

Research Proposal

When we think of modern farming, we associate it with large commercial agricultural ventures such as the dairy industry and cultivating crops. There are many smaller more boutique honey producers who are often independent from mainstream farming practices and have a rich community and culture. It is this beekeeping community, culture, and independence that I'm going to explore and share the results through a series of images and questions. Having recently read *Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand* (Matheson & Reid, 2018), I've chosen the South Island beekeeping community to explore and research. Furthermore, in a world of excessive farming of the land, and the associated large scale environmental impact, I feel the need to document alternative farming practices that have a low impact on the environment. The goal is to answer several questions visually, through a series of photographic images consisting of environmental portraiture and details of their process and tools.

The main goal of this research project is to share this alternative farming practice, the people, and their impact on the environment, by documenting Christchurch and Canterbury's independent beekeeping community, including the environments they operate in, their process, and the practice they employ.

To ensure a cohesion of the imagery captured, I aim to ask each beekeeper a series of questions, including;

- a) How long have you been beekeeping and why did you start?
- b) Do you believe your beekeeping practice is environmentally friendly?

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c) What makes your beekeeping practice different to the mass production of honey?

Artist Research

Artists who have inspired my goals for this project include Alec Soth and Glenn Busch, Diane Arbus, August Sander and Duane Michals all of which capture people on large format film. Using large format photography not only yields an interesting aesthetic, but it also slows down their process. Soth often captures subjects within their familiar environments, from a point of view that would often be overlooked (Soth, 2004). “Sleeping by the Mississippi” is Soth’s first photo essay and arguably his most famous, and his process fascinates me, as he drove from location to location with a list of keywords for things, he was interested in. Soth’s work often lacks context, or text, and inviting the viewer to piece the story together. In contrast to Soth’s work that lacks text, much of Busch’s work is accompanied by extensive narrative and context to the imagery (Busch, 1984). Busch’s work is also often captured using large format monochrome film, and documents everyday people going about their business. His defining work “Working Men” shares imagery of working-class men and their own stories. These series of images are simple and uncluttered while focusing entirely on the subjects in question.

Diane Arbus, as Artnet (2021) states, was an American photographer best known for her intimate black-and-white portraits. Arbus often photographed people on the fringes of society, including the mentally ill, transgender people, and circus performers (Artnet, 2021). It’s the aesthetic of Arbus’s work that I’m attracted to. Like the other artists mentioned, her style of work simply captures the subject as they are, in the environment. No more no less. I really feel magnetised to this way of capturing people with a minimal fuss approach.

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Sander's work is seen to reveal the complexity behind the human condition, and most of his works depict the faces of people from diverse nationalities, genders, classes and professions in a simple, intimate and revealing aesthetic (Hauser Wirth, 2019). I'm drawn towards such a style when it comes to capturing the beekeeper portraits.

Duane Michals, as DC Moore Gallery (2021) highlights, is widely known for his work in series, multiple exposures, and text accompanying his analogue process. Michals work in the 1960's, in an era heavily influenced by photo journalism, manipulated the medium to communicate narratives (DC Moore Galley, 2021) with handwritten text for powerful context to his works, similar to that of Busch.

Like the artists highlighted, my aim is to also slow down the photographic process and connect better with the subjects to find their story, their environments, and those moments overlooked. I'll also add narratives to the series, for cohesion of images and context of the subjects own accompanying stories.

Literature Review

Practical beekeeping in NZ book 5th edition.

The Practical beekeeping in New Zealand (2018) book is a complete guide to managing hives and provides insights into New Zealand's beekeeping practices. For the inexperienced, it also explains what is required to become a beekeeper and discusses the industry in New Zealand. For those experienced with beekeeping the book shares the steps for managing colonies all year long and the products that hives produce. The Practical beekeeping in New Zealand book will be useful, not just an overview of the beekeeping industry as a whole, but also for all the practical steps and equipment required in maintaining a hive. This publication has assisted in addressing my questions relating to the process of beekeeping, as well as the queries relating to what equipment is important for the management of bees.

Strategies for "Greening" the NZ Honey Industry.

This report, produced by researchers from the University of Otago, focuses on the current positioning of the honey industry towards 'greening' and aims to identify social and industry dynamics which are promoting or inhibiting the development of 'green' strategies (Bourn et al., 1999). The report contains interviews with people involved in the honey industry, including beekeepers, who were chosen to have their own views and perspectives of the honey industry. This report also provides views on organic beekeeping practices, which shows an alternative approach to beekeeping from many commercial approaches. It also

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explores the individualistic nature of the bee industry compared to other monopolised agricultural production. This report has helped explore a number of aspects of the research questions that will be addressed, in particular it has provided insight to the individual attitudes and environments that beekeepers operate within.

2020 Apiculture Monitoring Report NZ.

The annual Apiculture Monitoring report by the Ministry of Primary Industries (2020) provides numerous statistics on the New Zealand bee and honey industry. It covers topics such as honey production, including manuka, exportation, as well as hive and beekeeping enterprise numbers across New Zealand, with annual trends and a break down into regional areas. It also highlights key developments, achievements and challenges experienced by commercial as well as hobbyist New Zealand apiculturists. These statistics and observations have been useful in helping to define and identify the New Zealand beekeeper population and industry. It has also assisted in providing insights to the challenges that beekeepers face including any impacts on the industry from the recent Covid19 outbreak.

Christchurch Hobbyist Beekeepers Club Website.

The Christchurch Hobbyist Beekeepers Club (2021) website provides information about the current committee members and their contact details, as well as news updates relevant to beekeeping and some statistics about the current membership numbers, and average age. The information from this website, has assisted in providing insights to topics of interest and current issues for beekeepers, as well as helping to define a portion of the Christchurch beekeeping community. The main information that has been and will be utilised from this site

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is the various contact names, emails and phone numbers for current beekeepers in Christchurch. This information will be useful to make contact with beekeepers to help answer the questions for research as well as assist in identifying subjects and locations for photography to be produced in response to the research questions posed.

Video of beekeepers at work in Southern Alps.

This YouTube video from The Beekeepers Honey (2019) provides a brief look at a Day in the Life of a Beekeeper in the beautiful and rugged Southern Alps, New Zealand. The Beekeepers Honey is a commercial beekeeper operating in the Southern Alps and Canterbury Plains. This video provides a visual experience of the activities beekeepers undertake to look after hives and bees, as well as the natural environment in which beekeepers work in, and the locations that hives are kept. This video helps respond to the research questions relating to the environments that beekeepers work within, as well as some of the processes of keeping bees and the equipment used for the management of bees. It also provides useful visual examples to assist in producing the photography required to respond to the research questions posed.

Methodologies

My goal is to capture images of New Zealand's beekeeping community and their culture, related to their environments in which they operate. I will demonstrate and link how the commercially independent people of beekeeping, and their activities, work with the environment through a series of photographs, and a zine. The images will be created alongside questions to add context and narrative to the beekeepers' unique process and stories. I want to showcase New Zealand's unique beekeeping communities and the environments that they work within.

I will achieve this goal by leveraging into local beekeeping clubs, sellers of beekeeping equipment and small commercial ventures, and then contacting them to discuss meeting them and documenting their process and portraits. My focus will be Christchurch and the Canterbury Region of beekeepers. This part of my methodology may well be the hardest, as contacting beekeepers mid-Winter could yield little interest. Hopefully moving into the Springtime, with a persistent attitude towards connecting with these farmers, it will result in multiple connections and leads. Another more organic, and interesting approach towards connecting to beekeepers could be applying the methodology that Alec Soth applied to his process when creating 'Sleeping by the Mississippi' (Soth, 2004) whereby, like the fledgling internet of the time, he let each connection lead him to the next portrait, and from each

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subject, he found another connection and he followed that lead. The results were more organic and created an interweaving lateral body of work that captured the overlooked side of the subject matter. I wish to explore this more 'obscure' side of portraiture too, during this series of image taking, with pictures within the beekeepers' home, or environments outside of the traditional beekeeping visuals.

Organising meetups and travelling to document leads will be time consuming, as I will cover in my timeline planning, but vital to the success of this project. To accommodate travel in the most economical way, I'll use my campervan setup that I'll stay in overnight if my travels take me outside of Christchurch into the mountains or Canterbury plains.

I aim to answer my questions visually using a Yashica635 (6x6) medium format camera, as well as recording the subjects verbal answers to my sub questions on my iPhone via audio recordings. These recordings will be translated into text to accompany the images and provide cohesion between the two.

My process of capturing the imagery on my trusty Yashica635 medium format camera, is to slow down the end-to-end process like the photographers who inspire me, Alec Soth, Glenn Busch, August Sanders, Diane Arbus and Duane Michals. I'm going to capture the complete series on monochrome Ilford HP5 film stock, as it has a lot of latitude in the shadows, as well as offering the most neutral negative (Ilford Photo, 2019). For some variation I will also be photographing on colour film, Kodak Portra 400 and plan on self-developing all negatives and digitally scanning them, so that I can have full creative control and reproducibility of the end-to-end process. Camera settings wise, I'm keen to explore capturing the subjects wide

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open at a low aperture to achieve the distinctive ‘medium format look’, and I will pose the subjects at ease and as natural as possible, like the portrait works of August Sanders (Hauser & Wirth, 2019).

The medium that I’ll use to showcase the beekeeping community and culture on, will be large traditional prints, but as part of this body of work, I will also produce a small run zine that will have accompanying text from the questions posed during the visits, like that of the ‘Working Men Series’ by Glenn Busch (Busch, 1984).

Timeline

Throughout the next semester I will be traveling to many different locations to create an extensive body of work to answer the questions I've posed. The aim is to work with the beekeeping associations and farmers in the Christchurch and Canterbury region to arrange a series of visits and image capturing sessions.

20th June – 19th July

During the mid-semester break I plan to use this time for the planning of my project, organising locations, looking at logistics, and booking dates to visit beekeepers within the Christchurch and Canterbury region. I will also be researching more processes of artists to accompany my own goals in image making. I'll plan to make a style guide of the images I'm going to shoot, for consistency at each location.

20th July – 20st September

During this period, I will be actively meeting with farmers at their location and capturing as much content as I can, following the style guide made previously and utilizing the research

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and questions previously prepared. I will also be developing and scanning imagery captured throughout this period.

21st September – 29th October

During this period, I'll be deciding to shoot beekeepers again who I built a rapport with during the previous shoots. I'd really like to capture some imagery within their homes or alternative spaces to add another level of intimacy towards their lives. I'll continue to develop and scan imagery, and I will also be drafting the concept for the zine.

30th October – 23rd November – Hand In

During this final period, I'll be completing my workbook and checking it provides an in-depth capture of my experiences, process, and outcomes. The final couple of weeks I'll be doing test prints and completing the design of the zine ready for exhibition.

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