

My artistic practice, incorporating writing, photography, audio, and video, is based in historical research and documentary practices. I investigate objects, documents, symbols, and testimony, both current and from archives, to explore the present (and future) in relationship to our connection(s) with the past, memory, and history. I am interested in what is said and what is left out: how silence shapes narrative. My work gravitates towards the space of current and past socio-political movements. In the context of history and memory, I examine the ways we attempt to *draft* ourselves (personally and collectively)—consciously and unconsciously—through our actions and proclamations.

While my work does not bear a methodological consistency, there are certain tendencies that I have learned to follow. Each work begins at the point of one object or collection of objects, a series of photographs, a cluster of symbols. Often (though not always) there is a personal aspect to the objects: a political button collection inherited from my father, a series of photographs taken by my grandfather, a dusty relic found in the back of a closet. The space of familial inheritance and an examination of how ideas and ideologies are passed down are important to my process. Through researching around the objects, histories directly or tangentially related, my investigations take place at the intersection of private experience and public history. It is an examination of my (our) ‘I,’ Alexis Shotwell¹ writes, “as a collective situation experienced individually.”

In her essay, “Unforgetting as a Collective Tactic,” Shotwell describes a “critical memory practice” for engaging with memory and history. Specifically within the context of interrogating whiteness and anti-racism, Shotwell explores how we come to know or, perhaps more importantly, not know about historical events. The questions that Shotwell explores act as guideposts in my work: What has been left out of dominant narratives of history? How does this impact what we think about current events, events of history, or the experiences that we have had? What have we chosen not to acknowledge or what did we never really know because it was silenced in inherited narratives? Are there more questions that we should ask?

If the greater strategy is exploring how I implicitly comprehend myself (and with viewers, how this relates to the varieties of ‘we’ in the room) in relation to history and memory, Shotwell’s tactic of *unforgetting* is useful for describing how to look at not just any past but contested and buried histories for a first, second, third, fourth time. Returning to these past events and experiences is not for nostalgia’s sake but is a critical way to revive, in detail, the events of the past, and to bring myself (and viewers) to take a closer look.

With this tactic in mind, my piece *Eclipsed* is a two-part, single channel video work, approaching a fairly publicized time in the history of the United States: The 1964 Freedom Summer movement to fight for civil rights through registering disenfranchised Black voters in Mississippi. The project digs into details as a way to linger and unpack the particularities of this specific time in the Civil Rights movement. The work asks questions relevant to today through an examination of the past.

The first video (1:30 min), titled *Looking for those who most resemble someone we now know*, flashes through personal archival images, my family’s photographs as well as found family photographs, from the 1950s-1970s. This places the work ambiguously in a time and also conjures up the private space of family photos. The second video (14 min), *Eclipsed*, is a slide show of photographs of a lunar eclipse. My grandfather and father had taken these photographs of the eclipse through a telescope in June 1964. The photos click on and off as though viewed through a slide projector but are animated with a video overlay of a cloudy sky. A slow and melancholic music score accompanies the visuals as well as sporadic atmospheric noises (crickets for instance).

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During the duration of the eclipse, activists had covertly entered Mississippi to search by nightfall for the three slain Civil Rights activists James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. A text overlay tells the story (drawn from oral histories, letters, and other archival sources) of this clandestine search party in the days immediately following their disappearance.

This project uses archives, both personal and private (family photographs) and those publicly available (oral histories, library holdings), to stay within this short period of time, to imagine what occurred in the days immediately following the disappearance of the Civil Rights workers. The piece asks questions of race, whiteness, and racism in the present moment. The narrative explores the risks that the Civil Rights workers (white and Black) were taking in descending upon Mississippi as well as the risks that local people and farmworkers took in helping to clandestinely search for the missing men: housing the search party and drawing maps during the day for the nocturnal quest. Local police forces were involved with the murder, so all of this work was carried out while hidden.

The work is a product of my insistence to look back, to turn over and over events of the past, and to examine my (our) relationship to what has occurred. It is to examine our present tense relationship to history and memory through the process of examining the layers of events over long stretches of time and working to better understand what led to the present moment. Ultimately, my project is to look more closely, carefully, critically, at the past, to examine the longer and deeper narratives that brought each of us to our current moment and our sense of ourselves.