

The Claire Rosen & Samuel Edes Foundation Prize for Emerging Artists

Application Materials Packet for:

**Brett Tracy**

*The Illuminated Thread*

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San Jose, CA

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**Artist's Statement:**

Rejecting the imperative of endless growth, Brett Tracy positions the human species at the onset of its deindustrial phase. Using video and audio field recordings, the artist reveals the splendor and tragedy of a world built with phenomenal amounts of fossil energy, offering both a glimpse of the industrial sublime and a critique of the religion of progress.

Since receiving his MFA from the University of Chicago in 2008, Tracy has been engaged in a bicycle-mounted research endeavor documenting structures and landscapes that epitomize the heroic feats of the industrial age. Water conveyance systems, power plants, mines, shipping ports, and other megastructures are all part of the project's growing archive, a collection of more than sixty video-vignettes.

In 2007, the artist traveled to Sao Paulo, Brazil to document the effects of the 'Clean City Ordinance,' a set of laws abolishing outdoor advertising in South America's largest metropolis. In recent years, he's been committed to the mystification of several contemporary ruins including the Dixie Square Mall in Harvey, IL, the former Hunts cannery site in Davis, CA and eighteen decommissioned cold-war-era ICBM silos near Tucson, AZ.

**Abstract:**

*The Illuminated Thread* is an ongoing research venture committed to documenting and interpreting the contraction phase of the industrial age. The project's growing archive of active and disused industrial sites identifies structures capable of communicating the ethos of our age to the cultures of the future. Set within the context of an open-ended bicycle tour, the project employs modalities connected temporally, viscerally and spiritually to the living world—the antithesis of advanced industrial mechanization.

## **Project Proposal:**

The modern industrial economy, with its torrential flows of energy and resources, seems as permanent as any human reality can be. This sense of permanence, however, is an illusion. The Herculean feats of this anomalous period in our species' history are revealed to be transitory as the diminishing returns of complexity and the end of cheap energy consign them to our collective past.

Archeologists identify the recycling of old structures for new uses as one of the distinguishing characteristics of a collapsed society. The reinforced concrete constructions of our age represent significant concentrations of embodied energy and will be widely called upon to perform new functions in a deindustrializing world. Ruins of the most durable of these will persist into a future we'd scarcely recognize.

Using improvisational filmmaking techniques that adhere to the methodology of pure cinema, *The Illuminated Thread* seeks to identify and document industrial structures with the capacity to function as a cultural bridge, connecting the present to the postindustrial future. Embodying the values and exploits of the industrial age, such structures will someday serve as monuments to this brief and exuberant period.

The global drawdown of Earth's one-time allotment of fossil energy has erased the possibility that societies of the future will duplicate our industrial model. With this in mind, *The Illuminated Thread* becomes an exercise in cultural conservation. Photographically preserved in the project's growing archive, even the less-iconic fixtures of the industrial complex are saved from oblivion. Since periods of decline are historically not well documented, the record is a valuable resource.

All the sites in the project's catalog were accessed by bicycle, most within the context of a multi-stage cross-country tour. By relying on human-powered transportation to string together points in the US industrial constellation, the project's system of research and production reflects the reality of increasingly scarce and expensive energy. Additionally, cycling through impacted landscapes permits true immersion in subject and site.

The extraordinary success of the industrial model has brought upon us an uncertain future. As disillusion with the religion of progress spreads, the need for new visions of the future may become an overwhelming force. *The Illuminated Thread* provides an aesthetic context in which these visions can flourish.

*The Illuminated Thread's archive serves three primary functions:*

1. Expose the often-concealed interconnections between hyper-complex industrial megasystems.
2. Identify structures with 'ruin value'—the potential to transmit the legacy of the industrial age to future cultures.
3. Build a dynamic audio-visual tableau of the industrial world as it enters a prolonged period of contraction.

As the number of sites increases, the degree of connection and interdependence between them is inevitably revealed. A growing archive will more and more forcefully demonstrate the ubiquity of these megastructures, and how the viewer and their modern lifestyle are embedded within this intricately linked network.

*If awarded, funds from the Edes Prize would:*

1. Facilitate completion of the project's US circuit by returning it to Chicago where it began, rounding out its first three years and positioning it for exhibition.
2. Finance the replacement of ailing documentation equipment. Camera upgrade would reflect current standards for video-enabled DSLR.
3. Fund exhibition and distribution endeavors including (but not limited to) screenings, symposia, gallery exhibition, and published material.

The Edes Prize would allow the artist to reach a new level of engagement with both subject and audience. Moving beyond the limited framework of the Internet, the ambition is to create immersive environments that recall the sublime character of industrial landscapes. More complete immersion would be the aim behind a series of highly choreographed site explorations led by the artist. After more than three years of empirical research and documentation activities, lecture/screening events may be an appropriate way of conveying the unorthodox concepts underlying the project. Funds from the Edes Prize would help make these and other events a reality.

## **Provisional Timeline:**

*July 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011:*

Houston, TX to Chicago, IL via the Gulf Coast and the Eastern Seaboard. Six months on the road with fall and early winter allocated to the Rust Belt states of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois.

*January 1, 2012 to March 31, 2012:*

Studio time. Process accumulated digital content, edit, commission writings and design work.

*April 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012:*

Exhibition. Lecture/screening events, choreographed site explorations, catalogue published.

## **Provisional Budget:**

*Daily: (\$5,500)*

Meals (\$25 per day for 180 days)	\$4,500
Lodging/campground fees	\$500
Incidentals: clothing, maps, camping gear, batteries	\$500

*Technology: (\$8,000)*

Lumix DMC-GH2 Digital Camera W/14-140mm Lens	\$2,500
MacBook Pro	\$2,200
External Hard Drives	\$400
Final Cut Studio	\$1,000
Adobe Creative Suite 5 Design Premium	\$1,900

*Bicycle:* replacement parts, mechanical work \$500

*Exhibition:* installation costs including prints and materials \$8,000

*Catalogue:* design work, commissioned writing, publishing \$8,000

See *Work Sample DVD* insert for description of media.

The complete archive is available online: [illuminatedthread.com](http://illuminatedthread.com)