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Faculty Development Grant report: June 2014
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In June 2014, I received a faculty grant to travel to Finland to further a studio project documenting traces of my presence in my current surroundings, childhood home in New England, and now, my mother’s ancestral home in Finland. The work consists of photographing the local flora and placing it into images of my shadow taken as I walk the land.



Images from project already in progress.

My mother, an artist, had always wanted to travel, especially to go back and visit her homeland of Finland but was unable to due to health reasons. As I began to “inherit” her body, it became important to document this in my own travels. I traveled to Helsinki and the rural Purola Farm, Finland, to walk the land and to photograph my shadow and the local flora, using the images to interpret what I think she might have documented as an artist had she been able to return there.



Sample of new images from Finland

The area I was raised in Connecticut was one that many Finns lived in as it replicated the climate and landscape of Finland. While in Finland I recorded what I thought might be the connection between my history and my mother’s in both body and land. I photographed the land surrounding Purola Farm, a farm with the same name as one I grew up in that was run by my relatives in Connecticut.



Voluntown, Connecticut, United States



Saarijärvi, Finland



I also made drawings for prints. As I suspected, the flora of the farm and surrounding area uncannily represented that which I grew up near in rural Connecticut, and I eagerly documented the area.

Questions that were raised as I worked were, did this land feel like “home” to me? Would my mother have been able to walk the same areas with her health or was my record of her projected experience a false one? Was I connected to this land even without direct memory of experience?

Was the experience itself a “shadow one” reinforcing my use of shadow imagery? Would I now have parallel memories of two homes that looked similar? Was this land just “ordinary ground”, or was it somehow sacred?



Voluntown, Connecticut, United States



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Discoveries nearby included a new landscape dissimilar to that of my home such as the Pyhä-Häkki National Forest, with its old growth pines and ancient bogs. This did not represent anything I was familiar with so the realization came that I would also have memories and traces from areas that were uniquely my own. The vast forests devoid of human inhabitants felt enchanted, and walking through them I was reminded of one of the central themes of my own work, that of mystery in the land and the body. I also became aware that although I could barely speak the language, I was constantly mistaken for a Finn, opening up a whole new topic to explore of identity and presence in my work.



Pyhä-Häkki National Forest

I expect these discoveries and questions will expand and be answered as I begin to use the images I gathered, but I have already started to connect the two landscapes and shadow imprints. This piece will reach resolution this coming winter with a installation of the shadow images, and a series of four-color lithographic prints from the images. Working on this project is a parallel to methodology I teach at Otis. The use of trace through photographic means in printmaking, and long-term, researched projects are part of the curriculum in my advanced Printmaking classes. In addition, the method of four-color lithography will be a new one in my Printmaking II class this year; the prints generated from this project will be a source for demonstration in the classroom.

I also traveled to the capital of Finland, Helsinki, and visited local printmaking studios (Helsinki Litho, The Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki) and the Ratamo Printmaking Studio in the small city of Jyväskylä. I reconnected with fellow printmakers from graduate school and met new faculty and master printers working in these shops. Discovering the importance of printmaking in Finland, even in outer lying areas and its support from both the government and educational systems was a revelation to me and one that I will encourage my students to pursue in both residencies and grants.



Travel costs for this critical component of this studio project would have been financially prohibitive for me to undertake without the support of this faculty grant. I am excited to bring the final result to exhibition and to share it with the Otis community.