

Look Natural In Any Light



Still from Drench Your Lips In Rich Luxurious Color (2021)

Graduate Project Proposal
Shannon Liang

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO MAKE?

A video titled “Look Natural In Any Light” with a run time of 20-30 minutes, looking at the way humans grow and interact with plants, while taking a perspective of emotionally identifying with the plants’ experiences and positions.

THEMES:

1. My personal experiences involving dynamics of power, which have borne an emotional identification with flowers.
2. The relation between humans and plants, which in Western society often involves dynamics of manipulation, control, and dominance, as reflected in the cut-flower, home gardening, and agriculture industries.

ELEMENTS:

VISUAL: Images will focus on locations in the Netherlands, including the Royal FloraHolland flower auction, the Rotterdamse Munt community garden, the Keukenhof garden, flower bulb fields in Lisse, greenhouse locations, and the parks by my house in Rotterdam.

The work will be shot on my phone to retain a quotidian view, keeping at the level of the flowers and their experience. Phone footage is accessible, mundane, easily reproducible, illustrating the commonality and mundanity of the flowers and of the violence enacted onto them.

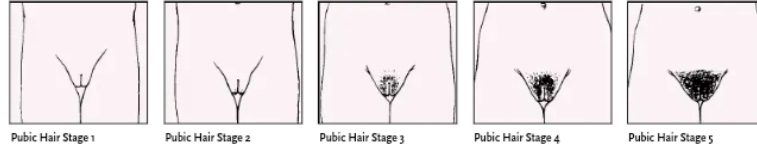


Spent flowers laying in a pile of grass

AUDIO: Sound will include a mix of field recordings and found audio. It will layer references to the commodification of beauty and feminine sexuality in the form of cosmetic advertisements, and surgical procedures, alongside field recordings of machinery and crowds chatting and laughing. These references contextualize the seemingly innocuous footage.

Tanner Staging

Staging Pubic Hair Development



Rijpheid / Stages of opening / Reife Voorbeeld voor / Example for / Beispiel für



Tulipa (Fringed Grp) (grp 10301108)



Rijpheid / Stages of opening / Reife

Visual References

Top: Tanner Staging Sexual Maturity Rating Scale

Bottom: Association of Flower Auctions in the Netherlands (VBN) Reference for Maturity

TEXT: Text will focus on the manipulation and violence involved in the cut flower industry by explaining processes such as topping and the introduction of viruses, mapping these practices onto my personal experiences, and thus bridging my personal experiences and societal structures. Text may become a voiceover for the video, or it may take on a form separate and adjacent to it.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO MAKE IT?

I have collected thousands of videos and images of flowers—flowers in botanical gardens, cut flowers in vases, flowers on the side of the road, flowers in forests. Budding, blooming, shriveling, dried. In some of the videos I had the urge to touch and interact with the flowers—caressing, tearing, cutting. In others I wanted to preserve the flowers—pressing them in books, pounding them into cotton.

To make this project I will reflect on the various forms of my relation to and interest in flowers, by sifting through this documentation, and by writing. Writing serves to clarify my thoughts and articulate the connections. I will visit these sites of the cut-flower, home gardening, and agriculture industries in the Netherlands to gather information on the flowers' perspectives and cycle of life.

I began the project in April 2021 with a visit to the Keukenhof garden (the footage I shot there became the video “Drench Your Lips In Rich Luxurious Color” (2021)). This November I visited the trade fair at Royal FloraHolland, and began working with the gardeners at Rotterdamse Munt, which will continue every month. In early Spring 2022 I will visit the greenhouses and the flower bulb fields in Lisse. Throughout this time I will continue visiting the parks close to my house. On visits to each of these places I will look and listen carefully, make videos, record audio, and write notes.

Alongside these visits I will be reading, thinking, and writing about vulnerability and its relation to violence, and psychoanalytic frameworks around trauma. My thesis will comprise a reflection on the personal origins of this project, as well as research tracing the lifecycle of cut flowers, and writing for that may overlap here (for more information please refer to the Thesis Outline).





TIMETABLE

November 2021

WET sound workshop, begin sound experiments

Writing thesis proposal + outline

Visit Royal FloraHolland Trade Fair 2021, Rotterdamse Munt

December 2021 - January 2022

Sound recording, experimentation and learning

Compile and experiment with material collected so far

Reach out to collaborators

Writing thesis

Continue at Rotterdamse Munt

February 2022

Visit Royal FloraHolland Auction, Greenhouses, Rotterdamse Munt

Writing thesis

March - May 2022

Visit Keukenhof, Bulb fields in bloom, Bulb fields topping, Rotterdamse Munt

Write and finish thesis

June - July 2022

Post production for moving image and sound

Creating/acquiring materials and equipment for installation

Continue at Rotterdamse Munt

September 2022

Screening/Exhibition at Rotterdamse Munt (tbc)

WHY DO YOU WANT TO MAKE IT?

In 2017 my mother and I went to a garden in springtime and saw voluptuous flowers spilling their blooms everywhere. They looked soft, inviting, and yielding. I reached out and touched them, fondled their insides, stroked the revealed stamens, knocking off drooping petals, and tore off crisp pink petals.



Stills from *Sweet little flower*, (2021)

I saw the flowers standing gently, displaying themselves for my pleasure. It occurred to me that I could defile them, that no one would stop me. I could do what I wanted. So I did, and that became the video "Sweet little flower," (2017).

My impulsive actions towards the flowers echoed experiences I myself had of being manipulated, violated, and controlled. In this case I both identified with the position of the flowers and was enacting the role of perpetrator of violence onto the flowers. My project aims to unpack the significance of this complex experience.

WHO CAN HELP YOU AND HOW?

Tim Leyendekker - (Director of "Feast") discussions of plants and flowers as they relate to transgressive desires

Katerina Sereti - (Biologist specialized in Phytopathology) discussions and information around medical procedures in plants

Nor Greenhalgh - (Artist and Mental Health Practitioner) knowledge around psychoanalytic frameworks and references

Adèle Grégoire - (Classmate and audiovisual enthusiast) sound composing and mixing knowledge, discussion and feedback

Marianne Gerritse - (Garden Coordinator at Rotterdamse Munt) gardening knowledge

Patrick Herbert (Manager at Dutch Lily Masters) access and information on lily greenhouses and growing practices

Natasha Soobramanien - (Writer) feedback on thesis writing which may overlap here

Walter Johnston - (Writer) discussions and feedback on writing

RELATION TO PREVIOUS PRACTICE

My video work "Sweet little flower," (2017) is the starting point for this work. It shows an impulsive reaction to peonies and tulips in a garden, the beginning of my emotional identification with flowers.

As in my book "See You Soon" (2016) which explores vulnerability, desire, exhibitionism/ voyeurism, and power dynamics within an intimate relationship, "Look Natural In Any Light" considers these same themes within the relation between human beings and flowers.



Stills from *Drench Your Lips In Rich Luxurious Color* (2021)

I will be building off of my video "Drench Your Lips In Rich Luxurious Color" (2021) which I shot at Keukenhof this past Spring. The footage displays endless varieties of vibrant tulips in neat human-made geometric plots. Shots are quick and sharp, cutting from one to the next. Suddenly we see plots of green stems sliced across at the top—beheaded flowers. Drooping petals come into view that will soon meet their beheaded fate as well.

As in my previous works, "Look Natural In Any Light" will be shot on my phone, and similarly focuses attention on highly personal and often mundane subject matter.

RELATION TO A LARGER CONTEXT

As extractive practices continue to deplete natural resources worldwide, perspectives of human domination over other living beings requires urgent examination.

Here I focus on the perspective and power dynamics between humans and flowers, but manipulative and exploitative practices within the labor force of the large scale cut-flower industry, as well as wasteful practices of energy consumption are issues which also require urgent examination, but fall outside of the scope of this project.

In terms of related works, I think of Tim Leyendekker's film "Feast" (2021), where flowers are injected with viruses to help further explore the complex dynamics of transgressive desires. My project relatedly considers the violence involved in the plant growing industries, alongside the perhaps transgressive pleasure that consumers derive from the results of the violence.



Still from *Feast* (2021), Tim Leyendekker

In Sophie Calle's work "Take Care of Yourself" (2007), Calle took an email sent to her by her then-boyfriend, breaking up with her, and sent it off to 100+ women of various different jobs (ballet dancer, lawyer, proofreader) to analyze the email based on their respective professions, and compiled all of these responses into a book. Here it seems she works through the emotional stress of this personal event by going through it over and over, with more than a hundred other perspectives.

Similarly, in "Look Natural In Any Light" I am working to process emotionally stressful events that happened in my life by reenacting them with flowers and plants, and by seeing a parallel of my experience in the way that humans relate to plants in the large scale flower growing and agriculture industries.

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