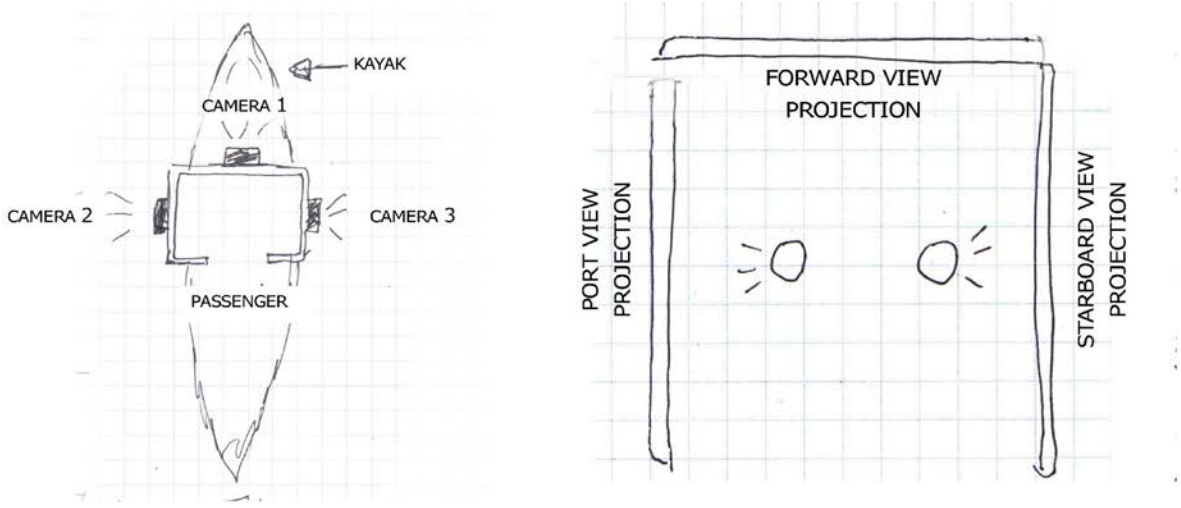


Figure 21: Project 3 Wireframe Draft Sketch, By Author, 2016

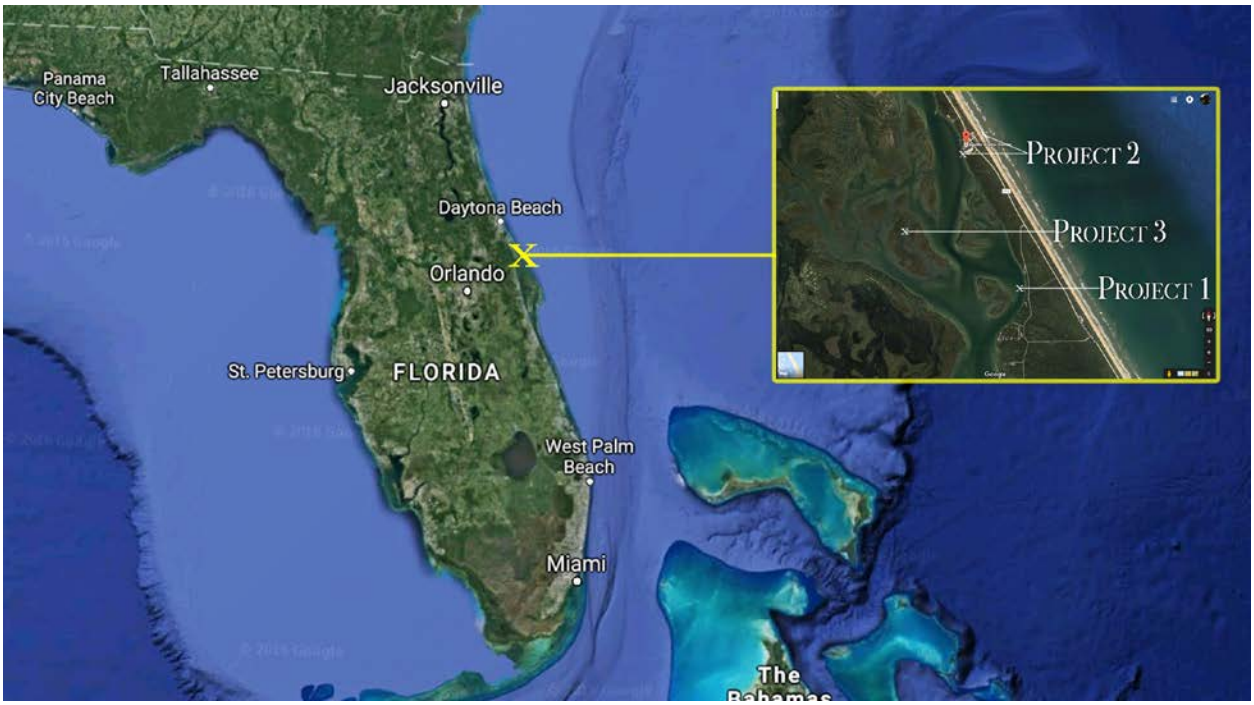


Figure 22: Map of Florida with Canaveral National Seashore Project Locations, Google Maps, By Author, 2016



Figure 23: Overhead Map of the Canaveral National Seashore showing Video Project Locations, Google Maps, By Author, 2016

Project 1

Planning and Production



Figure 24: Project 1 Overhead Map Detail, By Author, 2016

The technological goal of the first project was to create a floating camera and wire system that allowed for a tracking shot across a Canaveral, lagoon coastline where the tracking speed was determined by the natural flow of the current. My intent was for nature to essentially physically record itself. The piece stylistically references the scrolling horizontal panorama images of the mid to late 1800s. Instead of a viewer watching a rectangular repeating landscape image of the scrolling panorama they see a scrolling image of sorts moving in a static rectangular frame (either as a projection or widescreen video format). My job as the producer for the piece was to create physical parameters for the video but let nature do the rest. The use of two PVC poles placed within the lagoon bed at a starting and end location with a guideline ensured that the

floating rig would have a predetermined path. The floating rig had to be both modular and lightweight; at any moment the height of my guideline could change, the camera could require being angled or placed differently, or additional stabilization might need to be applied to the PVC frame. A reference text for using PVC as a modular framing system for the builds came from the classic Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) text “Build Your Own Underwater Robot and Other Wet Projects (1997)” by Harry Bohm and Vickie Jensen. The use of a gimbal for the Go Pro was integrated to try to limit the vertiginous rocking sensation that the floating rig would create.

Though I researched tide speeds, water depth, and wind for the specific time of day the shoot would take place, once the floating rig was released the shot was subject to the natural elements of the settings. Several passes and recording attempts were executed to seek improvements in framing and stability could be made. Post-production required some basic color balancing, image stabilization, and the removal of the Go-pro's wide angle distortion to achieve a more true view of the setting.



Figure 25: Project 1 Location Scouting view of Lagoon, By Author, 2016



Figure 26: Project 1 Preproduction, Measuring water depth and testing floating rig prototype in lagoon, By Author, 2016

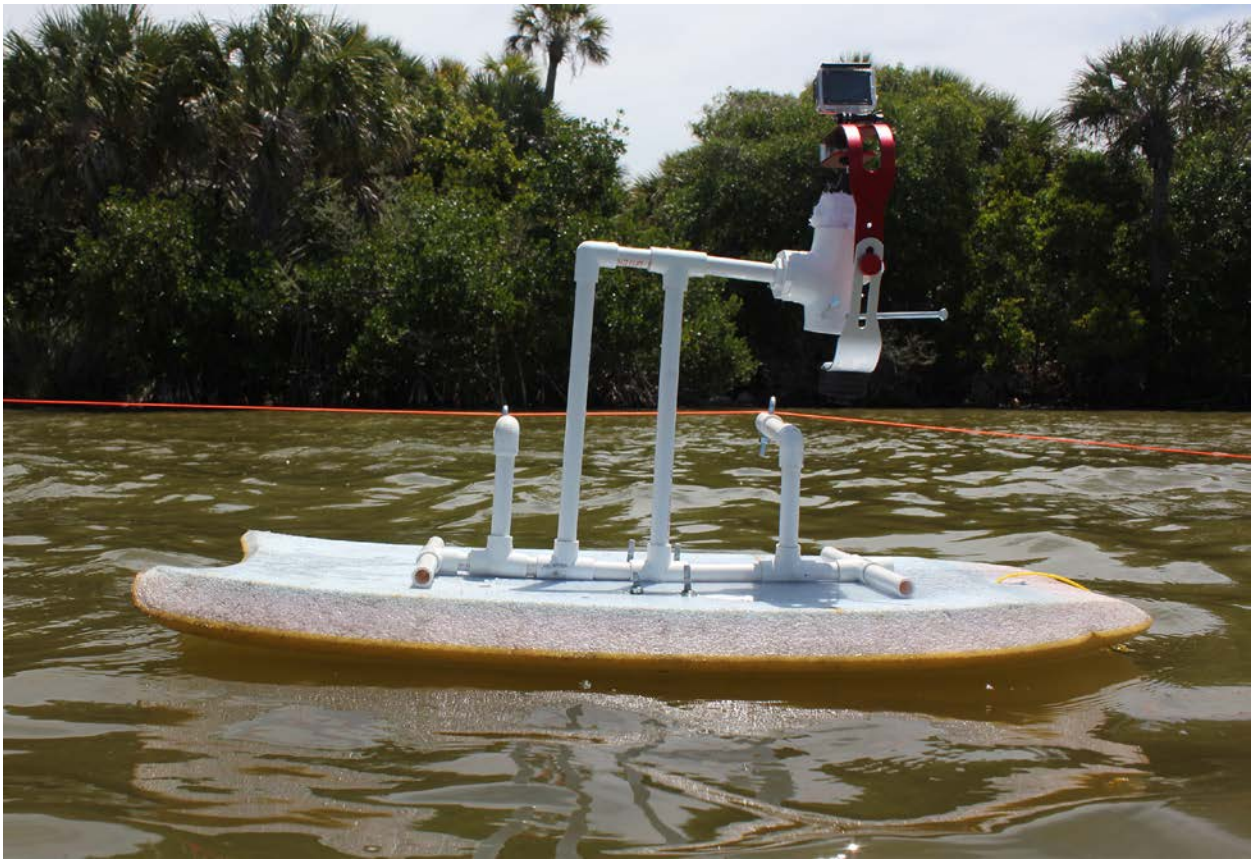


Figure 27: Project 1 Detail of floatation rig, By Author, 2016



Figure 28: Project 1 flotation guideline in lagoon and testing floating rig, By Author, 2016

Installation View



Figure 29: Project 1 Installation setup, front-view and rear-view of projection



Figure 30; Project 1 Installation setup front-view, By Author, 2016

Project 2

Planning and Production



Figure 31: Project 2 Overhead map detail with lagoon camera and beach camera locations, By Author, 2016

The second project is closer in line to the static vista aesthetic of turn of the century American landscape painters, the later plein air aesthetic of Florida's Highwaymen, and the photographic works of Clive Butcher. What spatially and geologically differentiates this piece from standard landscape imagery is the duality of Canaveral's Mosquito lagoon coastline juxtaposed with the Atlantic Ocean coastline. The entire park hosts these two divergent settings separated by a few hundred yards, the serene and brackish waters of the lagoon flow as the tumultuous waves crash on the untouched beach coast. The intent of this project was to pair these settings in a physical space, essentially recreating the physical distance and differing water vistas. In order to add cogency temporally and spatially to the works I had to dig deeply into

researching potential accessible locations on each coastline. To pair the settings I had to first find a point on the lagoon side that afforded a classic, aesthetically pleasing view of Mosquito lagoon. The location of the first lagoon would link to the location of the ocean view via GPS coordinates. Upon securing my lagoon location I walked a straight, latitude-oriented line to the opposing ocean setting. Upon reaching the beach coast I marked via flag and GPS where the matching location was. After finalizing these locations I had to secure a time of day to perform the demo and final video shoots for each side. Both locations would require identical cameras to be run simultaneously. This would ensure that a viewer could more clearly see the way both the clouds and tides behaved on each respective side of this peninsula-like landmass at the same time. Most notably the contrast in color and tones created by passing overhead clouds would be reflected by each side.

After the initial location research phase I returned to the lagoon and ocean with a waterproof Go-pro camera and stands. Using my marked locations I placed the camera on a pole in the lagoon side and ran it for one hour. I then proceeded to do the same at the equivalent ocean side. Through reviewing my footage I realized I needed stability in my stands to limit camera shake and movement from the current.



Figure 32: Project 2 production view of Visitor Center lagoon and administrative beach coasts, By Author, 2016

For the final production phase a production assistant and myself stripped and retrofitted the Lagoon Rig and TurtleCam Rig. Both aluminum rigs were durable and light enough for one or two people to easily carry to the lagoon and beach locations. The Lagoon Rig was placed ocean side as it had a wider base and footing that could withstand the ocean current and keep a stable camera image. The shorter, stripped down TurtleCam was placed in the calmer waters of the lagoon. The visual goal of the two pieces was to mimic the sensation of a human immersed in the water, looking out at the water's horizon line. To achieve a more embodied view the camera had to be looking out at lower camera angle. I created a plexiglass panel that could be mounted underneath the camera on the Lagoon Rig to shield it from ocean waves. For additional stability the feet of the rig were staked in to the ground. To begin the shoot I made sure both cameras and shots were compositionally matching (dominant sky, lower third of water). I armed the Ocean view camera to record and left my production assistant to monitor it. I then trekked over to the lagoon to setup and armed the other recording. For ninety minutes I checked back and forth between the two. The extended time would ensure that I found stretched of temporally matching video on each view that had no boats, planes, or people crossing the shots. Postproduction only

required minor color adjustments to the video and adjustments to keep the horizon lines balanced as the rigs settled and shifted in the water over the course of the day.



Figure 33: Turtlecam rig stripped and prepared to be placed in Visitor Center lagoon and author adjusting the camera rig in the lagoon, By Author, 2016



Figure 34: Camera 1 looks out at the lagoon, By Author, 2016



Figure 35: Stripped-down Lagoon rig prepped for ocean placement, By Author, 2016



Figure 36: Lagoon rig with plexiglass water protection and camera installed, By Author, 2016



Figure 37: Project 2 securing rig in ocean and rig withstanding waves, By Author, 2016

Installation View



Figure 38: Project 2 installation setup and testing, By Author, 2016

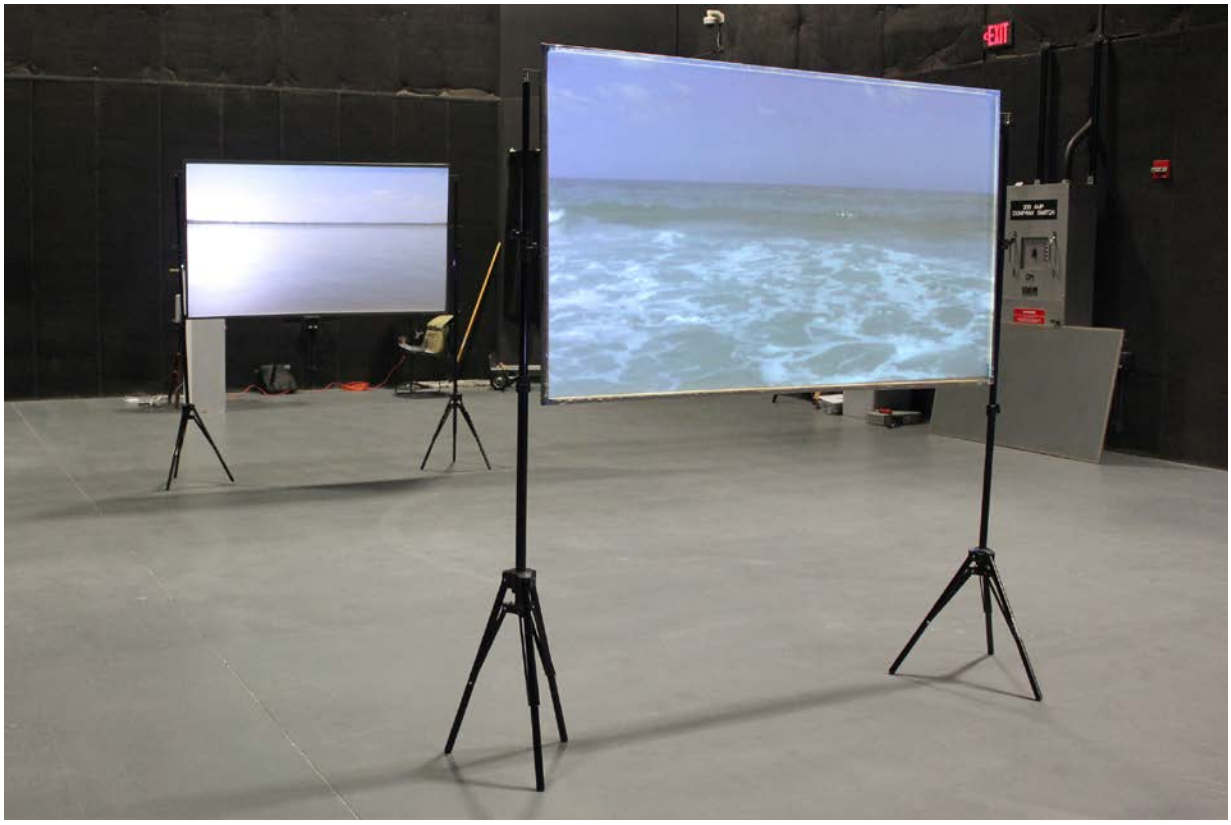


Figure 39: Project 2 installation projector testing and alignment, By Author, 2016



Figure 40: Project 2 installation view with spectators, By Author, 2016

Project 3

Planning and Production



Figure 41: Project 3 Overhead map detail of preproduction and production locations, By Author, 2016



Figure 42: Project 3 Overhead map detail of finalized production location, By Author, 2016

The final project required the most land research and was the most technically difficult. It incorporates the movement styles of the first project and the framing of the second. Historically it has roots in camera obscura and phantasmagoria in that upon being reconstructed in a three-panel rear-projection setup it envelops the viewer. Using the same flotation device from project one I crafted a PVC mount for three cameras. One camera faced straight forward and the other two were port-side and star-board. The goal of the project was to float this mounted rig down an inlet of lagoon that had a forward focal point and clear subject matters in their respective moving backgrounds. In order for the piece to be interpreted as a cohesive multi-direction video the viewer had to be aware that they were seeing different perspectives of the same location at the same time.

Location scouting required taking several kayaking trips to find lagoon inlets that had a 360° view with minimal boat and human interaction. Additionally the space required an island rest area for my production team and I to dock kayaks and setup gear. Using a GPS locator I tagged several locations that potentially could work and picked the one that had the easiest access in case of an emergency or the need for a quick return. Upon finalizing the location I began modifying the modular, boogie-board setup of project one for a three-camera mount system that could fit on a standard kayak. The mounts required the ability to be quickly modified and needed to allow quick access to the cameras to arm or adjust their settings. The day of the shoot my team and I assembled all gear and parts and stored electronics in a sealed cooler. Once we kayaked to our selected inlet we assembled and tested the floating mount system. Orchestrating the timing of the start and finish point of the video was tricky in that we had to reset the shoot in any instance that a nearing boat or kayak entered the video frame. After five

attempts at my chosen route I'd collected a useable take of the three-camera recording. Postproduction was the most technically difficult in this piece as it required color balancing three different cameras to visually match and steadying through keyframe animating major swaying or skewing of the frame.



Figure 43: Project 3 preproduction location scouting and testing, By Author, 2016



Figure 44: Project 3 finalized production location lagoon view, By Author, 2016



Figure 45: At Project 3 production location setting up three-camera rig, By Author, 2016

Installation View

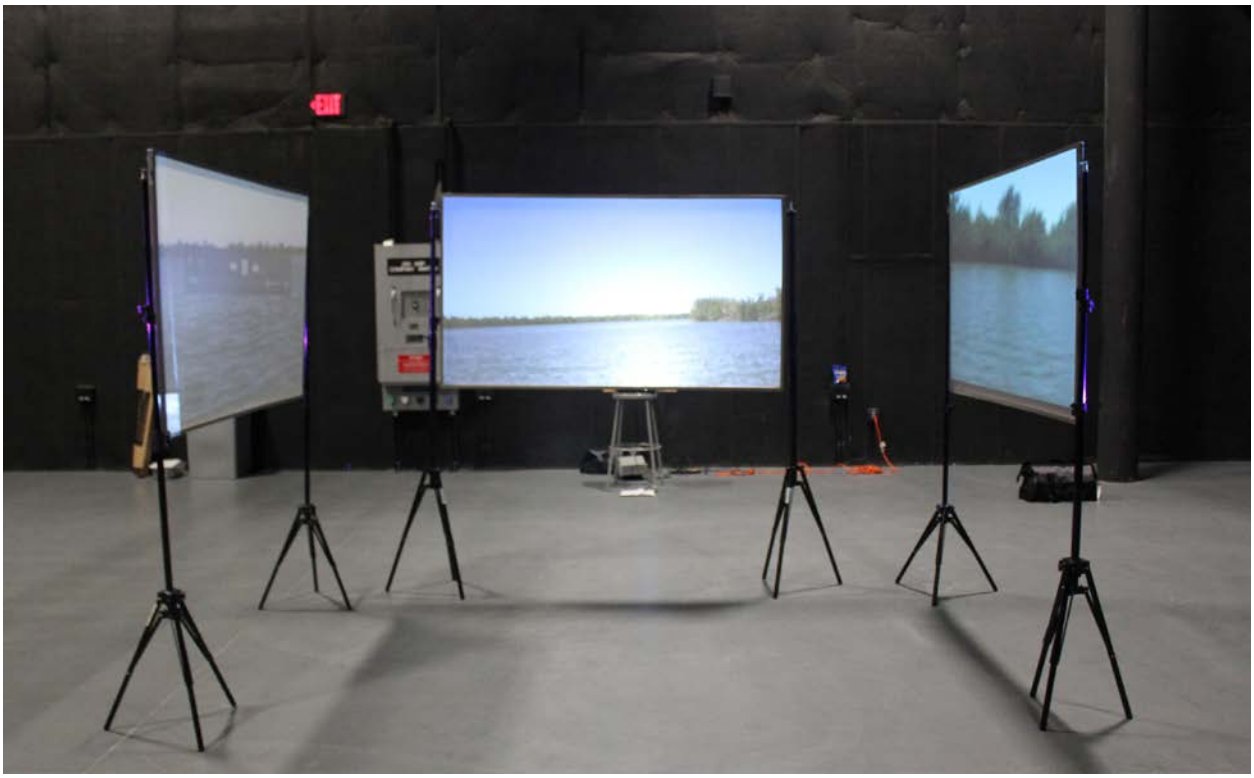


Figure 46: Project 3 Installation setup head-on view, By Author, 2016

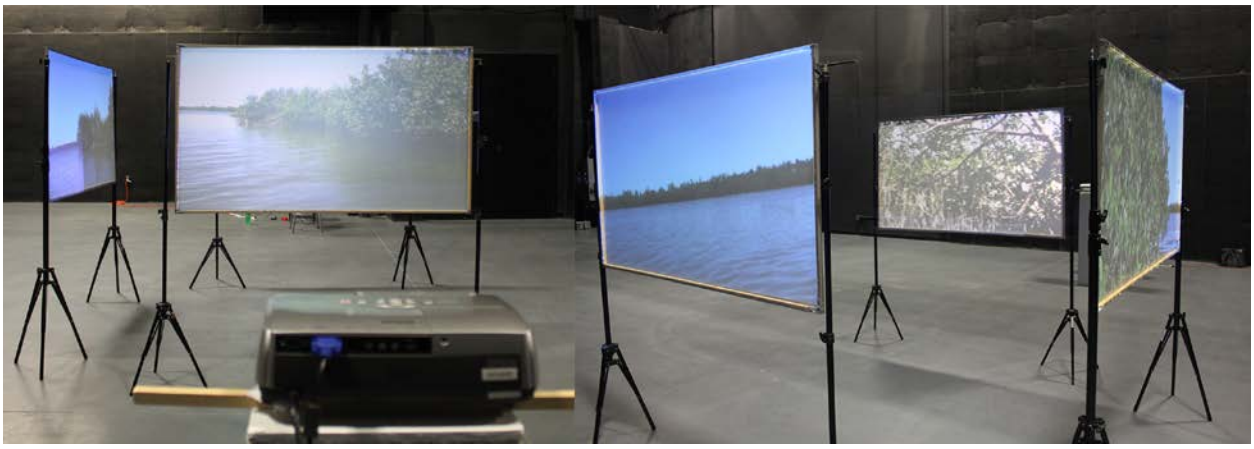


Figure 47: Project 3 Installation setup panel detail, By Author, 2016



Figure 48: Project 3 Installation with synched 3-camera video, By Author, 2016

Discoveries

My technical and aesthetic intent for this collection was to work in the parameters of the Western formalist nature aesthetic and film format while presenting new ways of interaction and representation of the recorded spaces. My approach to this was less as a traditional filmmaker and closer to that that of a visual artist preserving a space through the recording process. This preservation of an idealized space (with limited interaction and manipulation as producer) allowed the water rhythms, colors, sunlight, fauna, and animals of the locations to become the focus of the pieces. Though not intended as Romantic works this shift in focus to a nature setting free of humans, their vessels, and their construction, allowed me to better communicate the awe-inspiring and undisturbed beauty of these historic locales. Though these settings will continue to shift as waterways evolve, are dredged, and erosion continues my recordings will act as a sliver in time as to how they once looked.

The decision to create widescreen format, rear-projections panels mounted at an average human-height eyeline was done to have the viewer's eyes rest naturally as they would while scanning a horizon line in those actual nature spaces. If a viewer stands in front of the panel their field of view is dominated by the presented landscape imagery. The integration of rear projection verses overhead or head-on was to allow maximum viewer interaction unencumbered by clashing shadows or rays of projector light being seen in ones' periphery. In addition, using rear-projection simulates the sensation that sun creates in a space giving off a warm and vibrant feeling of actual sunlight. This aides further in immersion and interactivity in the sense that the viewer does not feel as if they're seeing these images on a mere LCD panel or Television setup.

A theme in these pieces and my continued art is that of rhythm. As an editor and artist with a musical and experimental sound production background I can't help but feel and see repetition through movement within the frame. I find textural and rhythmic inspiration through nature's ocean water, flowing rivers, shorelines, winds, fauna etc. Project 1 contains the natural rocking and movements of the camera and rig created by the lagoon water combined with the internal rhythms of the on-camera water. As the floatation rig and camera move at the lagoon water's pace the viewer becomes aware of both the physical movement created by the rig and the current's speed. Project 2 while more physically static demonstrates rhythm internally in-frame. The crashing ocean waves of the Atlantic coastline view repeat, as the water slowly rises. The clouds gently move across the skyline, creating a secondary set of rhythm and variation through shifts in the sunlight. The lagoon view presents a more serene sense of water movement and rhythm; occasionally broken up by a passing dolphin or manatee. These small breaks in the onscreen action create minor yet serene shifts in the overall dynamism of this view. The 3rd

project takes the movement styles of the first project and amplifies it by three. Each panel has its own internal rhythm and action but are linked together through their shared setting and journey. The viewer realizes this most when the camera mount rocks and we see all three panels correspond to that motion in-tandem.

CONCLUSION

Through the research and production of my thesis videos I was able to more deeply explore Canaveral National Seashore and uncover richer understandings of my aesthetic and artistic motivations. My earlier work involving the production of remote-observation machines that extended the view and removed the documentarian triggered in me the impulse to create videos with an unintrusive process and with machinery that could naturally and non-destructively function in a location-specific nature setting. Limiting team member numbers, researching locations for paths and access that didn't require the damaging of foliage or lagoon-beds, and staying mobile and modular became paramount in my physical approach to recording setting. Aesthetically the mission of the work was to communicate a sense of truth of the locale through perspectives that simulate a human eyeline looking out at these serene locations. Ultimately the viewer assigns their own narrative and meaning to every instance of on-camera action; a dolphin passing the video frame, a manatee's back gliding under the surface of the water, a pelican surfing a wave, or the sun casting a shadow that suddenly changes the light. Through my process I felt I was able to craft imagery that had a deeper personal connection to nature, myself, and the viewer.

Through avoiding recording techniques that made the image secondary to the viewer experience and truth of the setting such as anthropomorphization, prompting animals to react, or deceptive editing I've presented an unfiltered visual recording of a key Floridian ecosystem. By displaying the recorded imagery as rear-projected canvases raised to match the approximate heights that the horizon lines were recorded at, I've given viewers a chance to both see and feel the majesty and expansiveness of these locales as I did. Later iterations of the projects will

incorporate wider viewing angles, larger projection panels, and the use of directional stereoscopic sound. All of these elements will increase the immersiveness of these striking naturescapes and will raise awareness and interest in these settings and their histories.

In reference to the future of nature television shows and films I see dramatic shifts in both technological fidelity and the means of presenting these images. While increases in screen resolution offer home and theater viewers higher image quality and framerates, ultimately truth in these mediums will have to be dictated by caring and conscientious producers and artists. Les Stroud describes this idea at length, stating:

> It will still take individuals who feel very connected to nature. It will still take that level of interest and desire to be in nature within an individual to use the new technology to bring about this kind of cinematic offering to the world. I was happy when standard def went high def because all the old nature films started getting re-done and revisited. Now the same thing is happening with 4k and VR. But on a more sociological level all of this new and wonderful technology will also enable those who seek to protect nature to expose the villains. A camera everywhere also means on the side of a river and deep in the mountains and out in the forest where we can capture some of the beauty for those who cannot get out there and at the same time capture the people who have no issue with destroying our natural world. So I say bring it on; establish remote VR and 4k cameras so we can watch 24/7 eagles hatching and seals mating and wolves hunting. (Stroud)

Both Les Stroud and Kozynadan have moved their productions in to the immersive worlds of VR and interactive 3d-panorama, redefining our sense of what seeing and feeling arts rooted in nature can be in our modern times. It is my belief that constructing visual experiences around nature that celebrate its inherent lack of order (or entropy), it's contemplative qualities, and awe-inspiring expansiveness will ultimately speak to a deeper sense of truth and authenticity.

APPENDIX: IMAGE PERMISSIONS

Rashaad Rosalle <rashaad.rosalle@gmail.com> Oct 4

to Laura

Good afternoon Laura,

Here are the 2 screen-grabs I took from Amazon Prime. They're from Survivorman Season 1 - Episode 2: Mountains though IMDB lists the episode as number 6 for some reason.



They will be included in my "Influences" sections and credited to Les Stroud & Surivorman Productions. Let me know if there are additional specific companies or individuals I can further credit the imagery to.

Thank you all so much for allowing me to use these. I will be in touch once my work is completed and published!

Thanks again,

...

Laura Bombier Oct 4

to me

Sounds great thank you!
Laura

Laura Bombier
Social Media Director, Photographer, Survivorman / Les Stroud Productions

m: [redacted] a: Worldwide
s: www.lesstroud.ca e: [redacted]

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