

Creating my dance film, "Unmasked" was a very informative process. I learned a lot about dance film as a medium, as well as what choices work and why. When we were given the assignment, I knew immediately that I wanted to work outdoors, and with water.

To begin, I explored the symbolism of water both in folklore and in my own life. I was heavily inspired by the legend of selkies and the idea of shedding off a "skin" to become a wilder and more authentic version of oneself. The ideas of baptisms and ritual cleansings were also a part of my inspiration. Water is used in our lives to physically cleanse in bathing and to wash our hands, and, to spiritually cleanse in religious and cultural services across the world. I wanted to tell a story of someone cleansing and re-wilding themselves by returning to nature and water. Some of the aesthetic and choreographic choices were inspired by the dance film *Becoming-Animal* by Emilia Robinson and Sidonie Carey-Green. In the film, the dancers pulled at their faces or had their faces pulled by other dancers, which inspired my choreographic work. In an article on the piece, the face-pulling is described as "rediscovering" the face and head (Dance Art Journal, 2021). This immediately stuck out to me because of my desire to present an un-masked, wild, and natural state of the self.

My idea of re-wilding is defined by a return to nature, with an emphasis on the acceptance of nature as a part of oneself. We reside as a part of nature, as opposed to in, around, or on it. An important aspect to this re-wilding is the removal of the mask worn to appear beautiful and palatable to society. To re-wild, it is necessary to cleanse oneself of this mask, and the return to nature is an essential part. For this reason, I decided to title my film "Unmasked".

The book *Making Video Dance: A Step-by-Step Guide For Creating Dance For The Screen* by Katrina McPherson helped me refine the concept of my film. In the beginning, I had too many images and ideas about how I wanted to incorporate water into a dance film. My original idea was too broad, as I wanted to include too many different scenes, including a shower, a bath, a river, and a swimming pool, as well as the beach and the rain.. The questions that are given by McPherson in the *First Steps* section helped me narrow down what I wanted the final message of my film to be, and it brought me from the broad idea of cleansing and transformation by water to the idea of re-wilding and unmasking by water. (McPherson, 2006, p. 9)

After reading the text, I decided that the indoor water space of a bathtub, pool, and shower would not serve my theme, so those three locations were taken out. While a pool, shower, and bathtub all involve cleansing by water, there was not enough mess involved. Choosing two spaces that were in nature enhanced the sense of returning to the wild in a way that an indoor, sterile space could not, no matter how grotesque the choreography was.

For choreographic inspiration, I used the ideas of transformation, shedding, and the movement of water. These ideas turned into several short phrases. However, the choreography changed slightly once I was on-site due to mud, ground stability, and water depth. Due to these environmental factors, the choreography could not be precisely identical between the two locations, which changed some of my editing decisions. I could not create an exact progression of one singular phrase between the two settings because of this. Instead, I tried to edit together places that made sense and connected somehow, such as two different shots with my hand up or my head back. I chose to do this to thread the two scenes together, and make it seem as if the two locations were one in the same. It was important to me that the two scenes not feel like

two different characters and plots, but rather, one person experiencing one thing, just in two different settings.

To keep the structure of my film and maintain my theme, I wanted to show a clear devolution from beauty and cleanliness into the grotesque and un-masked self. To do this, I needed a stark difference between the beginning and end of the film. At the beginning of the film, I wanted to present myself as dry, clean, and put together, devolving into a rain-soaked, muddy, and “wilder” form. I chose to display this through choreography and the state of my makeup and hair. Smearing my makeup created a visual representation of removing a mask, and I created an entire phrase, pulling at my face and rubbing at my eyes to smear it as much as possible. I chose to save the most drastic “re-wilding” for the very end, smearing mud and sand on my face. This idea came from the desire to create a visual point in the film when I had become completely wild. I included a shot of this at both locations, and edited the two shots together so that they would appear to be happening simultaneously. It was important that the final shot be the messiest, showing the wet, tangled hair, the streaked makeup, and mud smeared across my cheek. I wanted the resolution of the film to be acceptance with the wild, as opposed to resistant or struggling against the smear of mud.

I chose to wear basic, light face makeup, mascara, and a light mauve lipstick for my makeup. If I had a chance to re-film, I would probably wear slightly more dramatic makeup to really emphasize and show the devolution of my “mask.” I would use a darker, neutral-toned lipstick, such as a soft burgundy or darker mauve, and a little bit of eyeliner. This way, you would see more of the makeup as it was smeared. However, the “done” makeup wouldn’t distract during the first part of the film. Since I chose to keep the makeup so light, I had to re-touch with extra mascara in between takes so the smeared makeup would be more obvious.

I wore my hair down so that it could visually get messier, wetter, and more tangled as the film progressed. Loose hair added an extra challenge to filming, as I had limited chances to film certain shots while my hair was still dry. Hair that was too neat and tidy would look out of place in my film, and water down the overall theme. However, I also had to find a balance between letting my hair flow freely, and mitigating tangles for the health of my hair and ensuring it would fall somewhat correctly. I often would pause between takes to re-brush it if it got too tangled, which felt incongruent to the theme of re-wilding.

I would also like to re-shoot this film in warmer weather, so I can fully submerge myself into the water. I was able to get in the water using a wetsuit, however, I struggled to fully submerge my head for long periods of time because the ocean water was so frigid.

I chose an all-black costume for this film to emphasize the scenery and movement. I wanted something simple that I could also wear over a wetsuit, so I chose black leggings with a black turtleneck. I briefly considered using something flowier, however, I think that anything too baggy or flowy would have distracted from the overall movement, and would have posed a challenge for managing fabric in the wind and the water. However, a more flowy costume could have looked messier and more natural, especially if it was a lighter color, which would show dirt and mud. In a warmer climate, I would like to play with the possibility of a simple, flowy light colored dress.

An all-black outfit did allow for re-shooting scenes, as the costume did not show if it had been wet or not. The only thing that could show this would be my hair, so I had to give extra

consideration for when I got my hair wet. Once my hair was wet, I knew there was no going back to film the “put together” scenes until the next day.

Overall, I would say that I am fairly happy with my film. I am satisfied with my ability to commit to my ideas of being in the water and smearing the mud across my face. Knowing what I know now, I would like to go back one day and re-shoot this film, using my critiques to make it even better. The main thing that I would change overall is just to make every bit of the film wilder and more feral. More mud, more grotesque faces, more unraveling.

Works Cited

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