

Interview: 'Time Life Volume 15. Monument to a Period of Time in Which I Lived' Director Mungo Thomson on the Stillness of Collective Memory

An exercise for the soul is what I found harbored in the heart of the short film 'Time Life Volume 15. Monument to a Period of Time in Which I Lived.'

by Bella Vega · December 28, 2025



Courtesy of Mungo Thomson and Karma

A two-minute curiosity, an exercise in illumination — *Time Life Volume 15. Monument to a Period of Time in Which I Lived* is a fascinating look at temporary space. As a candle burns down to the end of its wick, we see a variety of pages from a diverse collection of books flash behind it, all with a candle at the center. Part meditation, part ceremony, part time keeping — interpretation of this short film is up to the audience. With bated breath, we watch what so few dare to attempt to create: a simple action made utterly transfixing.

As the slow, dwindling wick is softly coaxed to ash by the flame — as images all around flow quickly, burned into our retinas more than consciously processed — we're reminded that the media we consume throughout our lives and the world we take in are at once momentous and momentary. Mungo Thomson's fifteenth stop-motion piece (presented in NYFF's *Currents Program 2: Afterimages*) reminded me of a simple truth: for the rest of time, you will be marinated in love.

I was able to converse with Thomson on his ambitious creative project; we spoke of the essential practice of creating stop-motion projects, the treasure troves of literature that inspired the flashes of images accompanying the candle wick, and the lifecycle of light.

Bella Vega: Why did this film feel essential to be made? Where did the idea come from?

Mungo Thomson: This film is the fifteenth entry into my *Time Life* series, an ongoing suite of stop-motion animations, each composed of thousands of still images sourced from reference books and visual encyclopedias. I decided to make a work tracking a candle burning down because I see its melting as a visual metaphor for the waning days of analog media.

BV: How did you curate the book pages with the candle flame? Was there any rhyme or reason?

MT: I took images of candles from an array of books on candles and candle-making, home decor and entertaining, and religion and magic; the Time-Life books that give the series its name; Gerhard Richter's book *Atlas*; Sarah Charlesworth catalogues; and behind-the-scenes books on the making of *Barry Lyndon*, *Game of Thrones*, and other dramas set before the advent of electricity. By drawing on these sources, I make reference to art, design, and media more broadly.

BV: What is your favorite usage of a candle: divine in worship, like on an altar for a saint; divine in prayer, like an intention of good fortune for someone you love; used in a ritual; or providing light to a home/space?

MT: I like to use candles to watch time passing.

BV: What was the filming process like for this?

MT: Making this and the other *Time Life* films requires scanning thousands of books, then meticulously editing together images taken from them so that they flicker by at a pace that matches that of the highest-speed book scanner. The images also need to come together to follow a set logic — in this case, they track the temporal progression of a candle burning. The soundtrack came at the end. I found an ASMR recording of vinyl crackle on YouTube that fit perfectly with the idea of proximity to the analog through the digital.

BV: How do you feel that *Volume 15* fits into the NYFF *Currents* theme it is placed in?

MT: The theme of “Afterimages” is perfectly applicable to *Volume 15*: the film is a condensation of the imagistic residues of candles that once burned brightly but now have burned out.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.