

Adam Crosson – *Haptic Recordings: The Body Eyes*

Galveston Arts Center, 2020

www.galvestonartscenter.org/adam-crosson



➤ About this Exhibition

Haptic Recordings: The Body Eyes, is a collection of work created by the artist Adam Crosson while exploring the lower Mississippi River near his home in Louisiana. The work examines the relationship between humanity and coastal areas. Though it was produced in the Mississippi River Delta region, this work brings together ideas both from within and beyond this territory, similar to how the river itself feeds into and out of neighboring areas through tributary streams and its eventual flowing out into the Gulf of Mexico.

The exhibition includes videos, sculptures, and black and white images made using two kinds of unusual photographic processes. The first involved the artist constructing a series of large, complex pinhole cameras to capture multiple facets of the terrain around the Mississippi's *oxbow lakes*—curved waterways that were once the river's mainstream before erosion, soil deposits, and human engineering changed the river's course. The other set of images makes use of waste and debris that he gathered from the river's banks and used to produce *photograms*—images made by arranging objects directly onto light-sensitive paper. Finally, the exhibit includes a group of sculptures influenced by the shapes of the cameras and textured with sand and sediment from the riverbed itself.

Through this work, the artist's stated intent is to draw attention to the way both water and human actions shape the coastal area over the years, centuries, and millennia.

"...everything is always already being lost. The reliance on photography, then, is an effort to capture not that transition, but the experience of being present in the flow of time."

– Joanna Zylinska, *Nonhuman Photograph*

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➤ Discussion and Discovery

Understanding key terms

Photography can refer to any process that produces lasting images by manipulating materials that sense light, either digitally or chemically. The name comes from the Greek words *phōtos* meaning “light” and *graphé* meaning “to represent with lines.” In other words, photography means “to draw with light”

Pinhole camera – a primitive kind of camera, made from a darkened box with a small aperture (or opening) through which light can pass, projecting the image of an external scene onto a light-sensitive material inside.

A **Photogram** is a picture produced with photographic materials, such as light-sensitive paper, but no camera.

Prompts for discussion or writing

Presentation—the way an artist’s work is displayed in a gallery, impacts how it is experienced by the viewer.

- ◇ Look at how Adam Crosson chose to present this work; how is it different from the way photographs are usually displayed? What is the effect?

Subject—the things you can identify in a work of art, can include objects, people, and places, but also physical properties like light and dark values, shapes and colors. In abstract art, the physical properties play a larger role.

- ◇ Are the subjects in these works of art easy to identify or do they seem mysterious and vague? Do you think photography can be abstract? How?

Medium—the material(s) used to create a work of art, can affect the way we think about the subject.

- ◇ This exhibition is part of FotoFest, an international photography festival, yet it includes sculptures and other 3-D objects. How do the sculptures relate to the photographic work?
- ◇ The artist chose to use two **low-tech** kinds of photography. How would it change the exhibition if he had used digital photography? How would digital photography have changed the way he interacted with the subject?

Artistic Intent—why an artist creates the work the way they do. Adam Crosson must have had a reason for taking such an unusual approach to photographing the Mississippi River region

- ◇ How do these photographs compare to other pictures of waterways that you have seen, such as on a postcard?
- ◇ Why do you think he used trash to make the photograms? How do you think those materials got into the river?
- ◇ What changes do you think are caused by human activity, compared to natural change?

Activity: *Sediment Jar*—It’s time to grab a spoon and head outside! You will also need a clear container with a lid.

- Collect several samples of soil, sand, or mud from different places in your yard or neighborhood and mix.
- Add water to the container until it covers the soil. Shake it up to simulate the flow of a river and then wait for all the material to settle. It may take up to an hour for everything to come to stillness.
- Note what sank to the bottom or floated to the top. Is there anything in there that surprises you or doesn’t belong in nature?
- Make up a short story to explain how a grain of soil, or something in it, got to the place where you found it.

➤ Artistic Exploration and Practice

Photography Fundamentals

People have been capturing images on light-sensitive materials in various ways for over 200 years, and it's something you can easily do at home with common art supplies.

Estimated time: 30 minutes to construct; one week for the final results

Materials Needed

- Construction paper (*the cheaper the better!*)
- Transparent tape (i.e., Scotch tape)
- Dark-colored paper or single-ply cardboard (such as from a cereal box)
- Scissors
- Interesting flat objects (leaves, string, wire, puzzle pieces, pop-can tabs...)
- A bright window that gets direct sunlight

Construction paper tends to fade over time when exposed to direct sunlight, so we will use this as our light-sensitive surface to create our photogram. Use your construction paper as your background.

Instructions

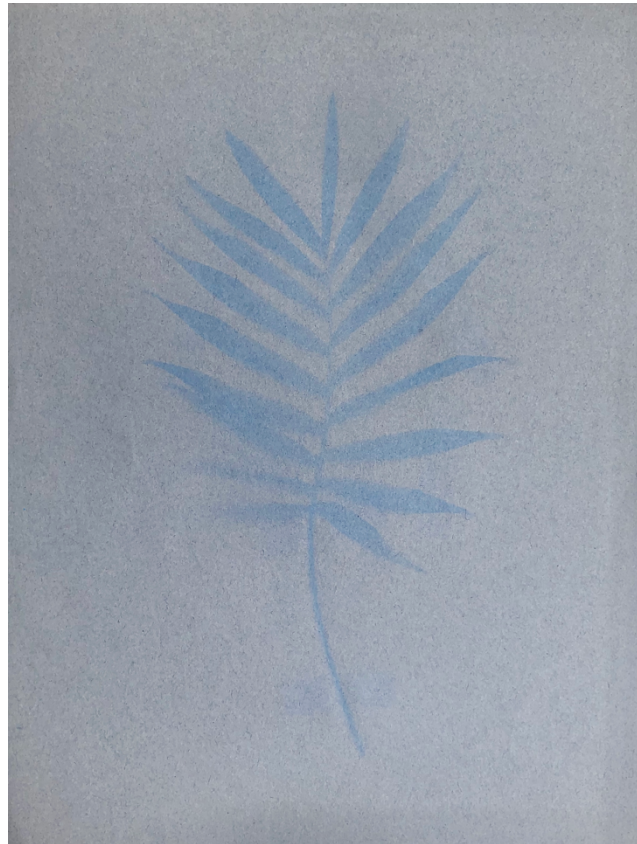
1. Cut out a variety of interesting small shapes from your extra dark paper or thin cardboard with your scissors. These can look like specific shapes or can be abstract.
2. Arrange the small shapes on your construction paper until you like the image you've created. You may also use any flat objects while composing your image - leaves, string, etc.
3. Once your arrangement is complete, use the scotch tape to hold your shapes and objects in-place. If your tape isn't 100% transparent, fold the tape and tack down the shapes from underneath. You are going to want to tack down any curling edges, otherwise light may get through.
4. Find a sunny window; direct sunlight is best. Tape the paper to the window image-side-out. Be sure to tape down all 4 sides to ensure the paper is flat against the window.
5. Depending on the sunlight, your paper should sit in the window for about one week. For even better results, allow a few extra days.
6. After the week has passed, remove your paper from the window and carefully remove all of the tape, shapes, and other objects.

Finally! Your photogram is complete. If your construction paper got a lot of sun, you should have a high-contrast image on your paper, and your own work of art!

Storage and protection of your photograms

Your paper is still light-sensitive, so store your photograms out of direct sunlight. For absolute protection, store them in a portfolio or a folder, or display them in a frame with UV-resistant glass.

Example



➤ **Additional Resources**

Artist's official website adamcrosson.com

Vocabulary terms from the exhibition title and official description

- **haptic** – relating to the sense of touch and awareness of one's position and movement in space
- **littoral spaces** – areas situated on the shore of a body of water.
- **alluvial plain** – a mostly flat landform created by the sediment deposited over a long period of time by one or more rivers coming from highland regions.
- **constellate** – to gather together into a cluster or group
- **anthropogenic** – originating from human activity
- **hydrological** – having to do with the movement and properties of water