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Title: Developing a practice and its method.

INTRODUCTION

A translucent camera

A playful photo book

A short narrative film

A series of experiments with pinhole cameras

A creative destruction of instant self-portraits

Thematic projects and self-inspired research.

Self-inspired and not self-directed, not enough, not yet.

I can see tendencies and overlapping interests from one project to the next.

I am in the process of articulating and better directing my research.

One of my obsessions is the desire to understand how the image is created.

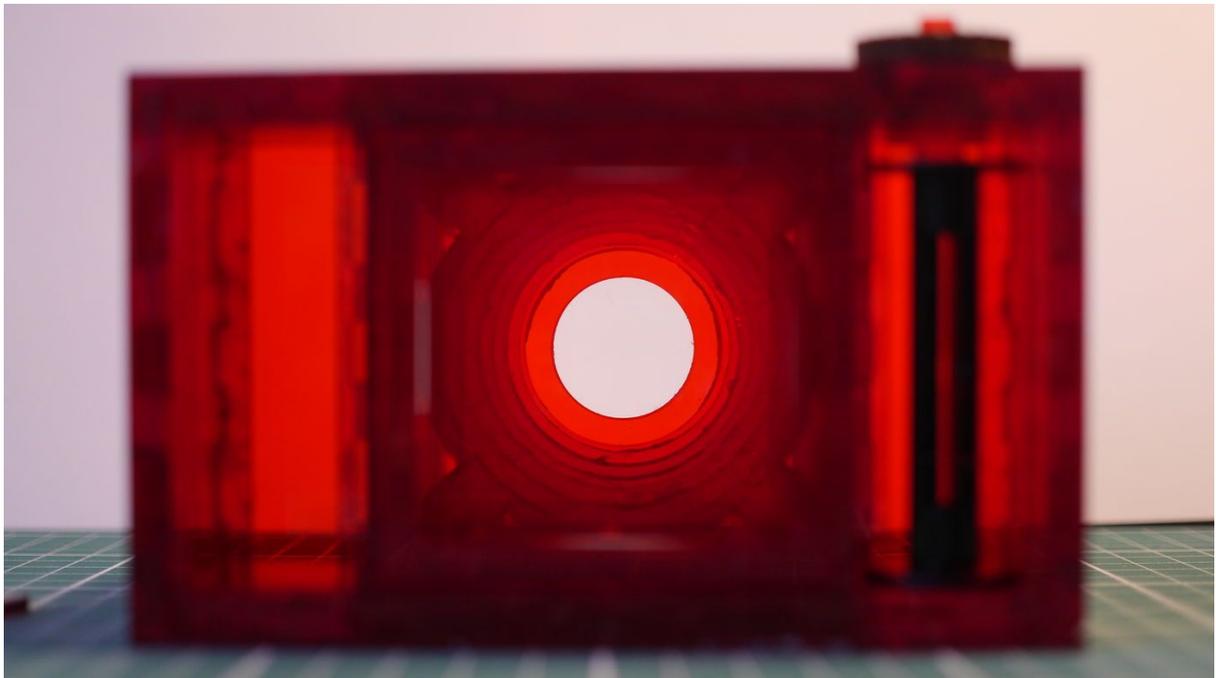
Another trend I recognise is the exploration of myself as a subject and, in general, personal and subjective matters. Such as some of my family's history.

A translucent camera

A handmade focal camera, built with red-transparent acrylic plates, it works with medium format film.

I made it as part of a thematic project where I was given the freedom to create any kind of camera within the limits of the tools and materials offered by the school. In order to build it I followed the instructions and the template that was given to us by the tutor. With the laser cut machine I cut out the different parts and then mounted them together. The lens is a second hand one found in a flea market. When I mounted the shutter I realised that it was not very smooth so I had to replace it with a wooden one that I could sand down and make thinner. I tested it with colour film and the result are blue-coloured photographs. The photos were taken on the Wijnhaven, just outside the WDKA. Willemsbrug is clearly recognisable in one of the pictures, and so are some of the very modern buildings opposite the academy. The images are blurry due to the fact that I have to hit the shutter in order to close it and also because the camera is not mounted on a tripod - something to keep in mind if I proceed to make a second prototype. Despite not being very sharp the images are interesting and unique, they have different tones of blue and they remind me of impressionistic paintings.

To make a translucent camera was my very first instinct, finding the reason behind this choice is a process *a posteriori*: I wanted to build a paradox of photography: photography heavily depends on controlling light; making a transparent camera means letting go of so much of that control and running the risk of overexposing the whole roll from the very first step of loading the film in the camera. I was aware of that risk and therefore of the possible failure of my experiment. I decided to still run that risk in order to deconstruct the the process of making photographs. I wanted to eliminate any doubt and incomprehension I might still have about how a photograph is made.



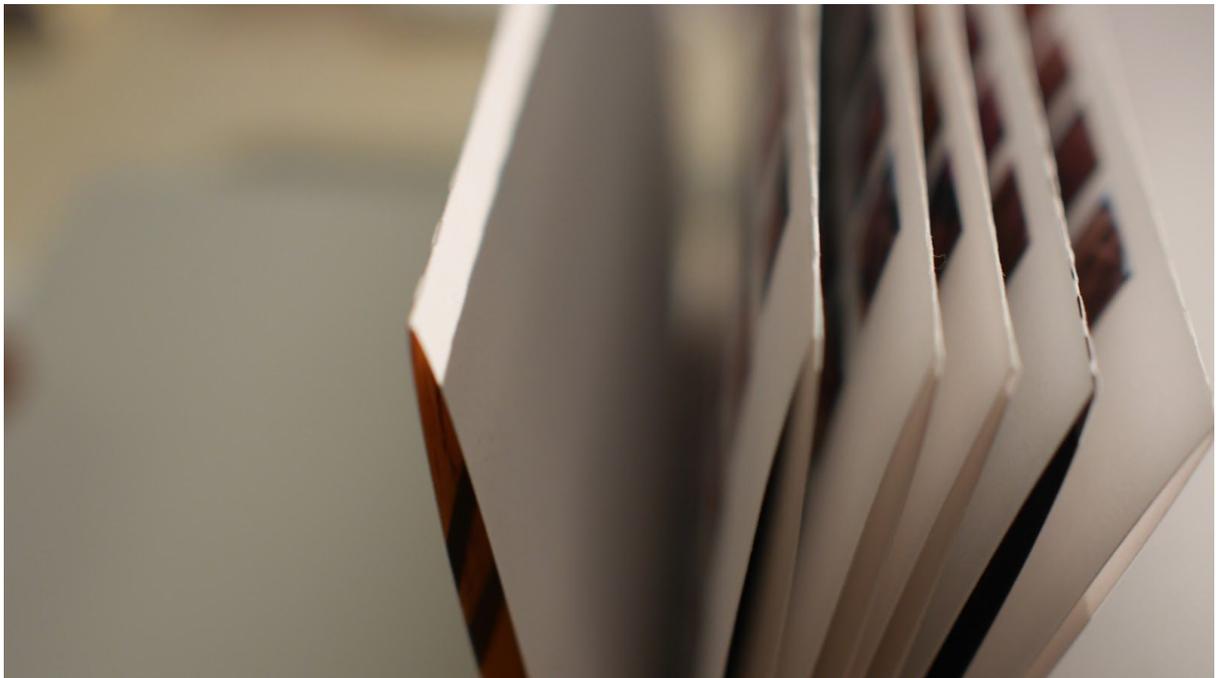
A playful photo book

The final product of our second thematic project, made in collaboration with Andreas.

Frown is a photo book that presents pages of grids filled with cropped photos of faces. The pages are folded in a way that the reader has to cut them open in order to see the larger photos inside. Being a collaborative project, this book is a result of many conversations and ideas thrown on a piece of paper, discarded, reconsidered, redeveloped.

As it was my very first experience with making a book I mainly wanted to explore the different possibilities given by such object and play with new ideas.

We had to consider what kind of binding we wanted to use as that would later influence how the book can be read. We tested on different types of papers and different sizes. Andreas' past experience was very useful and I learnt a lot from him and this project.



A short narrative film - 'Anna'

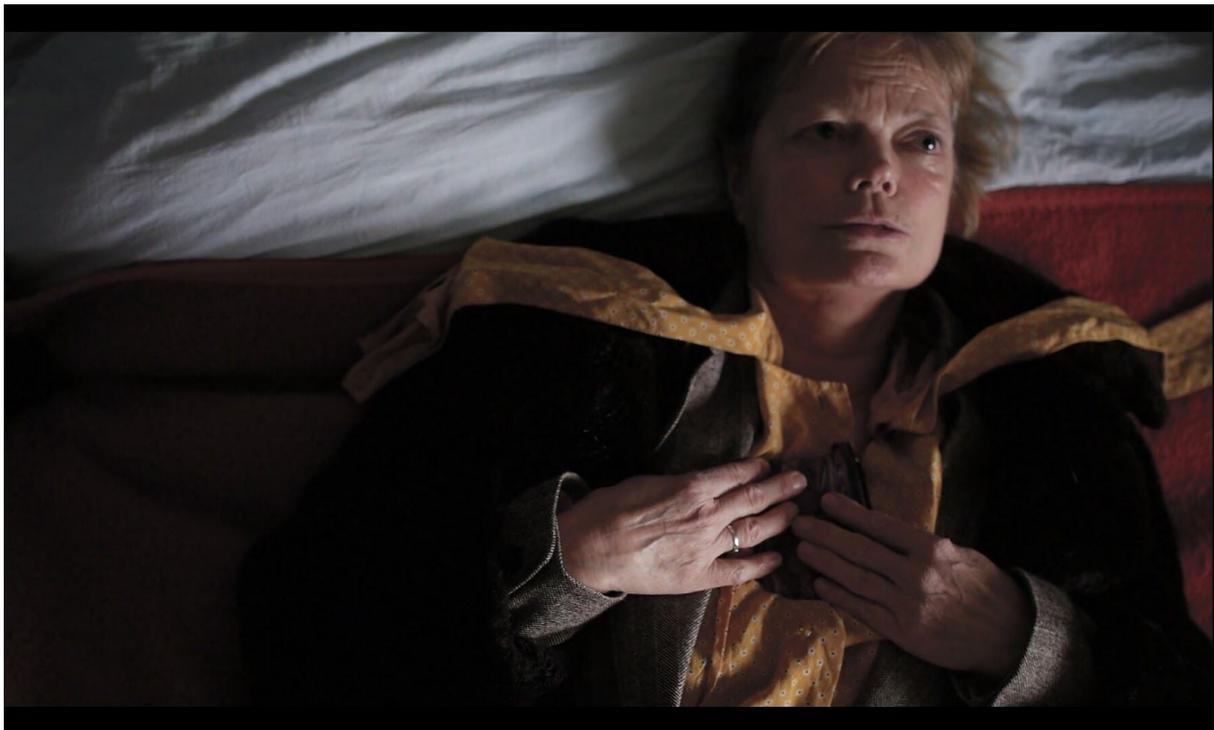
The plot: a woman works in a tobacco and newsagents shop, she has a daily routine of serving customers and restocking the shelves; during the shift she counts the money in the till and hides part of it in her shirt; later on she experiences an armed robbery. She ends her on her bed, shaken up by the events but glad that she saved part of the income.

Based on real events concerning my family, that I never witnessed but that nonetheless had an impact on my life. The finished film is very distant from those real events.

Viewers that don't know what story this piece is based on have perceived a different narrative.

This short film was never written, there is no script. It was thought through by sketching and listing lists of shot. After shooting two scenes I showed the footage to my tutors and we agreed that I needed to shoot one more scene, the robbery.

Despite the story not reflecting what I had in mind, I still consider this short film a good learning experience and a solid filmmaking exercise. I particularly appreciate the camera work that I did, as I can see some well composed shots. For the editing I decided to use a new and more professional software than the one I used in the past. Although having to learn how to use a new software definitely slowed the process down, I can also see the positive impact of this newly acquired skill. It does leave me with the unsatisfied desire to tell the original story in a way that I can communicate not just the facts, but also the more nuanced tones of a specific environment and time and more in-depth characters. Right now I am unable to tell this story using the medium of film. I would need to shoot it in Rome, where the real events happened, using professional actors that can really express the dramatic circumstances; it would need to be a much longer film backed up with research and a script and the production would take longer. The events described in the film happened because of a specific socio-economic situation that affected my family and many others in Rome, and in other Italian cities, for several decades.



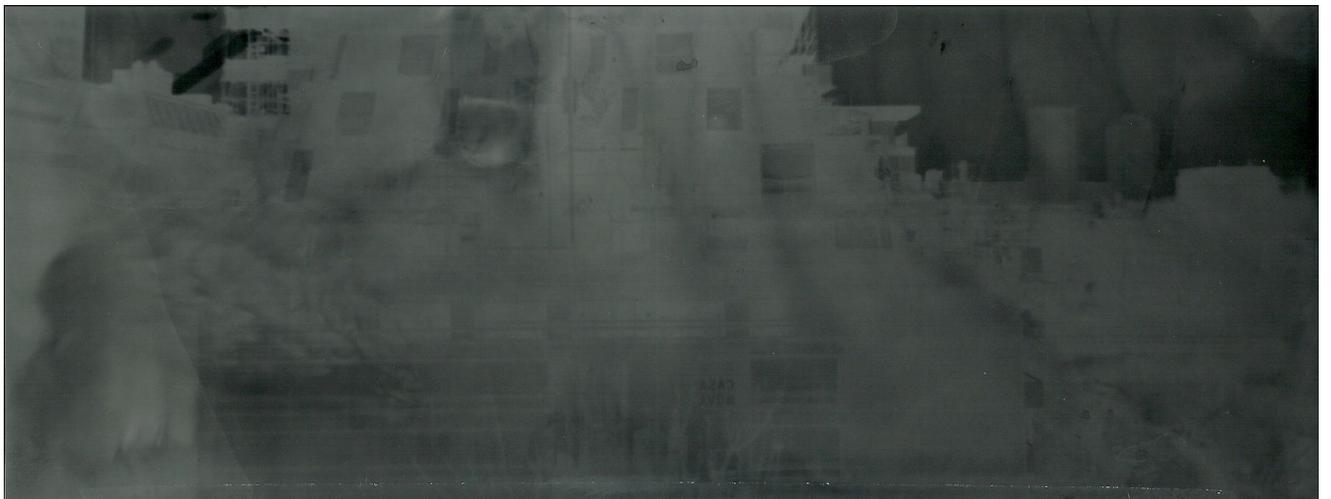
A series of experiments with pinhole cameras

Continuing to feed my obsession for understanding how photographs are made, I started experimenting with pinhole cameras.

I built the first round with 4 empty film canisters and I played with different exposure times: from 1 minute to 24 hours. All 4 cameras were placed on a window sill in the studio facing outside for the longest exposures; for shorter exposures they were placed in the developing room next to the dark room in the basement of the academy.

For the second round I reused the film canisters but I also built two larger cameras with shoe boxes. Exposure times went up to 2 weeks with some cameras on the window sill facing outside and some others placed in the studio, often taped to the computers where there would usually be a webcam.

The photographs of indoors spaces are similar to images from a surveillance camera, probably because of the fisheye effect given by the round shape of film canisters and because the only objects that are visible are those that are perfectly still: tables, chairs, screens. There is very little trace of human bodies, only some blurry shadows.



A creative destruction of instant self-portraits

Eventually I decided to point a camera at myself. I used a Polaroid camera to take pictures of my skin and parts of my body.

Taking self-portraits, and then destroying them, raises all sorts of questions and relates to somewhat political topics. Some of these topics I have researched within my research group project—What is the female gaze? How do/did men portray women? How do/did men and women spectators see women on the screen? How do women portray others? How do women portray themselves?

I am aware that because of the subject that I chose (myself, my own body) it may seem that this project is about bodies, or sexuality, or gender or all of these things. But in fact my fascination with the emulsion lift process, and with the two types of images that I end up producing, is the real focus of this project. I mention two types of images because: first there is the image that I have as a result of the intervention on the Polaroid; and then there are the images that I produce while documenting the intervention.



Lifting the emulsion of a Polaroid photograph means altering it in a way that becomes less recognisable, the emulsion is fragile and breaking it is very easy, the whole process often ends in destruction of the image. Once the emulsion is lifted it becomes a soft, wet and fragile object. Flesh-like. As I destroy the image I also make something that resembles decaying organic matter. Human skin? Fish skin?

The fact that the pictures are in fact of human skin adds to this morbid look.

The lifted emulsion can be reapplied onto different surfaces and objects, leading to the option of having a more tridimensional and sculptural image.

This research, this project, is very much in the making and at this stage I am looking at how the physical decay of an analogue image resembles the decay of an organism.

RELATION TO PREVIOUS PRACTICE

All of the above does not relate to anything I have ever made, and that is the reason why I wanted to do this course.

In the past I made videos, mostly commissioned by others or in the context of my studies which meant having a very precise brief. As much as I am interested in film studies and in the filmmaking process, I wanted to try some other forms and medium. Something more immediate and less filtered by compromises with team members, budgets, weather conditions, production schedules.

Film, from both a theoretical and a practical approach, still remains the medium that I'm mostly fascinated with, especially as a spectator. The making of the film *Anna* was particularly interesting and satisfying because it was my first proper attempt at making a fictional film.

Ideas around being an artist and what my practice is like, are new to me. I come from a Film Studies background, much more academic and focused on the history and analysis of the works of others.

In the past year I have started to understand what my practice is about, what my method is and what would like it to be. I can recognise some behavioural patterns: I tend to not show my work to my fellow students for fear of criticism and comparison; whenever I have a new idea overthink it and see the possible outcome before I even start to work on it; I don't take notes, and I mean notes in the broader sense of writing down thoughts and concepts from readings, sketching and drawing ideas, taking 'quick' pictures to make a prototype or draft for a potential more elaborated image. As I navigated the environment of this course and recognised those patterns I also tried to acquire some more positive habits: I forced myself to initiate a few projects just on intuition, leaving the overthinking aside; I continuously shared my work with tutors and listened to their feedback and criticism; I tried to take more notes, and I started a journal of practice.

If I look at the content and the direction of my work I see two strands, both important to me and for entirely different reasons.

The first strand, one that I developed more because of my previous studies, is storytelling. Using film I want to tell stories, particularly about people. The way I see it is almost archeological: discovering a subject and unearthing their story with them, digging deeper, discovering new details. Following this need to tell stories, I made the short film *Anna* and I would like to make some more documentaries. My experience with

documentary filmmaking comes from the making of a handful of short documentary, all commissioned by others. For next year I am considering making a piece about my father's past and my relationship to those events. If for any reason this option is not viable, I will probably still make a documentary about another subject, with the same approach of discovering a story together with the portrayed subject.

The second strand, that includes most of the projects I worked on this year, has more intuitive and abstract traits. It's about making objects and images, following an inspiration that has not been explained yet. It is a kind of activity that, for some reason, I have never let myself embrace. Still images and non linear moving images are the main results of this practice.

While the first strand is more rational and analytical, it comes from thinking, from conversations, the second strand is playful and instinctual. It comes from moments of creativity that almost feel meditative: I make things, physically, and I follow the intuition without questioning it. From this approach come the pinhole cameras experiments, the transparent cameras, the Polaroid project.

Next year I will likely have a larger documentary project but it's still important for me to find moments to work on smaller and more abstract work.

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