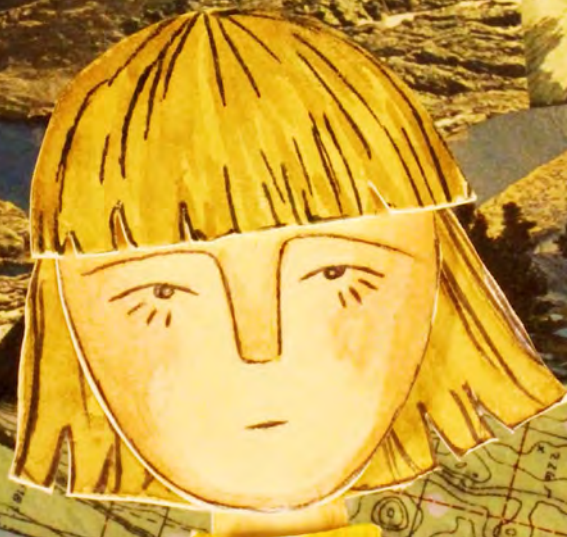


WILDER



MADISON GROSVENOR

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Wilder seeks a personal definition of wilderness by investigating my upbringing and family history in Northern Michigan. The film attempts to redefine wilderness through an assemblage of National Geographic magazines, watercolor paintings, paper puppets, and found objects. My fascination with wilderness stems from my family's business as boat captains within the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. As the film unfolds, the audience is introduced to my hometown of Leland, MI, and the surrounding Sleeping Bear Dunes. Through interviews with my family about our connection to the land, I explore the nuances of defining wilderness. The struggle to define wilderness is in itself a limitation, as there doesn't appear to be a singular definition.

Wilder critiques an idealized wilderness lifestyle associated with iconic male figures like Jack Kerouac, Jack London, and Henry David Thoreau. The film poses important questions about the scale, gender, and privilege traditionally associated with wilderness. How big is wilderness? How wild does it need to be?

INITIAL INQUIRY QUESTIONS

How have the varying perspectives of wilderness that I have been exposed to growing up in Northern Michigan, shaped my perception of wilderness?

How can a documentary and collage-based approach to this film help to piece together a personal definition of wilderness?

“My Dead Dad’s Porno Tapes”, by Charlie Turrel is a short documentary that follows director Charlie Tyrell as he tries to understand and relate through the random objects he inherited, to his father, one of the objects being a pile of VHS dirty movies. Blending stop motion animation, with archival video and interviews, this film analyzes a complicated relationship between the director and father through the material, both physical and archival.

This short film beautifully captures a kind of journey of discovery and does so in an incredibly sensory-filled and tactile way, similar to my film. I think I was most intrigued by the style of interviews. By overlaying audio and various archival images, Tyrell is allowing the interviewee to really contextualize the image and create a multi-faceted portrait of not only the person they are discussing but also the person speaking. The intentional use of the medium to further a documentary style of animation is so innovative and something I am inspired by in parts of my story.



MY DEAD DAD'S PORNO TAPES

NARRATED BY

David Wan



The New York Times. (2018). My Dead Dad's Porno Tapes. The New York Times. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from <https://www.ny-times.com/2018/01/19/opinion/my-dead-dads-porno-tapes.html>.

In the film "Whitetail Bucks" by Derek Tonks, three generations of a family venture out on a hunting trip deep in the winter forests. Within the story, power dynamics between the generations are revealed as the remoteness of the wild and horrible weather conditions ensue. The narrative of his film revolves around the family's, "own crumbling ideas of what it means to be a traditional patriarchal man as well as what it means to be human". The eerie shots and landscapes paint the picture of this ideal, remote wilderness and tense moments between family members. Often, the scale of the wilderness seems sublime, in comparison to the small figures, attempting to survive this awe-inspiring landscape. Situating the landscape as all-encompassing, allows the viewer to analyze the relationship between man and nature. The film itself situates the wilderness itself as a fourth character, waiting to swallow anyone left unprepared.

This film really highlights the shortcomings of the patriarchal archetype of the "mountain man" and how those roles were systematically developed. This film served as a visual representation of how to fabricate the mountain man scenes, especially by playing with the scale of the figures in the wilderness scenes. By situating one as larger than the other, I am able to play into that competing dynamic that Derek Tonks utilizes in this film. I also took inspiration from the characterization of wilderness exhibited in this film, so ideally wilderness will feel like its own entity, as well as a mechanism for memory and family. I wanted the wilderness to feel like a character in itself, especially in the final part of my film.



Whitetail Bucks. (2021). Video. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from <https://vimeo.com/543233258>.



Film Still from Whitetail Bucks by Derek Tonks

The Trouble with Wilderness;
or,
Getting Back to the Wrong Nature

William Cronon

“Wilderness is far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation- indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history.”

-William Cronon

William Cronon's essay is arguably the most influential in terms of my project. This essay introduced the idea of wilderness as a falsified claim of naturalness and that it is seemingly a signing a human construct to an indifferent organism such as the natural world. The “trouble” that Cronon accurately notes is the idea that wilderness implies a state in which humans are separated from nature, that Westerners tend to look at nature as opposite from civilization. That nature is where humans aren't.

In my project, my familial interviews display varying perspectives of wilderness which outline both this idea that wilderness is where humans aren't and that wilderness can be a place where human impact is present. And some of the portraits I am painting offer both of these ideas at once. These conflicting ideas of defining wilderness are integral to my project.

Leonard Askham's essay "Wilderness: A Way of Thinking; A State of Mind" delves into the concept of wilderness, not applied to nature, but rather as a state of mind that is perceived individualistically. Wilderness can be perceived contextually in terms of history and exposure to different environments. As exposure increases, so does the concept of what wilderness might be. It examines the idea that wilderness exists as a sociological rather than an ecological phenomenon. It is what humans collectively and individually imagine it to be. No two people experience wilderness the same way.

This essay gave me some great insight into how to go about telling the story of wilderness from varying perspectives of where it begins. Within my interviews, it's important to recognize that based on our own histories, we contextualize our beliefs of wilderness.

Film still from "Wilder"



“For many people, particularly those that do not venture into the designated wilderness and backcountry areas, the wilderness begins at the edge of the concrete. For those with no exposure, the wilderness may begin at the edge of a neighboring field. For others less fortunate, the edge may be at the of the block where they live and work” (16)

CREATIVE PROCESS

Experiments in collage and wilderness

Collage Experiment 1



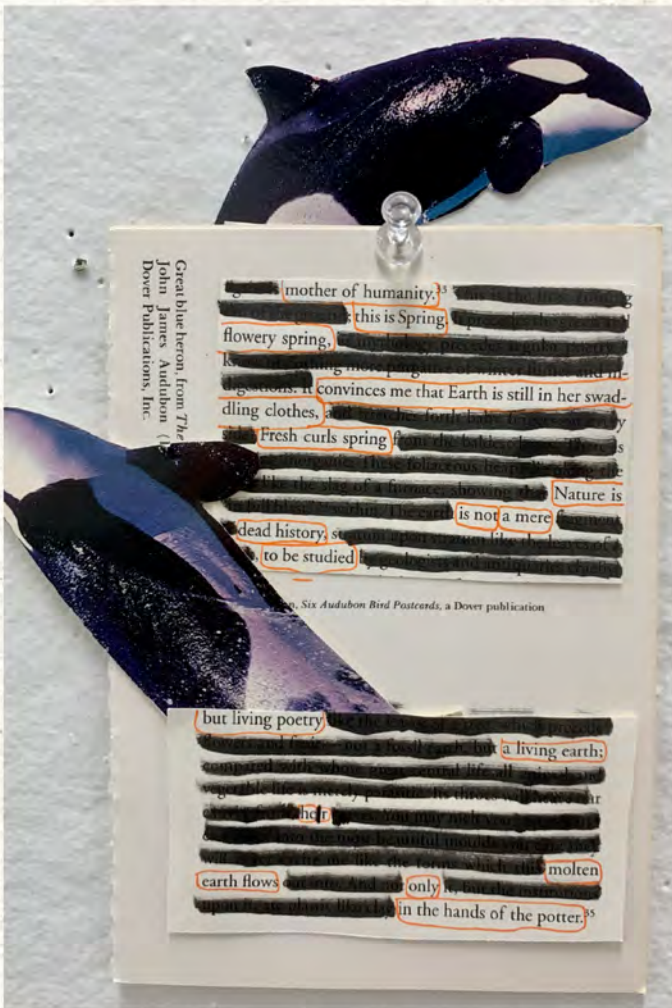
Collage Experiment 2



Collage Experiment 3



To begin ideation, I started to make collages with themes of femininity and wilderness, utilizing hand-drawn and collaged material taken from National Geographics.



Collage experiment 4



Collage experiment 5

Collage as a medium fascinated me as it felt like the physical act was also a representation of the conceptual combination of the various perspectives of wilderness.

I continued to do collage experiments in which I took text from some of the male mountaineers I was critiquing and created erasure poetry, attempting to pull out my own voice from the traditional masculine perspectives on wilderness. I was primarily focused on how to extract these feminine perspectives through collage, as the consistent feminization of nature by men was something that I was grappling with.

INTERVIEWING FAMILY

Following my experimentation with collage, I became stuck in my creative process. I realized, that my subject of femininity and wilderness was limiting myself. What I was most interested in, turned out to be how we as a society define wilderness, and what it means to do so. I also felt that my thoughts and experiments were most sincere when I was working with my own personal connection to nature and wilderness spaces.

I decided to draft a list of questions regarding how my own family views wilderness, as people whose livelihood revolves around the outdoors and Lake Michigan. My family owns an outdoor tourism company as concessioners with the national park. As people who deal with a kind of wilderness every day, I was fascinated by the highly varied definitions of wilderness that came up in the interview, even within my own family unit. I began to wonder why wilderness seemed to be such a difficult thing to pinpoint.

From these interviews, a narrative began to unravel; an exploration of the varying definitions of wilderness. With this in mind, I began to storyboard each conversation had with my family members, in order to begin to plan out my larger story.



Family Picture - (left to right) Me, Sarah Grosvenor (Mom), Michael Grosvenor (Dad), Tracy Grosvenor (Brother)

[Link to Interviews](#)

FAMILY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Definitions:

How do you define wilderness?

Where does it exist?

Does our local area align with this definition of wilderness?

Personal Histories:

Do you have any stories or memories of moments when you felt like you were truly in the wilderness?

What have you learned about yourself from spending time in the outdoors?

What role did wilderness or nature play in bringing up children? Was it important to you as parents?

How has your perception of the natural world or wilderness changed since you've traveled away and then returned?

Place in Nature:

What place do you feel that you have in the wild?

Do you feel comfortable in nature?

How do you feel about people that are ignorant or disrespectful of wilderness or nature?

STORYBOARDING

After conducting the interviews and creating the animatics from them, I began to storyboard my larger narrative. Since I had created animatics from my conversations with my family members, visuals for the larger narrative were a lot simpler to extract from the interviews.

I decided that my larger narrative would be divided into 3 parts:

1. Family interviews, wilderness perspectives from a childhood in Northern Michigan

2. Femininity and Wilderness: the critique of the Mountain Man (derived from my collage experiments)

3. Conclusion: Summation of all the varying perspectives of wilderness I have explored and what was learned





Close-ups of storyboards



ANIMATION



Once the storyboards were completed, I was able to begin animating.

The animation process involved constructing various landscapes out of National Geographic imagery. As I was working, I realized that the construction of landscapes out of collage material seemed to replicate the construction of the wilderness ideologies I was exploring.

I thoroughly enjoyed the process of collage through animation, as I think that the photography combined with my handmade puppets brought the concept of navigating wilderness to light.

Top image: Handmade puppet

Bottom Image: Collaged forest background



As I worked on completing the animation, it was very satisfying seeing the storyboard sketches turn into the final stills. Doing an in-depth storyboard was incredibly helpful to the process as I could plan out how to reuse particular cut-out pieces and even reuse entire scenes. This film really helped me to realize the incredible importance of pre-production to the final image.

Final Title Scene



Click image for full animation



Final Exhibition



Exhibition Space



Collaged Wall

National Geographic cut-outs,
paper collage



DEATH OF TIMOTHY TREADWELL

HOW LARGE should a wilderness be?
Around the Bob Marshall Wilder
vast corrugated stretch of the Montan
ies, the question involu...

M I C H I G A N

THE INDIAN TURTLE HOLE

Nat Geo cut-outs,
paper collage



Who wouldn't be a mountaineer!

The AMERICAN WILD



National Geographic cut-outs,
paper collage



The final exhibition was designed so that viewers could both watch the entire film, but also have the option to walk around the space to see each piece from the animation aligned in a weaving path.

This design was chosen both as a way to display the amount of detail that went into each shot and to emulate the sort of journey that the film takes us on.

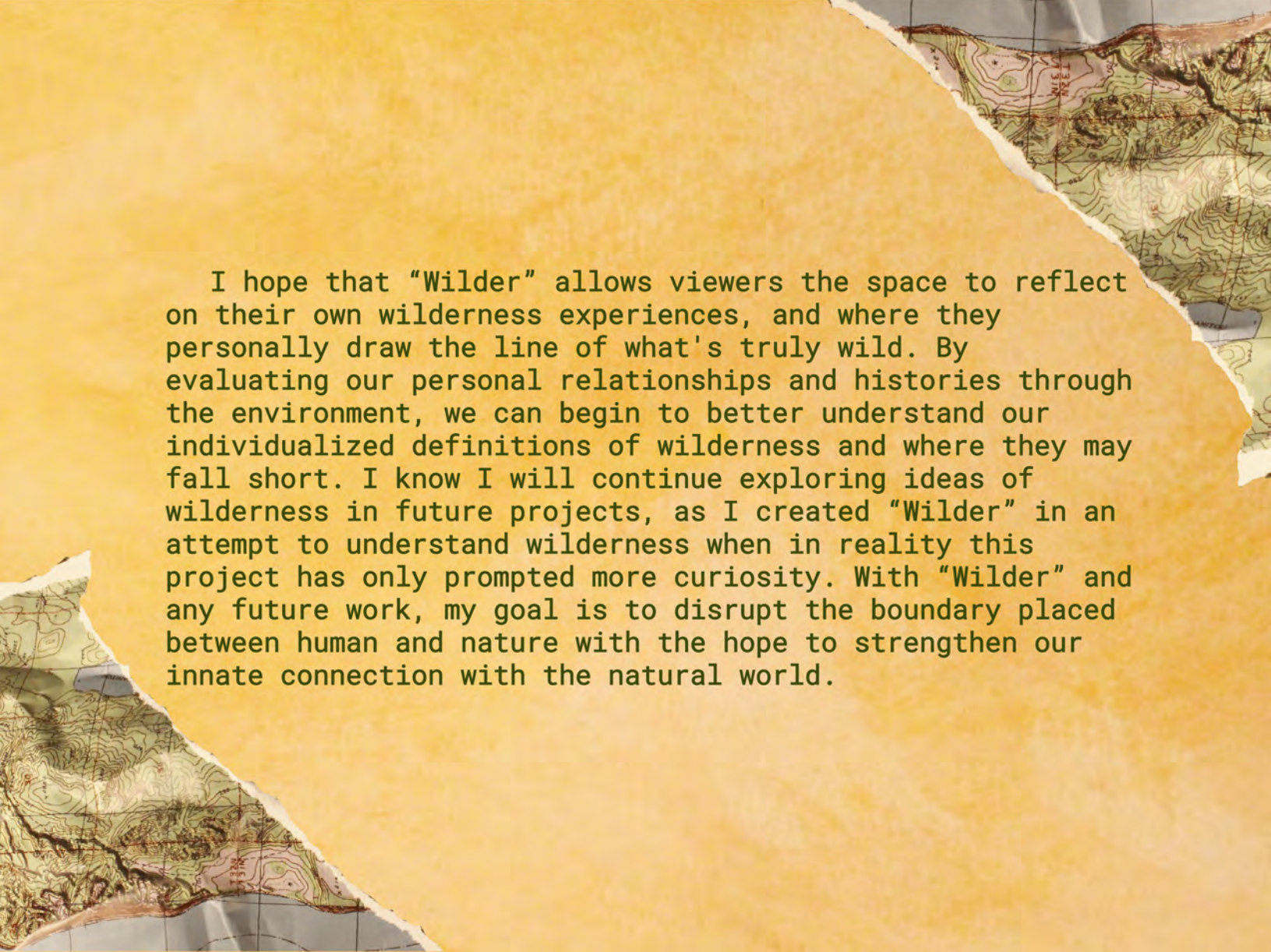


Exhibition Space 2

REFLECTION

Creating "Wilder" was a labor of love. It not only was an amalgamation of my own thoughts on wilderness, but it also became a love letter to my hometown, my family, and the environment as a whole. Being able to collaborate with my family members, and recreate imagery from my childhood in Northern Michigan, brought my collegiate experience full circle. Those lovely people and amazing places are the entire reason I continue to make environmentally fueled work.

The process of making "Wilder" was very involved. The art of stop motion is already an involved process, so making it a twenty-minute documentary dedicated to defining wilderness was incredibly difficult, but rewarding. Since beginning "Wilder", I have fallen in love with documentary not just as a genre, but as a medium. While this piece is a documentary in itself, this project has made me passionate about documenting place more experimentally as well, playing with how to artfully present information and stories of our environment, and our world. "Wilder", an experimental narrative documenting personal perspectives of wilderness, has inspired me to continue to work with documentary as a medium for future projects and attempt to break the mold of what we traditionally consider to be documentary film.



I hope that "Wilder" allows viewers the space to reflect on their own wilderness experiences, and where they personally draw the line of what's truly wild. By evaluating our personal relationships and histories through the environment, we can begin to better understand our individualized definitions of wilderness and where they may fall short. I know I will continue exploring ideas of wilderness in future projects, as I created "Wilder" in an attempt to understand wilderness when in reality this project has only prompted more curiosity. With "Wilder" and any future work, my goal is to disrupt the boundary placed between human and nature with the hope to strengthen our innate connection with the natural world.

THANK YOU

