

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

Natural Light

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Introduction to Conceptual Ideas

Neon has given me the language to mimic the magnificent. There are moments in our world that are beautiful yet often we do not offer them the time they deserve to be seen. My work investigates the interior and exterior, the spaces I move through, and replicates natural moments for the viewer to experience in the gallery.

I've developed an inability to linger. Every moment I think of what needs to be done next. The chance to truly pause seems unattainable. The world races past me and I feel stuck on a treadmill at high speed trying not to get flung off the conveyor belt. When I am able to recognize the spectacle that nature is I can take a breath. Being outside reminds me that there is another option than constant progression until burn out. The natural landscape is a place for me to rest.

My work explores natural phenomena that I am drawn to, translating those inspirations through neon, and inviting the audience to reflect on the magnificence outside. I have been interested in the tools that help me interact with nature, exploring the manufactured objects that are with me when I am moving through a space. For example a paddle and something that floats entices me to traverse the water's surface.

Overview of Neon

Neon is the umbrella term for glass tubes that are filled with inert gases that illuminate when electricity is introduced. Other gases, not just neon, can be used in this medium. Neon emits a strong red light. Argon visually is subtle compared to neon, giving off a light purple but when mercury is added to argon it excites the gas and creates a bright white blue light. This combination is often used with phosphor coated tubes that are responsible for many other colors seen in this medium. Krypton offers a tighter line of light when filled to a higher pressure. There are multiple steps in this process. Starting with a straight tube and by heating it in a flame I am able to manipulate its shape. I connect an electrode to each end of the tube and hook it up to a processing manifold. The tube is put under a vacuum and filled with gas. By sealing the gas in the tube and connecting it to electricity the tube illuminates.

Influences

I look to the natural world for inspiration. The subtle gestures and moments that point to connection. The roots and branches that mirror each other. How the underneath of a flower can be more complex than its face yet is often overlooked. When looking at exposed layers of sediment along a creek bed, I begin to think about time and erosion's ability to reveal beauty. Recognizing the way trees act as a canopy, reminds me of nature's ability to nurture. The speed our society moves at is uncondusive to witness the brilliance that is beyond our architectural spaces.

Small moments of awe and wonder influence my creative language, and inform the way I make art. From a young age the outdoors were where my creativity soared. Through every season playing outside was an integral part of who I was as a child and has developed who I am today. The creativity present in play has remained important to me. Running out the back door of my childhood home was like traveling to a new place every single time. As I have grown up the landscape has continued to be where I feel most creative. But not only most creative, it's where I feel most connected, most joyful, most aware of the glory and honesty of the earth itself.

As I have deepened my relationship with glass and light I began to take neon into the landscape, using it as a way to highlight the moments that I'm drawn to. Through my research I discovered artists working with light in the environment and feel my documentation of neon in the landscape aligns with the work of Ali Feeney and Jame Akers, specifically their *Neon in the Wild* series. This work places portable neon in the landscape and lives on as beautiful photographs. Niko Dimitrijevic's work *A Device* visually connects with some of my early thoughts on the home and the structure of the spaces we move through. This concept of movement within our lives has made me aware of the paths we create. Richard Long allows walking to be art in itself, his photographs document the linear marks carved into the ground simply from repeating steps. This has validated my need to get outdoors and has opened up the natural landscape to be a cornerstone of my art practice. Christo and Jeanne Claude's *Valley Curtain* demonstrated that when humans disrupt scenery there is the opportunity to wake up and notice more when we depart from the artistic intervention. Each of these artists challenge the idea of art living in a gallery.



Images above:

Top Left: Ali Feeney and James Akers, *Neon in the Wild*

Top Right: Niko Dimitrijevic, *A Device*

Bottom Left: Richard Long, *Karoo Line, A fifteen day walk in South Africa*

Bottom Right: Christo and Jeanne Claude, *Valley Curtain*

Description of Specific Work

Branches

As I walk through the woods I can feel the earth give below my feet. I am aware of how grounded I am, how stuck I am to the earth's surface. And at the same time, thankful for the feet that transport me from one location to the next. With a glance from my toes to the clouds my eyes travel, skipping from one branch to the next until the sky fills my vision. There is no way to simultaneously see both the roots and the top of the trees. We forget about the vastness of the sky when completing daily tasks. We can't comprehend the complexity of the roots as we pier through the gaps in the trees.

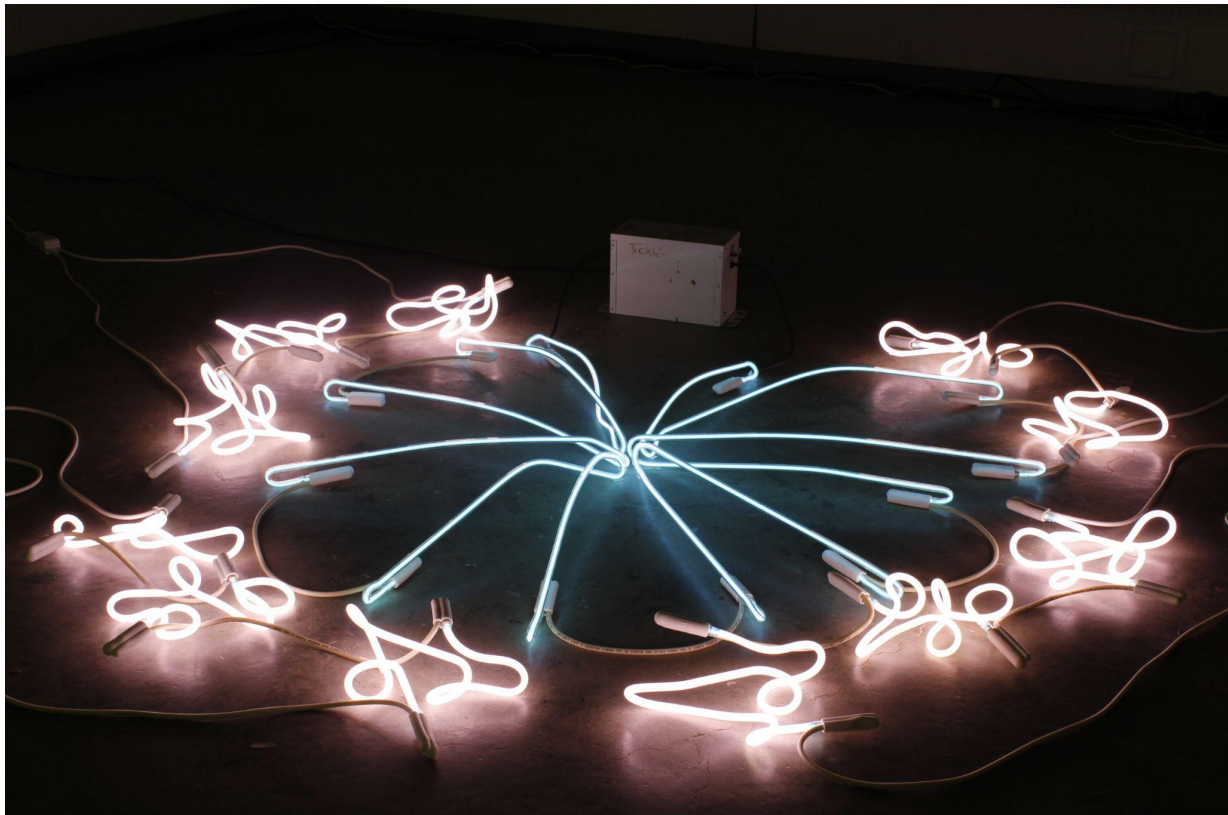
White glass tubes create undulating lines who's light demands the attention of the viewer. The intensity of the light in these lines is vivid, as the light expands it illuminates the entire room. A calmness is offered in this space. The experience invites the viewer to pause, to think of the last time they experienced nature the way they are attentive to the sculpture in the gallery. Have we become disenchanted with natural creation? Humans rush through the outside world to get from one building to the next. If we don't have time to notice nature outside, I'm bringing suggestions of it to the interior places that they have reserved time for. When bringing a hint of exterior in there is the chance to express how I feel when looking through the trees.



Wild Carrot

Such a small moment. The underneath of the wild carrot is forgotten. More than forgotten, because to forget one must first be aware. The intricate structure of the wild carrot goes without recognition. But, if given the second to notice a whole new world is revealed. The intricacy of the form makes me question, "If no one is ever going to look, why is it so beautiful? What else in this world have I been missing?"

This floral pattern is placed on the floor to highlight the structure of a wild carrot. Blue-white lines from a central point project outward suggesting the scaffolding that holds the floral facade depicted by lavender white luminous squiggles. This enhanced scale of the form invites the viewer to expand the importance they place on small moments. The act of walking around this light sculpture engages the body in a similar way we explore natural spaces. When we see phenomena that fascinates us, our entire body is pulled that direction as we intuitively seek further understanding. In these situations I notice I'm in a posture of gratitude, with the realization that the everyday is powerful and true.

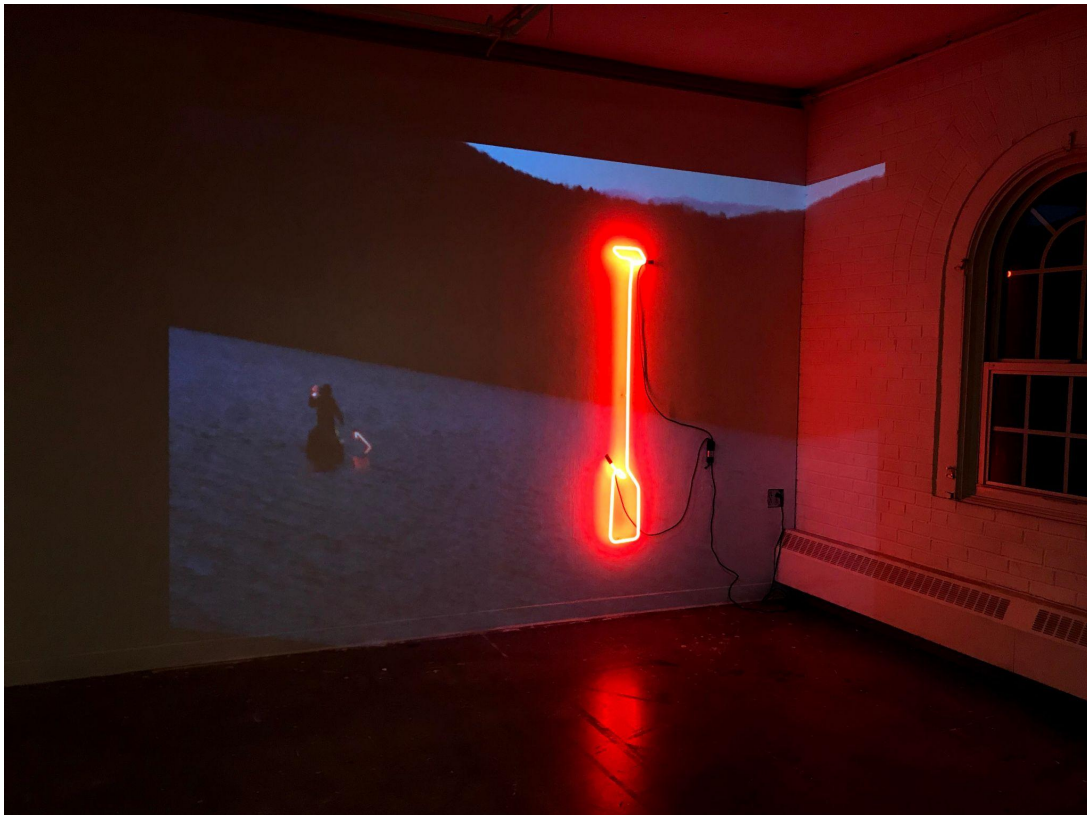


Moving Water

The water moves the person and the person attempts to move the water.

In this process I am the performer. I push myself away from the shore line in an inflatable raft and I am at the mercy of the current. Relinquishing the need to control my trajectory, I become more acutely aware of my surroundings. When the paddle makes contact with the water, the paddle glows brighter. The rhythm of the strokes I take with the paddle highlight the interaction between myself and the water. I am faced with danger as I place high voltage electricity in the water, but the movement of the light on the water over powers the fear. A sense of peace comes from the solitude of floating.

I am considering the objects that allow us to experience nature. An object that I have held many times, and a movement my body is familiar with is transformed when the original object is replaced with a neon replica. With the original object, a manufactured paddle, I thought I was in control. With the neon replica I realize that I can relinquish that need to control.



Terrain

A photographic series documents my process of exploring the exterior spaces that I travel through. I strap neon to my backpack and walk until a space inspires me. The practice of placing neon tubes in a space prompts me to slow down as an act of praise and recognition for my surroundings. Tracing the negative spaces or replicating forms I am drawn to. These interventions with the landscape materialize the way I see nature. By documenting these actions I begin to share where I look. I am creating a physical record of what my eyes notice. By making choices of where to place the light I am collaborating with the environment.



Conclusion

There is a push and pull that happens once I install work in the gallery. This pendulum of the outside inside and inside outside. The inspiration starts with nature, while installing the work I have brought the outside to meet with the people in the gallery space. These abstractions of the natural world can prompt the viewer to leave the gallery with a renewed sense of wonder. The work invites viewers to pause and recognize these moments that are overlooked and to remember the beauty that surrounds us.

A fascination with the natural world runs through each work I create. Being outdoors has been a crucial part of my life. It is easy to get caught up in day to day tasks and accept that there is not enough time to enjoy the outdoors. I have placed importance on my need to do so. Developing an artistic process that allows me to explore the natural world and its characteristics that intrigue me has had a restorative power in my life. To reach beyond my own need to experience our natural surroundings I invite the viewer to remember how truly connected they can feel outside.

When given the time to sit surrounded by grass, trees and the sky I am overwhelmed by the intricacies of our world. These moments that leave me awestruck are the moments that have served as evidence of God to me. Through reverence for the natural creation I see proof of a maker's hand in every detail. I go outside to be reminded of the goodness, and to look to the Light. With reverence and sincerity I invite others to pause from their hectic lives and think beyond themselves.