

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Environmental Preservation Through Photographic Recreation

Studying the Photography of Ansel Adams and Allen Smith in a Modern Context

1. Proposal Narrative

A. Abstract

Ansel Adams and Allen Smith, my grandfather, are two mid-20th century photographers whose careers focused on photographing the landscapes of the American West to promote environmental preservation and our National Parks. For this project I plan to recreate 10 of their photographs taken in National Parks. My recreations will reflect current photographic technology and changes in the landscape over the decades. To complete this project I will study the photographic styles, historic techniques, and equipment used by Ansel Adams and Allen Smith. In the summer of 2019, I will travel to three National Parks (Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Yosemite) to recreate their original photographs. Given the nature of this work, it is essential that I travel to the exact locations of the historic photographs. When I return to La Crosse fall 2019, I will create framed prints and exhibit them on campus. I am requesting \$2,000, which will cover a portion of my travel, photographic materials, and a stipend. I see this project as the start of a larger portfolio that I will continue working on for years to come, and use to apply to Artist-in-Residency programs with the National Parks.

B. Background/Statement of the Problem/Significance of the Project

“It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government to save the environment.”

-Ansel Adams

Ansel Adams lived from 1902-1984 and spent his career photographing the American landscape. He continues to be one of the most well known photographers and environmentalists. The other photographer I will be studying in this project is Allen Smith, who created his photography in the style of Ansel Adams. Their works share similar techniques and styles.

In order to study the work of these two photographers, I will travel to three National Parks (Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Yosemite) to recreate 10 of their photographs. In addition I will create my own original work on the trip to document my experience and build my portfolio. Allen Smith grew up in American West, and a lot of his work was created in that area. Studying the work of Allen Smith in addition to that of Ansel Adams is personally motivating for me. My connection to the work will also be an interesting narrative element for the viewers of my final exhibition.

I am interested in Ansel Adams as a photographer because of his contributions to the field of photography as a whole. One of Ansel Adams largest contributions to photography is the Zone System (see appendix 2). Adams developed the zone system to render a dynamic range of light in black and white photography. As photography curriculum has shifted to favor digital and color techniques, the Zone System has fallen out of practice. For this project I will study and master the Zone System, which will be a necessary technique to recreating the historic photographs, and greatly benefit my work.

Environmentalism is another part of this project. Through his work Adams promoted the care and maintenance of the natural world and National Parks. Sadly, I feel that sense of care and

wonder for the environment is dwindling in my generation. I hope, in some small way, my project will revitalize awareness about the beauty and preciousness of our environment amongst my peers. To this end, I will be specifically looking for and documenting changes in the landscape since the mid-twentieth century. One major candidate is the Adams photograph *Jeffrey Pine* (see appendix 1 for image). Due to vandalism and drought, the tree in this scene died and fell down. This is just one example of changing landmarks in the National Parks that I will examine and include in my project and exhibition.

This project can not be accomplished by simply staying in La Crosse and reading about the Zone System and other historic photographic techniques. In order to truly understand these techniques, I will need to study them out in the world. The completion of this project is largely site specific. I am unable to recreate these landscape photos without traveling to the specific locations they were taken. Finally, a large part of the reason Ansel Adams produced photography in the National Parks was to keep people caring about these places. I want my work to continue with that intention. Ultimately, I see this project as the start of a much longer-term and larger portfolio that I will continue working on for years, and use to apply to Artist-in-Residency programs, where artists reside in the Parks for an average of 2 weeks to a whole summer, the mission of which is to have artists create works focusing on the National Parks.

C. Objectives / Specific Aims

1. Gain a better understanding of photographic styles, equipment, and techniques of Ansel Adams and Allen Smith.
 - a. Studying the Zone System of Ansel Adams.
2. Create an exhibition of 10 large scale photographs to share with the UWL community

3. Spark dialogue about changing landscape, preservation of National Parks, and changing technology

D. Methods

During summer 2019, I will take a 2 week trip to specific scouted locations in Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Yosemite National Parks to recreate photographs. I have time set aside for this trip in the last weeks of May and the first few days of June. I will camp at National Parks and hike to photograph locations. For example, one photograph I will recreate is Adams' *Monolith, the Face of Half Dome* (see appendix 1 for image). From Ansel Adams' own writing in his book Examples: The Making of 40 Photographs¹ I know that this photograph was taken from a point called the "Diving Board." I have looked up this location and calculated that this hike will take me all day in and out. Then, using similar research methods for calculating hiking times, finding locations, and researching the techniques used to create the images, I will recreate the other photographs I have selected as well. It is going to be harder to find locations of Allen Smith's images, the one clue I have are his photographic journals. My tentative list of photographs to recreate is as follows:

1. *Monolith, the Face of Half Dome, Yosemite* by Ansel Adams
2. *Jeffrey Pine, Yosemite* by Ansel Adams
3. *Bridal Veil Falls, Yosemite* by Ansel Adams
4. *Vernal Falls, Yosemite* by Ansel Adams
5. *Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite* by Ansel Adams
6. *Tetons and Snake River, Grand Teton* by Ansel Adams
7. *Cumulus over Mountain, Grand Teton* by Allen Smith

¹ Adams, Ansel. *Examples: The Making of 40 Photographs*. Little, Brown and Company, 1983.

8. *Mountains in Grand Teton, Grand Teton* by Allen Smith

9. *Mammoth Hot Spring, Yellowstone* by Allen Smith

10. *Old Faithful, Yellowstone* by Ansel Adams

While traveling, I will keep a journal of the places I go and methods of photography I used to create my photographs. I'll also use this journal to keep references of the photographs I will be studying and notes on techniques and methods for nature photography.

Once I return to UWL in the fall, I will print the photographs I took over the course of my trip to create pieces for exhibition. I plan to take an independent study in photography to have access to and time in the photo studio to develop, process, print, and frame my work for exhibition.

E. Final Products and Dissemination

I will produce an exhibition of recreated and original photographs, as well as my documentation and field notes of the journey. This exhibit will travel to different places on campus. I plan to exhibit at the following places: the Student Art Gallery in the Center for the Arts, Murphy Library, the Student Union, and the Annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research. With this wide variety of locations, my work will reach a broad audience of many students and community members in La Crosse. In addition to my exhibit, I will give an artist talk about my work to my photography class. I will also enter selected prints into the All Student Juried Art Show, held annually in the UWL Art Gallery.

F. Budget justification

Due to the nature of this project, the equipment I need to transport, and the distance from affordable airports, I plan to travel by driving my own vehicle to decrease the overall costs. I

worked with the URC office to determine this as the best mode of transportation. Because I need to be close to the locations that I am studying, camping in the parks will be critical to my project. Due to budget constraints, I am not requesting a per diem for food. I will also provide roughly \$2,710 worth of equipment for this project.

Budget/Requested Funds:

Item	Qty	Each	Total
Scholarship	01	\$601	\$601
4,000 miles by \$0.58/mile is \$2,320*	01	\$480	\$480
Campground Fees (at National Parks)	14 nights	\$40	\$560
Roll of 24"x100' Premium Luster Photo Paper	01	\$89	\$89
MCS Large Format Poster Frames, 24" x 36"	10	\$19	\$190
Crescent Decorative Matboard-White	10	\$8	\$80
Total			\$2,000

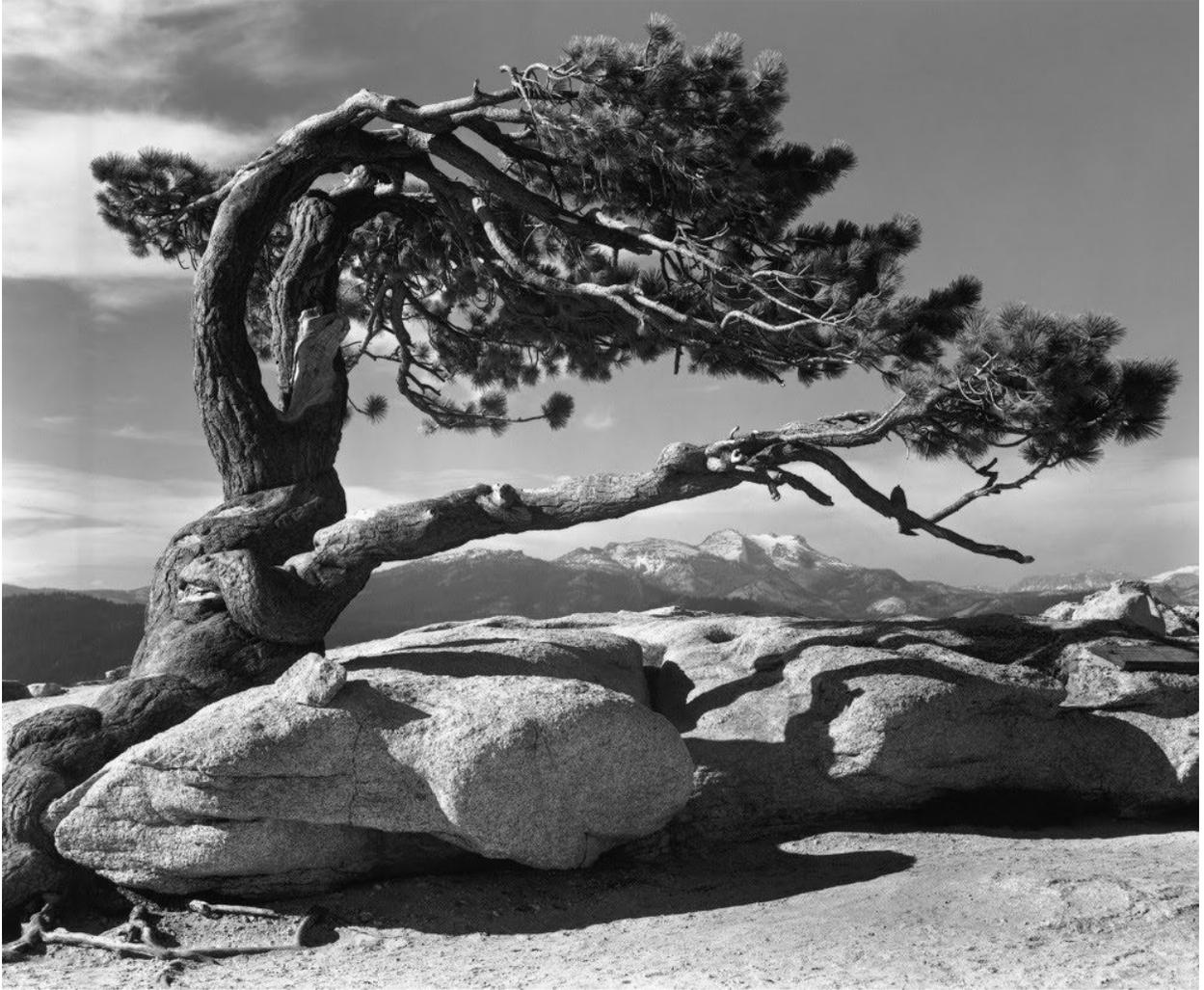
*Requesting \$480 for gas due to budget constraints, additional gas will be supported out of personal funds.

Self Funded and/or Sourced Equipment, Supplies & Fees:

- **CAMERA EQUIPMENT & SOFTWARE:** Olympus OM-D E-M1 Micro Four Thirds Mirrorless Camera (\$1300), Olympus M.Zuiko Digital 17mm f/1.8 Lens (\$400), Lensbaby Velvet 56mm F/1.6 Lens (\$450), M.Zuiko ED 40-150mm F4.0-5.6 Lens (\$100), Olympus M.Zuiko 45mm 1.8 lens (\$300), Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom Licence (\$19.99/month for 8 months)
- **PRINTER & INK:** Because I will be enrolled in a photo studio course in Fall 2019, I will have access to the Photo Lab printers and ink to complete the printing of this project.

Appendix 1

*Note: At this time, I do not have good digital reproductions of Allen Smith's photograph. As part of this project, I intend to make high resolution scans of his negatives.



Jeffrey Pine, Sentinel Dome, Yosemite National Park, California, 1940 by Ansel Adams



Monolith, the Face of Half Dome, Yosemite National Park, California, 1927 by Ansel Adams

Ansel Adams' Zone System

Zone	Tone	Description
0	0	Pure black.
I	026	Black with slight tonality but no texture.
II	051	Black with texture: the darkest area of the image in which a slight detail is recorded.
III	077	Dark gray with little texture.
IV	102	Dark gray with texture: dark foliage, dark stone or landscape shadows.
V	128	Middle gray (18%): dark skin.
VI	153	Light gray: Caucasian skin, shadows on snow in sunny landscapes.
VII	179	Light gray: very light skin, shadows in the snow with strong side lighting.
VIII	204	White with texture: textured snow.
IX	230	White without texture: overcast sky, glaring snow.
X	255	Pure white: light sources and specular reflections.