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Jason Lazarus is interviewed by Sharon Hollensbe on May 12, 2017 at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Series: Alaskan Artists Interviews.

Sharon Hollensbe said Jason Lazarus, a photography teacher in the Communication and Journalism Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks will have a display of his photographs in the Museum of the North in the summer.

Jason Lazarus talks about his interest in photography. In high school he took a photography class. He comes from a military family and ended up in Fairbanks for high school. He started at the University of Alaska as a computer science major, but later decided to change majors. He eventually got a job in the Journalism Department. Over 12 years he has held different jobs in the department. He started out teaching darkroom laboratory classes. He went into digital cameras. He missed the creative process. He ended up getting frustrated with the lack of movement in his work.

Eventually after teaching he decided to get his MFA in photography through the Academy of Art Institute from San Francisco. He worked online for his degree. He talked about the process and workmanship behind the print. He said that has become a huge part of his art. Through his graduate studies he has worked on perfecting the Van Dyke Brown Process which he used on his series of mining apparitions. He took models out to mining sites and had them reenact the daily life in the mines.

After graduating from UAF he started looking for something to photograph. A lot of people in Alaska look at the landscape or the wildlife. He wanted his work to look different. He said he couldn't find the passion for that. He avoided a lot of Alaskana subject matter. The mines got his interest. He had always been interested in abandoned places. In his childhood in Europe he saw this. Finding hidden stories in the mines was a huge portion of what he wanted to focus on. A lot of Alaska's early history is just rotting away. He hoped his early works would inspire people to save this history. Hollensbe asked if he was still interested in this type of work. Lazarus said he has moved on. His early work with mines spanned about five or six years. He was trying to figure out how to use his photographic tools combined with the narrative. It took a long time to figure out. He tried to tell people about the feel of a place. It took him a while to end up achieving this. He started asking what people thought about his photographs. He started playing with the idea of including apparitions with the photographs. He was always trying to convey that there was something left behind at the mine sites. He started working with models. He would take two negatives and stitch the images together. He started shooting with film and worked with it. He described his technique. He makes his own contact paper at home. He talked about the process involved for contact printing. He exposes the paper to sunlight or a UV box. He then processes the print with chemicals. He still produces prints this way. He said sometimes people think his prints are archived images. His prints show what was left behind at the mines. He thinks if we want to save these places then we have to imbue them with the stories of these places. The place and people are connected. He said his mining series will be shown in the museum. He focuses on places that have not been restored or preserved. He talked about one of the photographs he took by Eagle Summit. Discussion about some of the photographs. He did a residency at McCarthy and had access to Kennecott Mine. He talked about some of the sites he photographed. He had a photograph from Treadmill Mine near Juneau. His new work with chemograms. They are digital reproductions of original images. He takes photographic paper

over seventy years old. He discusses the chemogram process. He decided to play around with symbols and specifically WWII symbols. He said a lot of people have forgotten about the history attached to that conflict. He said history is always written by the victors and he wondered about the other side. He focused on looking at the dual nature of the symbols. He focused on reminding people what happened and why it happened. He talked about current politics and comparing it to what happened during WWII. He takes the photographic paper and sprays a resist on it. After drying he cuts in a pattern into the resist. He makes a pattern on both sheets of paper. He goes through the chemogram process. He said the chemicals aren't getting to the surface except where he has made cuts in the resist. The effect looks like rust.

Lazarus said he has a new set of Alaska landscapes. He is focusing on the textures, the weather, and the somber quality of Alaska winters. He wanted to focus on the concept of what a traditional Alaskan is. He said we reflect our environment. He said Skookum is a Chinook Jargon word. It refers to strength, resolve, etc. He wanted to find landscapes that reflect that value. He said after years of chasing good light he is doing the opposite on this project.

Lazarus said going for his MFA has opened his eyes. He sees how diverse art can be. He sees how important education is. He continues to love to learn. He attends workshops for new skills. In Alaska with the isolation that is easy to not better or challenge yourself. His abstract work would not have happened except for his work at the Academy of Art.