

## *Projecting Absence*

When I set out to photograph this project, I did so guided by a profoundly different vision than the theme running through my portfolio today. I drafted my first Project Previsualization over five weeks ago, and it's natural to expect my plan to change in the time since. But until last week, I was convinced it wouldn't. Regardless of whatever logistical challenges might arise, I believed in the intimately human focus of my idea and in its significance to my time at PA. In any case, in the time since, the vision behind my project hasn't just shifted; it's reversed course entirely. In a roundabout way, I now feel that the transformation my portfolio has made — from highlighting the human component to tearing it out in the most visible way — has made it only more compelling at communicating what the humanity embedded in my first previsualization meant to me. I'm writing this supplementary piece for a couple reasons — firstly to explain that shift, but perhaps more significantly because I don't think this portfolio would be complete without an understanding of how that change projects the absence at my portfolio's thematic heart.

The majority of the photos in my portfolio derive from the ideas in my Final Project Previsualization — that is, I planned to physically superimpose cutouts of my friends' portraits onto printed background photos from spots around campus and places I'd traveled to that called to them aesthetically. As the workload and associated stress have escalated over the course of this term, however, I found myself spending less and less time with the people I intended to center my project around. I found myself struck by their absence more acutely than I was even accustomed to recognizing their presence as the foundation of my identity as a PA student — the theme I'd originally determined for my portfolio. At first, I felt that proceeding with my first previsualization, nonetheless, would reinforce the meaning its themes had to me. But as the term and my linked considerations showed no sign of slowing, I realized I couldn't tell a story about myself as meaningful as I hoped without projecting this absence into it.

I came to resolve that inverting my original plan would best reflect (a verb that runs through the portfolio's use of water) the realization I had come to — a conclusion I stand by with my portfolio completed. Many of the silhouettes of figures I've cut out from my prints are based on actual photographs of my friends, representing the declining sway of my most dependable influences in the environment I,

the school, and forces behind my understanding have constructed around me. Others, still, aren't intended to represent any particular people — rather, they represent the possibilities of campus life that the unpredictable reality of my life's unfolding here have inadvertently cut short. Around me (and especially at this stage of the term and school year) I feel that I'm living surrounded by absence. The lifelong friends the school promises me are nowhere to be seen — they exist (and I know that in theory) but they are absent (and I feel that in my heart). As it doesn't suit this project's scope to assign a specific reason *why*, I choose to focus on the ways I project this sense to myself.

Rather than highlighting the people who make this place what it means to me, then, this project will highlight their absence. In somber tones and disparate settings, I endeavor to capture the ambient solitude of this time, and the ways it obscures the sun, the campus life, and the *people* this term could symbolize without all the overhanging *stuff* that clouds its meaning to me today. *Projecting Absence* takes its name from the introspective pattern that held this term back from what I hoped it could be — that held *me* back this term. And with this absence projected back onto me through this portfolio, the best I can do now is to take its lessons in stride.