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Miller Arts Scholars
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Rising Fourth-Year Arts Award 2016: Outcome Report
One-Week Intensive at the New York Film Academy

This past January, I attended the one-week film acting intensive at the New York Film Academy. This program is designed to introduce its students to the techniques associated with acting for the camera, which can be very challenging and different from the techniques used in acting for the stage. After taking film acting with Richard Warner in the UVA Department of Drama last semester, I felt that this program would be a great way to synthesize and apply the skills I'd learned in his class in a film-specific intensive workshop environment.

The week I spent at NYFA was enjoyable, challenging, and incredibly rewarding. The program packed an extraordinary amount of information into six short days. We spent the first two hours or so of every day in scene study, working in pairs with one of NYFA's acting teachers on scene which he picked out specifically to challenge us as actors. We had a short break for lunch, followed by an hour in subject-specific seminars – including a business of acting class, a movement class, and an introduction to directing. We then spent the following three to four hours, and even five to six hours on Wednesday and Thursday, working on-camera. The first day we were given short scenes to start memorizing and characters to start analyzing. I was given a scene from Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine*, and told to play the titular character. I was incredibly intimidated by the possibility of trying to play a role that was originated by Cate Blanchett. By no means am I at a point in my training where I could play that role with any of the sophistication and subtlety that Cate Blanchett manages, but I suspect the teacher gave me that role specifically to challenge my tendency toward perfectionism. By giving me a character I could have no hope of mastering at this point in my education (let alone in six days), she forced me to make the strongest decisions I could in short period of time. I had to choose one or two aspects of Jasmine's character that I could experiment with, and work on embodying those specific parts of her personality. In the end, I chose to focus on her defensiveness and her tendency to avoid confronting her problems. I can relate to both of these personality traits, and thus was able to bring in some of my own experience to color my portrayal and make it more personal.

We spent two days blocking and rehearsing our scenes, and then spent the remaining time filming. The "on-set" experience was the most time-consuming, and gave us all a clear picture of what it would be like to work on a film set. A two-minute scene could take multiple hours to film. It must be shot from multiple angles to accomplish the director's storytelling vision. Several takes from each angle might be necessary, until the director is happy with your performance. I learned the importance of consistency and repetition. Because you are filming the same scene multiple times (and those shots will be edited together to create the illusion that all the action is happening in a continuous stream of time), every action and detail has to be the same for every take. On a real film set, there would be someone whose sole job it is to make sure all the details are consistent. But in the stripped-down version of a film set that we were working with as students in a single week-long intensive, we all had to be alert and perceptive enough to make sure our takes were as consistent as possible. That kind of focus and specificity is difficult to maintain while also trying to stay in character, and provided us with a very real and challenging taste of acting for film.

Overall, my experience at NYFA accomplished exactly what I expected it to. It introduced me to the world of film acting, and laid out the basic skills required of any actor starting to work on-camera. In my short time there, I was introduced to several new techniques and was given the opportunity to synthesize those in a filmed scene at the end of the week. The program also proved to me that I have an interest in pursuing further training in acting for the camera and that, as I start considering graduate programs, I should focus on applying for those that offer training in both theatre and film.

The encouragement that the Arts Scholars community has given me is invaluable, and I can't imagine how my university career and my artistic training would have proceeded without these amazing opportunities provided by the Arts Scholars. Thank you to all of the supporters of the Miller Arts Scholars program, with a special thanks to Sandy and Vinie Miller and Evie and Stephen Colbert.