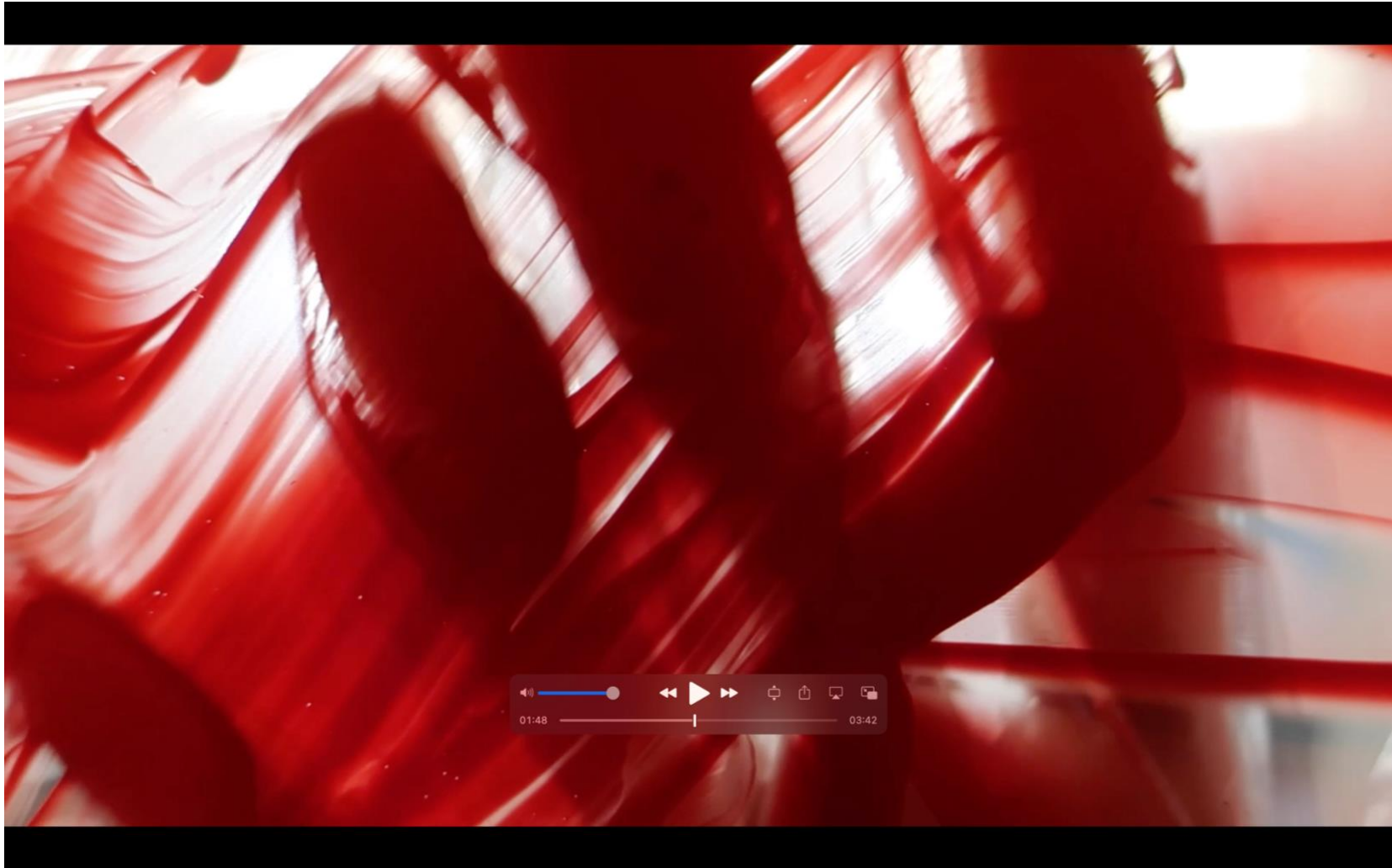# Recurring Horror

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Integrative Project, 2022 – 2023

Artist Statement

Recurring horror is a video installation that visualizes the foreboding of the unconscious self. The installation explores the emotional feeling of these recurring dreams through a 2-channel experimental film, using non-linear narrative, repeating motives, and abstraction. The imagery is intended to evoke feelings of anxiety and paranoia rather than visual depictions of my nightmares.

Recurring Horror, single channel video, duration: 2 minutes

Video link: https://youtu.be/ZRKkl65iz2Y
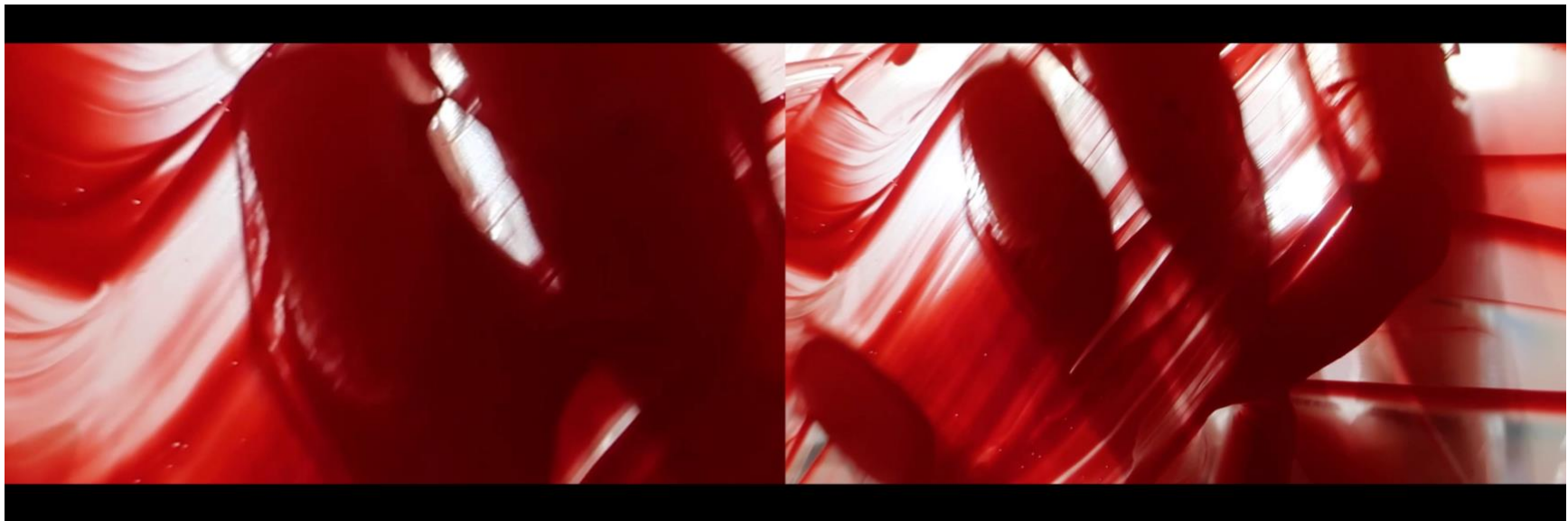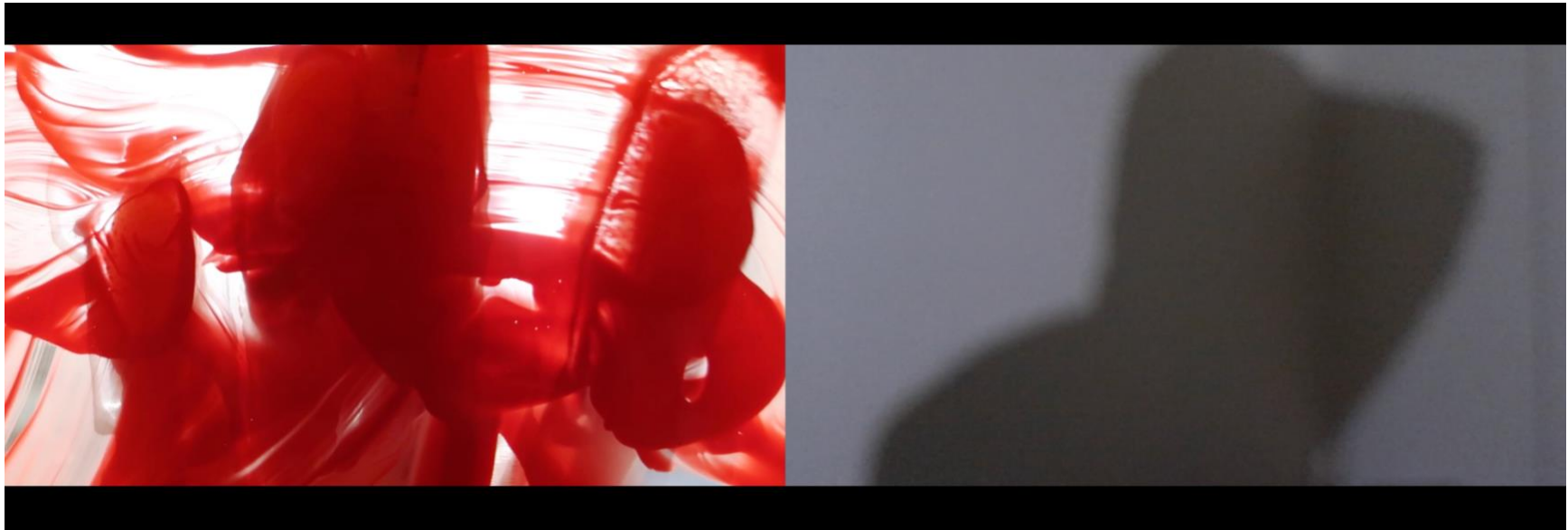
Art/Design Precedents

Stan Brakhage, *Dog Star Man*, 1961-64

Throughout the course of the semester, my artistic process and experimentation was necessary for the successful completion of my project because I'm not a film maker. As a painter and fibers/textile artist, my expertise lies primarily in these traditional mediums, making the digital realm a somewhat challenging and unfamiliar territory for me. But I believed I could take on this challenge and learn throughout the semester. I was inspired by experimental filmmakers, like Stan Brakhage, because they made the medium seem more approachable. Brakhage himself was a novice in film and editing during his early works, and was limited by the scarcity of materials available to him. I felt that with my abundance of resources, I could take on a similar challenge.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb5Ko_sTwlc

Francisco Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters,* 1799

This piece is from Francisco Goya's *Los Caprichos* series. He incorporates many disturbing and violent images, but I was drawn to this one specifically because of the content. When first looking at the piece, I notice the many eyes- eyes of the owls, the cat on the ground, and I'm noticing what they're looking towards. Some look at the figure, while others are looking directly at the viewer. Goya made a lot of work surrounding his own mental health and this piece may resemble his struggles with mental health. The mass of birds could symbolize the overwhelming feeling he may have been feeling at the time. The birds have an aggressive look and seem to be attacking the figure. The figure may even represent himself. This etching technique compliments the concept so well, it's chaotic and expressive.

I want to portray a concept but in a more discrete, thought-provoking image. I appreciate the creativity and imagery Goya included to make this piece complicated. I want my piece to be abstract so the viewer can interpret it in their own way. What I enjoy about Goya's work is that I could relate it to my own experiences and make sense of it, even if that wasn't his exact intention behind the etching. His subject matter is relatable to a broad audience but still individual to his own life. Which makes me wonder how I can replicate similar aspects of Goya's process into my own. How can I use mark making to express my concept? How will my paint application affect the mood of the video? How do I convey mood in a space that I can't fully control?

Interdisciplinary Research

Source 1:

McNamara, Patrick. *An Evolutionary Psychology of Sleep and Dreams*. Westport: Praeger, 2004. (pg. 142-148)

From chapter 9, called *Theories of REM Dreams*, a portion focuses on the content of dreams and the potential function of them. McNamara states that dream content has value, it is not random. Dreams are derived from past experiences, but aren't recreated, they are "cognitively creative". There is another argument that dreams perform a mindless train of thought cycle and are hard to articulate due to this common form of dreaming. McNamara believes dreams have a deep connection to one's emotions. Dreams problem solve, and these dreams dealing with emotional concerns are more easily recalled after waking. After reading many of the studies, the theory that dreams hold no value is false.

I found this text very interesting because of how often it connected to my project/concept. Many of the questions I have been asking myself during the research phase of our project were about the content of my dreams. Do they have any value or is this pattern just a coincidence? McNamara mentioned many convincing studies that prove dreams aren't random and do connect to our personal experiences and current emotions. Many of my recurring nightmares have drawn back to anxiety in some way or another. My anxiety is triggering this nightmare pattern. After reading this text, I think it could be helpful to visualize my dreams in my painting. I've been dream journaling to help me remember my dreams, which allows me to walk through the scenario and make sense of them. I also need to consider context. Knowing that dreams come from past experiences and change due to cognitive creativity, I could take pieces of my dreams and include them in my painting- possibly distorting them, resembling that dream-like quality. They don't necessarily need to fit together either, since dreams take on a mindless train of thought story line. This research gave me the reassurance to dig deeper into the visual elements of my dreams since there could possibly be meaning (or metaphors) lying within them.

Source 2:

Moorcroft, William H. *Understanding Sleep and Dreaming*. Berlin: Springer, 2015. (pg. 141-145)

From *Understanding Sleep and Dreaming*, I focused on Part III, *Dreams and Dreaming*. Moorcroft describes dreams as being private, we are the ones that can experience them- which makes them difficult to study and find conclusions for. People often leave out parts of their dreams that they can't recall, almost everyone experiences dreams and can't recall the full dream. Scientists cannot be sure of a person's description of a dream because it can be fragmented and biased. Moorcroft mentions that dream content cannot be easily influenced, it is unique to every person. Since the content cannot be influenced, this makes it difficult to study dreams because there is no control or accuracy when it comes to dream recall. All this frustration of collecting data from dreams made people reluctant to conduct studies to find out what dreams are all about. That was until REMS were discovered and scientists found they could track REMS, REMS meaning rapid eye movement sleep. They used this to their advantage when conducting sleep studies by waking someone up during a REM stage and getting more accurate and detailed dream recall.

From my own experiences recalling dreams, dream journaling, and sketching my dreams, I can relate to what Moorcroft describes in this text. I experience the same frustration wrapping my mind around these dreams and what they mean. He points out that dreams cannot be influenced by others but are somewhat random. I wonder when studying dreams if there's ever a link between dream content day to day. For instance, my dreams aren't a recurring story, but certain details like people and places are repetitive during my recurring nightmares. REMS are the stages in sleep when we experience the most vivid and intense dreaming. The concept of REMS connects well to my concept because they're a concrete pattern when studying sleep.

Creative Process

Experiment 1

Stop motion - oil paint on canvas

Given my passion for painting, I was keenly interested in finding ways to seamlessly integrate this medium into my video project. Through a series of experiments and iterations, I explored various stop-motion techniques that involved painting on a canvas and capturing the process through a sequence of images. However, this method failed to align with my overarching concept as it simply appeared to be a recording of a painting being made. I wanted something that felt more real and tactile.
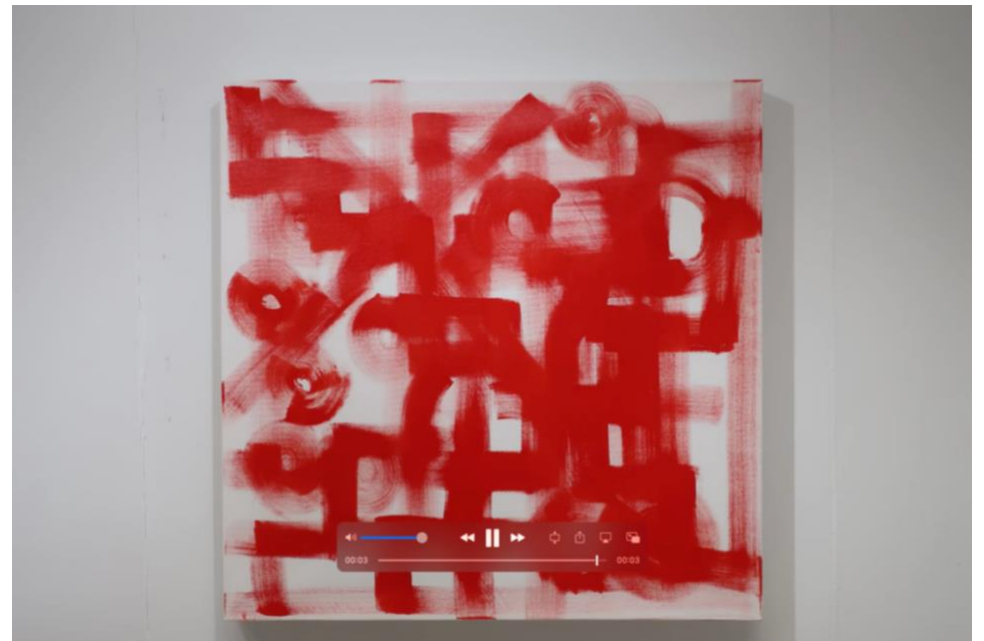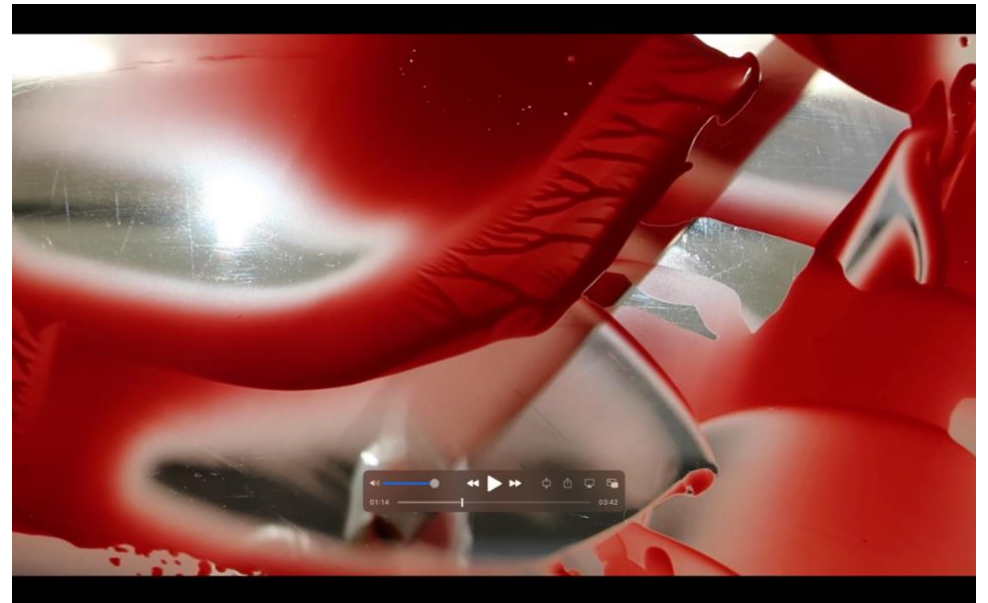

Video link:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rfYwe6Idsibi8WHn00TqNGcQ_QUYqQEB/view?usp=sharing

Experiment 2

Painting on acrylic sheet

The next technique I experimented with was painting on acrylic sheets while positioning my camera to capture the footage from an upward-facing perspective. I really enjoyed this result; I could control the opacity of the paint and the speed of my movements. Overall, it had an eerie vibe that I hoped to achieve. I made the decision to include a significant number of these clips in my final piece.

Video link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-rlY_rdY9QrAyQe3PVg_1SgR--i1T2oq/view?usp=sharing

Experiment 3

Stop motion - painting on acrylic sheet

I decided to combine the two techniques I had previously employed. My vision was to fuse the tactile, human touch of painting on acrylic sheets with the captivating nature of stop motion. I began by setting up a similar arrangement to my previous experiment, where I painted on acrylic sheets and captured the process through a series of images taken with every slight movement I made.

While this approach yielded better results than my previous attempts at stop motion, I still felt that there was something missing. I yearned for that "point-of-view" feeling that would immerse viewers and connect to my concept. The stop motion technique seemed to detract from this immersive quality, making the final footage feel somewhat impersonal. I chose not to incorporate either of the stop motion techniques in my final piece.

Video link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GIBgd0zWfwETShz6-JVIn_fp4EnfRuZa/view?usp=sharing
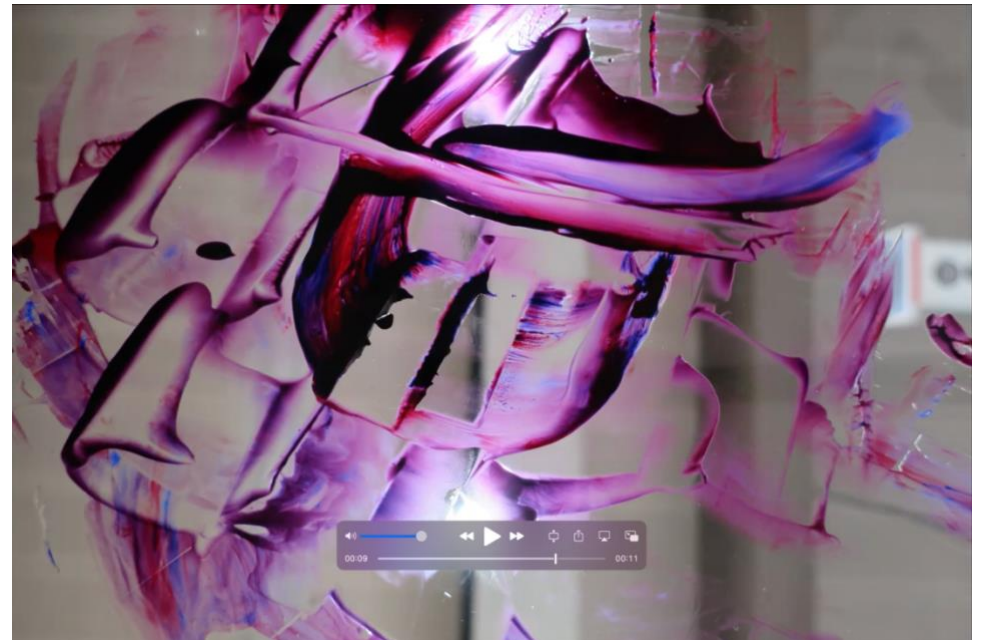
Experiment 4

Video editing

This experiment was used similar techniques to the final iteration of my video project. I recorded many small clips and edited them together with the objective of curating a collection of visuals that aligned with my overall concept. I didn't focus on the rhythm/tempo of the video but played with repetition, abstraction, and layering imagery.

Video link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WjArqlalivBx2DKhtgOY7SExc_qAyD1z/view?usp=sharing

Reflection

Over the course of the semester, I gained a deep understanding of the intricacies involved in the filmmaking process and the immense effort required to bring a project to fruition. My video was just short of 2 minutes, and it took me a whole semester to craft. That mainly consisted of editing, getting feedback, going back, and editing more (over and over again). But there was another layer of difficulty because I was trying to articulate my concept through a medium that was basically new to me. I'm very thankful to receive invaluable guidance and mentorship from my professors, who provided me with insightful feedback and support every week.