



Interview

During preparations for the presentation of *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* at KW, the following conversation took place between Margaret Honda and Anna Gritz, Curator at KW.

Anna Gritz: You came to filmmaking late in your work, after having worked in sculpture, installation, and photography for many years. Intriguingly, you managed to find a way to continue exploring a set of concerns that has accompanied your practice for a long time, but through the new parameters of the medium film. Can you talk about your transition to film?

Margaret Honda: My transition to film was the result of a ten-minute conversation. A few years ago, I was talking to someone about things that come in wide rolls and he mentioned 70mm print stock. I never considered making a film, but I was drawn to 70mm film, because it is inconceivable for me to work on the scale of a movie like *Lawrence of Arabia*. I think it helped that I had so few options. I realized that using a negative didn't make any sense, and that led me to the idea for *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum*. My idea was to run the print stock through a printer and capture the full range of colors that could be produced through the printing process. There would be no camera, no negative, no images. My intention was to *work* with film, not to *make* a film. *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* was produced entirely at the lab, and it was as much an experiment for them as it was for me. I was asking them to make a print without a negative, and initially I didn't know how long it should be, or even what it should look like. I wanted the process to determine those things, and it did. The running time is the length of a single 2500-foot roll of print stock, and the densities and durations of the colors follow those in the visible spectrum.

AG: For *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* (2014) you exhaust the color potential of the medium of 70mm film, moving through the full range of the film stock. The twenty-one minute long film correspondingly matches the material's potential for displaying color with our visual capacity to perceive it. There is no storyline or plot to distract from the encounter. This is rather a self-conscious approach that heightens our awareness of the act of perception. How do you bring together the process of making the work with the process of experiencing it?

MH: While making this work, I was mostly thinking about film as a material, not about film as the carrier of an image. *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* is constructed as a palindrome and includes properly oriented head leaders at both ends, which are also projected. It can begin from either end. It displays the full spectrum of Kodak 2383 print stock, and it is a record of how the emulsion responded to the printer's lights. The work has no frame lines since I didn't use a camera or an optical printer. The film exists as a 70mm print and will never migrate to a nonnative format. How the work is presented is an extension of how it was made. *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* employs the protocols of industrial film production, so it is screened like other industrially produced films—in a theater setting, with a projection booth, proper seating, and specific screening times. This is the conventional context for viewing films, foregrounding the relationships between the viewer, the film, and the physical setting. Any disruption of these relationships is immediately apparent in this context.

AG: Working closely with technicians, projectionists, cinemas, and labs is a key interest of yours—an extension of your investigations into a given, intrinsic set of factors that shape the outcome of the work. Taking into account that these relationships form a highly instable, “eco-system” as you call it, comprised of

an ever-changing number of factors, the work takes on a volatile, process-driven dimension. How do you define what factors become part of the consideration when making the work?

MH: For *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum*, I was very fortunate to work with Vince Roth at FotoKem. He is an unparalleled color timer with decades of experience, and he has now also become a friend. This film exists because of his efforts. It will be a real crisis when Vince retires. It means losing part of the culture, not just a single individual. The technicians, the projectionists, and the people who work with the equipment or at the supply houses form a network with an extremely deep knowledge of the industry. This is the “eco-system” I have come to depend on, because a film like *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* is both difficult to make and equally difficult to project. To get to the point of screening the film, everything matters. As this system shrinks, fewer films are made and shown, which is absolutely devastating for the people whose jobs primarily depend on film.

I’ve worked with film for less than five years, but in that time I have faced situations where I couldn’t do something because someone retired and was not replaced, or I couldn’t get the appropriate materials, or I couldn’t screen a film because the projector was not in good repair. Once, I almost missed a screening because the shipper hadn’t ever seen a 70mm print and was holding it for X-rays. I used to think that the loss of projectors and projectionists would be the end of 70mm film, but I now know that Kodak discontinuing an emulsion will have more immediate and lasting consequences for me. When I began working on *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* in 2013, FotoKem was one of only two labs in the world that processed 70mm film. A year later, it was the only one. If you work in film, you understand that the ground is constantly shifting, but for now it is still possible to figure out a way to get things done.

AG: The introduction to timing tapes in the process of making *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum* prompted the production of your second film, *Color Correction* (2015). For this film you gained access to the color correction timing tapes on an unnamed Hollywood film. These tapes, which usually determine the amount of color correction of each shot in the film, were used without the images to which they once corresponded. The 101-minute long film is like a shadow that offers a viewing experience that is usually unavailable, something that is reminiscent of your work *4366 Ohio Street* (2004–ongoing) in which you reproduce your childhood home at full-scale in a series of print editions. How would you describe your relationship to source material, and what dictates the points of departure for your work?

MH: I generally tend to think about what I want to do more than what things I want to make, so methods and

tools are often my starting point, but not necessarily the subject matter. I studied material culture, so I’m extremely interested in what happens when you rearrange certain steps in a procedure or remove a defining element of something, while still maintaining a strict sense of the discipline.

For *Spectrum Reverse Spectrum*, a timing tape was generated to control the printer’s light valves. When I understood that the tape and nothing else served as the printing element, I realized I could use an existing timing tape to make a film. With *Color Correction*, I was willing to accept whatever the timing tapes gave me. I was completely indifferent to their source and would have used any set because I wanted to make a film where I ceded control over all aesthetic decisions. Other people had already determined the gauge and running time, the number and length of the shots, and the color corrections. I did nothing to alter any of that except eliminate the negative. With *4366 Ohio Street*, the question was how to build something to an architectural scale without the required physical space. The work is a full-scale paper reconstruction of my family’s home. The surface area of each room is divided into hundreds of equal-sized pieces of paper and distributed in a catalog or journal. It’s possible, but not probable, that these pieces can later be assembled to form the room. One room is published at a time, and the closer I get to completing the house, the more fragmented it becomes and the further it gets from ever being seen as a built entity. These works have specific material sources, and the fact that those original sources are not represented or readily available makes everything somehow more active.