

FALL 2011 / Abstract – Armon A. Means: Photographic Research in Art / Design

I seek funding to support efforts in new mounting techniques in the areas of photography and graphic design. This proposal addresses the purchasing of a cold – mount press and supporting materials.

Cold - mounting has become the accepted method of presentation for much of the imagery seen in the industries of photography and graphic design. It has also been adapted for fine – arts usage in the photographic medium. It allows for a seamless “framing” of images to be permanently / archivally sealed between two sheets of substrate (Plexiglas, glass or acrylic) or archivally mounted to a substrate (board, acid free materials, etc). This allows for a frameless image, protected by the substrate to be mounted and handled in the same manner as traditionally 2-D objects. Currently there are production houses that perform the process, which generally work with the design, advertising and marketing industries (though not accessible within our area).

FALL 2011 / Grant Activity – Armon A. Means: Photographic Research in Art / Design

ACTIVITY:

I seek funding to support my efforts in new digital and cold-mounting techniques in the area of photography. It would be a benefit to my work and the artistic studio program and history at CCU for the following reasons.

Benefits to my own research efforts:

In the past my images have been produced and commissioned without a protective layer knowing that they are susceptible to environmental issues, this would allow for permanent and secure production of these images. The cold-mounting press would also allow me to continue producing the type of work, for which I have become known, but also begin exploring new areas in which the process can be beneficial. That same

work would be viewed as being in the forefront of artists using the process consistently and helping to establish it as a more common practice in the field.

The average cost for cold-mounting photographs in this manner is \$350 per image for a 30"x30" image: this cost would be eliminated, outside of the purchasing of adhesive materials once depleted. The nearest facilities for production of cold-mounted or face - mounted images are outside of our region in New York, California, Phoenix, Denver, Seattle (few other major cities), this means the cost and logistics of transporting and shipping would be also be eliminated.

CCU would be one of the only universities in the United States to have the capability to do the cold-mount process in-house (according to current research). The increasing demand for the process and our subsequent use of, would draw attention to the photography and graphic design programs and thereby other programs as well primarily in the area of visual arts. Use of the technique will also be viewed in the forefront of photographic and digital image production in the arts and graphic design. In the classroom the usage of the press will be built in as an instructional method in photography and design, students would then have access to the equipment allowing for wider usage and in preparation for a career in the industry utilizing this unique skill. Workshops / Visiting scholars in the art department could have access the equipment in a supervised capacity creating a new niche for CCU in the arts community as a whole

ACTIVITY SIGNIFICANCE:

In the current field of contemporary photography there is a large focus on the production and presentation of images as works of fine art as seen through their final state in exhibition. Each year new processes are being used and there is once again an active discussion within the field surrounding photography's relationship to painting; but that conversation is also active in sculpture and the digital arts. The debate has long centered on the surface, which painting has so often

relied, but also its ability to address issues of two-dimensionality while referring either directly or indirectly to a three-dimensional object. This is often seen through the aggressive and specific use of the paint as a dense material on the surface of the canvas. The texture begins to form an actual plane of space where depth, light and shadow all have presence. It is this same debate that enters into the area of sculpture, which already exists as three-dimensional objects. As other forms of art began to engage the idea of creating physical space, largely by dealing with flat objects meant to be viewed on a wall, they were generally thought of as sculptural. Frequently, the intent of the artist was to maintain the existence of these works in the discipline or manner in which they were created (such as through painting). The discourse focuses on whether the work relies on traits more common to that particular medium (e.g.; painted surfaces, line weight color, patterning and form). The argument was whether the fact that something has thickness or depth that relates to a creation of physical space, should immediately classify it as sculpture.

This discussion was sufficiently laid to rest by the 1990s and painters in particular, had successfully begun to create forms that were once classified as sculpture. Due to its inherent lack of a surface beyond the photographic paper, photography was isolated to two-dimensions. Its solution was to deal with an implied surface as seen through the textures and forms implied by the camera lens and translated into the final image. There was also a secondary solution, an increase in size / scale. For many years the photograph was thought of as a simple vehicle of documentation and was most often seen on the walls of one's home or tucked away in photo albums. Shortly prior to the 90s, photographers began to deal with large-scale imagery in order to force the viewer to question size and become absorbed by what began as the implied texture of the subject and led to the actual texture / surface of the image. A simple strategy of size would force the viewer to look at the photograph and engage it as an object, thereby recognizing its presence as a three-dimensional work. Over a ten-year span this would prove to be a successful strategy

for the medium, but the inevitable question was how the images were presented. Behind glass and frame, the textures were still separated from the viewer and understood as traditional photographs; unframed, they were left to the flaws inherent within the photographic material. The answer to this question emerged in two forms. First, photography borrowed processes from the advertising world, mount the images to glass or acrylic and back lighted them so that their appearance became like large-scale displays or kiosk images. While acceptable, that solution also meant that images had to be produced on special substrates that were suited for rear illumination and could only be viewed in site specific locations, removing many possibilities for variation in exhibition and presentation. The second answer came with the emergence of digital photography. Professional photographers became willing to use forms of digital output, and the surfaces of those new media were more resilient and forgiving, though production was often difficult. Without the ability to work on a large - scale or with compounds (pigments and ink) suited for archival production, professional digital labs sprang up across the country. Often the expense of producing objects swelled to such levels that artists could not afford or justify any significant use of the processes without substantial financial backing.

It was also this rise of digital printing studios that clouded the field of photography. Were the pieces digitally produced or traditional photographs and what defined the two and separated the works of fine artists from amateurs? These questions persist within the photographic medium and is compounded by the use of digital cameras and editing software such as Photoshop. Does the use of these processes define the classification of the final image or is the distinction left to the aims of the photographer? These are the question that much of my recent research has sought to answer.

In the arena of student involvement the cold-mount process would be a technique with which very few students nationwide would have a functioning knowledge. Both upper level graphic

design and photography courses would utilize the cold – mounting press. Graphic design students would gain a deeper understanding of template and output in regards to customer product options in signage and image presentation from both an industry and consumer perspective. This also allows for a further experimentation by the Graphic Design majors exhibits by giving them another mode of display and physical manipulation of the exhibition space. In photography students would use the press in courses such Critical Theory and Practice, Digital Photographic Techniques II and Studio Lighting. They would utilize the process to explore how a new method of presentation allows for a new mode of viewing and interpretation. While this relationship between artist and audience is long established, this process would allow the viewer to relate to the work without a frame and with direct contact to the environment in a manner much different from their usual connection to the photographic world and the perceived connection to the “protected work.” The process and its inherent possibilities places the students in the contemporary context of the photographic medium in practice which is then supported by many of the same theoretical concepts in class.

ACTIVITY PLAN / BENEFITS:

By working digitally a mass of resources and advantages become available - production speed, cost and quality are all areas of benefit for digital processes. As the demand for equipment changes, there is often a significant initial cost but in the larger scheme the lack of purchasing additional materials is a positive for the digital arena. The cost of computers has continued to lower as technology has improved. The ability of cameras to shoot at much higher quality is a recent development, as they have begun to use what was once professional grade technology in more traditional digital camera body types. Also as digital techniques have improved we have found ways to utilize traditional photographic processes through a digital “adapter,” and bring back much of the photographic-based language that was lost in digital output materials. By instructing

students in the usage of these processes we increase awareness and strength of our program by better preparing them for the workforce.

In presentation the final work has been transformed by using these new digital techniques. The cold-mounting process is a new method in photography by which the frame is removed and the image is archivally adhered to a transparent or opaque substrate. When applied on both sides of the image it becomes sealed between the protectant and still remains almost directly in touch with its environment and is allowed to interact with the spaces in which it is viewed. At a large-scale there is a direct correlation to the photograph as object, now seen outside of the traditional viewing format. The process is performed by only a few professional labs and individuals throughout the country due to its startup cost and specific equipment needs; as such the cost of production for a single piece is extremely high.

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FUNDING INFORMATION:

I am currently in my first semester at Coastal Carolina University and have not applied for or received grant funding.

Extramural Funding:

University Supported Funding: \$500

Total Extramural Funds: \$500

FALL 2011 / Grant Budget – Armon A. Means: Photographic Research in Art / Design

The following items are budgeted based on options for materials and categorized according to equipment or material type:

Equipment (priced based on CODA Finishing Products, the only dealer found for cold-mounting equipment / www.codamount.com):

Cold-Mounting Laminator:

54" Motorized Laminator & supporting equipment – \$4,395

Materials (priced based on CODA Finishing Products, most affordable materials):

Cold-Mount Pressure Sensitive – Double Release Adhesive (varies based on size):

54"x200' - \$491

Shipping cost for equipment (as quoted by CODA)

Estimated costs - \$200* - \$350 (differential based on items purchased / shipped)

Total (based on bolded* items and stand-alone items): \$5,086

Budget sheet shows materials from CODA, note some pricing and un-listed equipment information quoted directly from Coda Sales Department - 201-825-7400.

Extramural Funding:

University Supported Funding: \$500

Total Extramural Funds: \$500

Requested Funding (Extramural Funding subtracted from Budget Pricing)

TOTAL: \$4,586