

Pew Research Proposal Form  
Union University

Cover Sheet

Name(s) of Applicant(s):

Aaron Hardin

Title of Proposed Project: *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring*

Primary Discipline: Photojournalism      Secondary Discipline(s): Visual Communication

Has this proposal been submitted to another agency, publication, or program (including for the Union University Research/Study Leave)? No

If so, which one(s)?

Location of proposed research: Atlanta, GA

Desired start date: January 2020

Recommending Scholars and their disciplines:

External: Matt Eich

Union: Ashley Blair

In consultation together, we recommend the approval of the proposal as an acceptable project and affirm that the applicant has the professional wherewithal to accomplish the project satisfactorily.

Chair of your department Ashley Blair Date: 10/17/19

Dean of your school: A. R. Date: 10-17-19

If the chair and/or dean do not recommend the proposal, the applicant should seek a conference to discuss the reasons.

Proposals should be submitted by the applicant in person to the chair of the Research Committee.

## PEW RESEARCH PROPOSAL

### 1. Title of the project – *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring*

### 2. Statement of the end product(s)

*The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* will be published as a museum quality, fine art photographic book. Photographic art books utilize imagery as the primary narrative source to connect universal, non-verbal experiences and emotions. *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* will be published through Fall Line Press in an edition of 350-500 books. A book tour will begin in the fall of 2020 and will include lectures and/or gallery showings across the United States and Europe. Some of the tentative locations for the book lectures include Atlanta, GA, New York, NY, and Arles, France.

### 3. Explanation of the scholarly activity.

#### I. Statement of the Scholarly Activity

*The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* is an allegorical tale of birth, creation, and redemption. In 2014, our doctor told my wife and I that we were unexpected and miraculously pregnant. Up until that point, we were medically unable to conceive. Our lives were immediately wrought with fear and hope as we brought this new, pure life into a troubling world.

My daughter's birth became a catalyst of my own familial redemption as we began this new journey. I photographed the new world my daughter would grow up into, imaging beauty, creation, and hope intermingled with the shadow of the fall of man. *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* builds upon a history of biblical metaphors to reveal glimmers of spiritual realities unfolding within a rural and suburban landscape.

Thankfully the body of work received high honors, leading to me winning the 2016 Magnum Photography Fine Art Award, the 2016 Magenta Foundation Flash Forward Emerging Artist Award, and a 2017 MACK First Book Award nomination. The work was then shown in Berlin, Germany, New York, NY, London, England, and Havana, Cuba. Most recently, *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* was a part of "New Southern Photography" at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, LA.

The next phase of the body of work is its translation into a fine art photographic book. The limited edition museum quality art objects will serve as a comprehensive coalescence of the body of work. Photobooks are a sub-set of art books that seek to create an experience for the viewer that compliments and often transcends the gallery installation. Being that a gallery installation is temporary, the photobook serves as a historical and archival record of the entire scope of the body of work.

#### II. Description of the activity and its goals

I am seeking to publish my first monograph, *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring*. In the fall of 2019, I signed a publishing contract with Fall Line Press, an art book publisher in Atlanta, GA. Fall Line is known in the art book industry for their luscious, high-quality books. It is a great honor to work with such a publisher. Fall Line Press not only offers a means of distribution and

dissemination of the work, but they also open relationships with new galleries, museums, and art institutions for shows, books signings, and lectures.

This relationship with Fall Line Press is particularly important, as they are a secular publishing company. Currently, I am the only Christian practitioner on their roster, opening up new opportunities to speak about God's grace to a skeptical post-modern art community. Unpacking the themes of grace, creation, and hope are desperately needed in the mainstream art culture. *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* has already opened doors to speak to those that have long rejected the church.

### **III. Brief examination of scholarly literature or context of the activity within your discipline and Theoretical Framework**

*The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* falls within a Southern Gothic literary tradition, despite being a photographic art book. The work contains the haunting echoes of Flannery O'Connor's unforgiving lush southern landscapes. Though a looming anxiety moves throughout the *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring*, the narrative does not merely wait for God's judgment. Instead, the work is interwoven with the thread of hope. As photographer and writer Robert Adams states in his seminal work *Beauty in Photography*, "Art that can convincingly speak through form for significance bears upon the problem of nihilism... Restated, photography as art does address evil, but it does so broadly as it works to convince us of life's value (Aperture, 1996)."

In regards to a photographic tradition, *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* functions in a poetic documentary mode. Poetic documentary is a subjective interpretation of reality that hinges on visual associations that suggest deeper truths. Works such as *The Animals* by Garry Winogrand or *One Circle* by Fred Hüning utilize candid, documentary images to instigate deeper philosophical conversations. Winogrand photographed zoo animals to comment on the trappings of racism and sexism in the 1960s, while Hüning sorrowfully illustrated the frailty of life through the documentation of a miscarriage and birth.

Unlike these practitioners, my work reveals the glimmers of spiritual realities within a fallen existence. While the visual allegories presented in the work rely on ancient symbols in Christian art such as the serpent, the peacock, and the Madonna, the backdrop of *The 13<sup>th</sup> Spring* is a modern rural and suburban South. The work seeks to reconcile a contemporary southern perspective with an overly romanticized Southern Gothic tradition within a postmodern art world.

My photographs are an oddity in a predominantly secular, even anti-Christian art market. Despite the ubiquity of secularism, I have found pockets of both artists and art enthusiasts that are open to the spiritual realities of human existence. I believe it is time to engage with the spiritually famished within the art community with work that questions our own fears, hopes, values, and dignity as humans, thus leading to a recognition of the Creator.

#### **4. An essay (500 - 1000 words) describing how the Christian faith relates to your understanding of your discipline and how it relates to this scholarly endeavor.**

Photography at its core is both a meditative and explorative process, particularly in regards to human existence. By placing a frame around a moment in time, the practitioner and viewer must stop and contemplate their own understanding of reality. The act of making and sharing photographs often coincides with my own examination of God's creation and the impact of the fall of man.

According to Hebrews 1, Jesus Christ is the exact representation of God's being. I believe this must include his physical embodiment. One of my pastors recently gave a sermon on Jesus fulfilling his title as the Son of Man. In the sermon, my pastor said that Jesus is the most humane human. He is truly the first born over all creation. To be human in the truest sense means to be an exact likeness of Jesus Christ. Christ's compassion is not limited to the rich or poor, the socially acceptable or the pariah. He does not see a Greek or a Jew. As such, his social structures and values differ greatly from ours. Our perceptions of this world are veiled by sin, ugliness, and a desire to dominate. Yet Christ sees things clearly – of what once was and what will be.

The problem with our current place in time is that we are stuck in exile. We were driven from Eden because of our sin, yet we await the new heaven and new earth after the second coming of Christ. For my own journey, photographing the physical world often reveals an echo of original creation. Humanity, nature, and the earth will always hold vestiges of the original Edenic state. Those faint glimmers of what once was and is to come leave me with both hope and sorrow. That longing for creational restoration is the framework for much of my work.

The desire for restoration is a hunger for Christ's return. But until that day, I am called to reveal the concurrence of hope and loss through my photographs. My own pursuit to reconcile hope and loss with my work directly coincides with my walk with Christ. As the pain of loss deepens in my own life, there hope endures. As I see a new flicker of beauty, I feel a further sense of loss.

As I make photographs, I am searching for a hole in the veil of the fall. This is a deeply personal journey that is shared with the exterior world. My photographs are personal documents, or proofs, that God's goodness, beauty, and grace exists among the thorns and thistles of the fall. Making work reminds me that my current perception of the wasteland is not fully true. The purpose of sharing my work is to invite others to see through that thick veil. Hope is not lost. But it does at times feel hidden. It is a grace that God gives me an opportunity to seek out His glory.

**5. A time frame for the completion and a plan for the dissemination of the project.**

The tentative release date of the book would be the fall of 2020. The funds provided by the Pew Research Grant would enable me to hire an editor and a project manager, while also covering pre-press materials and travel for press checks in Philadelphia, PA and Atlanta, GA. Due to the high cost of publishing full-color archival art books, pre-production is of the utmost importance as each book is a highly collectible art object.

Books signings and lectures will take place beginning in Atlanta, GA in the fall of 2020, followed by the New York Art Book Festival in September 2020, and the Arles Photography Festival in Arles, France in November 2020. Each book signing has the potential of a gallery showing, particularly in Atlanta and New York.