

Thank you everyone for being here, thank you Rachel for introducing me, let's get into it!

It's finally here: the last time I have to explain my thesis to anyone.

I try to love every part of being alive. Sunburns and headaches and nausea and hangovers are all proof that I was here, and even though the physical aftermath might be painful, it's a reminder of the time I spent jumping off rocks into the river, eating too much ice cream, front row at a house show, at a party where I barely know anyone. My friend Nods once said something that has become my motto: I love this life even when I don't.

However, partially due to a muted adolescent experience thanks to the pandemic, and partly due to my own anxiety, I have often found myself in a state of despair about the world passing me by and the increasing possibility of missing out on those coming-of-age movie moments. As college crept on, the dread worsened, and I realized I really, really, had to do something about it. The problem was I was still scared. I needed a solution. I needed an excuse to live a little.

Last year, at around this time, I was at a basement show with my friend Bean. Between sets, we stood chatting in the alley next to the house, and Bean asked me what I was going to do for my thesis. My eureka moment; everything fell into place. If I made

my thesis about documenting my life, I would have a pretense to actually go out and *do* the things I was afraid of. Of course I did not need a pretense, but I was insane. And so, this project was born: part diary, part documentary, an archival undertaking to go out - or go into the world - with a bang.

The bulk of the photos in this body of work were taken on a Canon ELPH APS camera. APS stands for "Advanced Photo System", a film format first released in 1996 and discontinued just fifteen years later in 2011. Each APS film frame is 24 millimeters in length, rather than the typical 35 millimeters of conventional film. The film canisters mostly come with rolls of 25 exposures, but are also available in rolls of 15 and 40 exposures.

APS cameras themselves are tiny, standing only a couple inches tall and easily transportable in your jacket pocket. I think APS is the best camera in the history of the world. To turn on the camera, you just flick a lever, and the lens opens. You can choose from three different aspect ratios just by flipping a switch on the back of the camera, the film canister has a series of four icons on it and as the film goes through stages - unexposed, partially exposed, fully exposed, and developed - the corresponding icon is highlighted, so you never have to guess if you shot the roll already or not. The "partially exposed" stage is especially cool because APS cameras reroll the film automatically

when you take it out of the camera, and if you put a half-shot roll back in the camera, it *remembers where you left off* and advances to that frame so you can keep shooting. And one of the most unique features of APS is that the camera encodes metadata in a sort of barcode along the film's sprocket holes that gives the printing machine information about each individual frame's exposure, light level, and even the date it was exposed.

Unfortunately, I am one of only a handful of people in the entire world who care about APS at all. Since the film is not manufactured anymore, I can only acquire it by buying rolls off of Ebay, and I have yet to find any film that is less than nineteen years past its expiration date, which makes processing a pain, but what can you do.

While I started this project with the intention of using outdated technology, I had no idea I would even come across anything legitimately obsolete, let alone that it would become the crux of my whole thesis. I had planned on using point-and-shoot digital cameras from my own childhood, though I didn't have a conscious idea of why I wanted that - *but* it turned out that my research backed me up on this choice. More on that later. I asked my mom if she could bring me my childhood camera and she turned up with *four* cameras: two of mine, one digital that was her own from the same period of my childhood, and a mysterious little film camera, again hers, with an unfinished roll of film still inside. She had no clue what might be on that roll, but asked for me to get it

developed, to which I said sure, but no promises on the quality of the photos, since the film was certainly expired. I needed to finish shooting the roll before I could take it out to be developed (or so I thought), so I took a few thoughtless pictures around my apartment. It was when I finished the roll that things started to get interesting.

Given that the demographics in this room are basically all art students and/or people over the age of 25, I assume most of you have seen a roll of film at some point. It's a pretty recognizable item. I had only shot 35mm film before, but I knew there were other formats; medium and large format film canisters are taller than 35, and 110 film is its own strange thing, but both precedent and camera mechanics led me to believe that the film canister I was taking out of this camera would be round.

It was not round.

Cool!

I texted my mom about the small, diamond-shaped canister of Fujifilm I'd just pulled from her camera, and she insisted that this was a normal and common type of film that she used to buy all the time when she used this camera. I told her I had never seen or heard of it before in my life. The canister said 24mm, but some preliminary Googling told me very little about 24mm film. Searching for the type of camera, a Canon ELPH, was similarly unhelpful. The most I could tell was that very few commercial

photo labs develop this type of film, and maybe I would have to ship the roll to Belgium? Luckily, a few weeks later in one of my photography classes, my classmate Sage happened to have several rolls of this exact film with her! She told me that Blue Moon Camera and Machine here in Portland is one of the only places in the *world* that develops this film, but that she hadn't shot the film herself, so she couldn't tell me much about it. That was okay; I had a direction now. I was finally making headway with my mom's Totally Normal Camera.

Blue Moon is a ways away from where I live, so it was a few weeks before I made my way over there. I set my film down on the counter and said "I need to get this developed, and then I need to buy more of it." The guy behind the counter said, "You Can't Do That."

Uh oh!

The guy was actually incredibly helpful. They did in fact develop my film, but he explained to me what APS film is, and that there is not a single film manufacturer on earth that produces it anymore. This was, obviously, a huge blow, but I did feel vindicated in the fact that I had *told* my mom this was not ordinary film. So, you win some, you lose some.

A long time ago I read about a study that scientists did with some species of ape, maybe chimpanzees? It's been a while - where they found that the harder an objective is to achieve, the greater importance the brain assigns to it. Bigger struggle = bigger reward. I think about that study a lot, and I was definitely thinking about it when I turned to Ebay to buy two rolls of APS film, expired in 2006, for thirty-some dollars plus shipping. 200 ISO, too, by the way, which is basically only good for shooting in bright sunlight, and I was buying it in November in Oregon. Luckily, my mom's camera has a flash.

So began my APS adventure. Over the next several months, this became my favorite camera in my growing arsenal. Because of its small size and relative quietness, I tended to use it in more intimate settings, like birthday parties or game night at a friend's house, but it came with me everywhere and shot a bit of everything.

The APS is definitely my favorite, but I did use other cameras throughout this project. I will forever be an analog lover, thank you Sally, but I've come to appreciate the brilliantly saturated colors that digital photography can bring me, as it mirrors what I see in the world. I also used a 35mm Minolta film camera for some of these photos, gifted to me by my mom, who chose the Minolta because it's the camera her brother had and loved growing up. Shooting exclusively in color was not something I'd planned to

do, and I did miss the hands-on experience of developing my own film and prints in the darkroom like I've always done for black and white. It ended up just being a trade-off I was willing to make since I gravitated towards APS so strongly. Additionally, I used a few disposable cameras, sometimes on purpose and sometimes because I was halfway to the coast and realized I'd forgotten to bring my camera.

Next, the video element. I'm not totally sure how the idea came about, to be honest. It feels like it's just always been there, and I guess that is kind of the point. I started recording whenever me and my partner and maybe some friends would go on walks at night. I did my best every time to hold the camera at chest height and turn it whenever I turned my head, trying to capture the scene through my eyes as accurately as possible. Originally I wanted to use the actual camcorder from my childhood, but I guess it's long gone, so my dad loaned me a cassette video camera from the middle school he works at. The cassette tape only held an hour of footage at a time, so after every walk, I had to sit down and transfer the footage. Which was. A hideous process. In order to digitize the tape recordings, I had to connect the camcorder to a laptop via a firewire cable, and like all beautiful feats of photo/video technology, firewire ports were discontinued from the last laptops in 2011. Seven-year-old Carter should've been hoarding APS film and firewire cables. Because of this hurdle, I had to transfer the tape

footage to my dad's ancient, inch-thick Windows XP laptop, which is actually quite a sight to behold with its 360-degree rotating screen and built-in stylus. The footage could only be uploaded to Windows Moviemaker in painstakingly small increments, about fifteen minutes of footage at a time, and it went about as quickly as you remember Windows XP running. Each of the five recordings that made the final cut of the video took around three days to digitize in full. I tried my best not to acknowledge the camcorder while filming, but the people I was with couldn't help but address it, and I ended up not minding that. In general, all of my cameras became more active participants than I expected whenever other people were involved.

The painting serves as kind of a retroactive photograph. I tried to always have a camera on hand throughout the year, but those "I wish I had my camera with me" moments still slipped through. Two of my favorite painters, Doron Langberg and Alice Miller, are known for their incredible command over color and light, and I definitely take inspiration from them in my exaggerated color palettes. If my photography has been a labor of love, painting is a labor of love-hate for me. I am not a patient person when it comes to art and can only really work on something for about two hours max before I have to go take a walk. But it's very fulfilling to create something from nothing, and I know I can always make a painting replicate what I saw in my mind in ways that a

camera might not be able to capture. Painting will always be a part of my artistic practice, but maybe I take a hiatus after this one.

The one hundred and forty five photos on the walls here are undoubtedly the heart and soul of my thesis. As I mentioned earlier, I knew from the start that I wanted to use outdated tech for this project, but I couldn't quite articulate why. I didn't give too much thought to the research component of thesis during my proposal semester, but since then I have gone down many fascinating rabbit holes about snapshot photography, the family unit, and the sociological connotations of digital versus analog.

Photographs have obviously been important devices for recalling memories for as long as the art form has existed. But in the fine art world, they seem to lose that utility a little bit in favor of appealing to an audience, either aesthetically or informationally. I love that type of photography too, and I partake in it, but for my thesis, I wanted to do something a little bit different. Thesis is supposed to be self-indulgent anyways, and in art school it can be hard to find the time for that sort of thing. Rather than engage in the more formal side, I decided to dig into the world of snapshot photography.

This was the breakthrough I needed to start caring about the research part of this whole project. I began my investigation in the realm of home video. I was curious about the recent rise of what has been deemed "analog nostalgia" and what we got out of

camcorders that our phones aren't giving us now. What I learned reflected my own reasons for preferring film photography to digital. Of course, my findings came in the form of qualitative data and carry a level of subjectivity, but the general sociological consensus seems to go back to those monkeys I mentioned earlier. Home video began in the form of the Super-8 camera and was, overall, a big hassle. The journey from Point A - the moment - to Point Z - watching the video - was arduous and time consuming. Super-8 is from the 50s, but even half a century later in the era of the cassette video camera I used for this project, archiving the tape footage was quite the ordeal. The effort required made the end result more meaningful.

And throughout that whole time period, from the 50s to the aughts, this was a family affair. Everyone would gather in the living room to watch their home video, again and again over the years. I personally have memories of being a child and watching home movies of my sister and I as babies on our boxy CRT TV. This was the case for photography, too, even before video. In 1888, Kodak introduced the box camera, the first camera marketed toward the general public rather than photographers. Kodak's advertisement strategy focused on families, encouraging people to "celebrate the moments of your life." Home videos and photos before the digital age also took up physical space in the world. The storage of photos became a cultural practice in itself, in

the form of photo albums. Transmuting memories into objects in this way compounded their importance. The current wave of analog nostalgia is at least partially motivated by the feeling that the sheer amount of photos and videos each person has is cheapened by ease of access and their intangibility. It's no wonder that I had the urge to counter that emptiness by using analog technology to document my experiences with as much feeling as possible.

The actual content of this body of work didn't change much from what I had planned in my proposal, but the concept has evolved some. Originally, like I said at the beginning, I wanted to use my thesis as a reason to go out and do spectacular things. I wanted to go stargazing in the desert, sing karaoke, take a road trip. Unfortunately, I have very disciplined friends. Everyone is in their last year of college, everyone is busy, no one has time to go camping with me. I didn't have time to go camping either, but I wouldn't have let that stop me. In any case, the subject matter of my thesis became less aspirational. I started looking at what was around me. I have loved watching the seasons change. I started to think every day was the most beautiful day of my life. Not to say that I didn't go out with my friends at all - obviously I did. But I ended up finding fulfillment in the life I already have rather than trying to grasp at something that's out of my reach. I started giving equal importance to *every* aspect of life. And as this was the craziest,

busiest semester of my time here, the photos on these walls became little pins in the map, reminding me I was here, I saw the way the afternoon light hit the siding on that house, and it was good.

I do believe these kinds of photographs can make people feel something even if they have no personal connection to the subject matter, because that's how I got into this genre in the first place. Olivia Bee is the first photographer whose work really sparked something for me. Specifically, her photo book "Kids in Love," which is a collection of photos she took as a teenager. The work is so genuine - she wasn't "a photographer" yet; the photos were for herself only. Polaroids of her friends jumping on a trampoline in the backyard. A close-up of someone's pony bead bracelet. An underexposed shot of a rainbow through the trees. The kind of pictures everybody takes. But when she started posting her photos on the internet platform Flickr, they blew up. Something Bee saw in those shots resonated with countless strangers. And that's why I felt confident about making such a self-indulgent, personal body of work for my thesis. I think there's something that everyone is searching for in life, and you can see it in photos like these. Maybe I felt the void a little more strongly than most people, but I think on some level it's universal. We're all looking for wonderful things.