

Miller Arts Scholar Mini-grant Outcome

Last semester, Miller Arts generously donated money for me to build a dark room in my basement. Most of the materials were purchased in their complete form (camera, film, developing chemicals, trays, tongs, etc.), except for the enlarger. I researched ways online to build my own enlarger and I found one that I was particularly interested in trying. Building the enlarger was way more difficult than I expected, but it left me with a greater understanding of film development.

I spent most of my experimental time in the printing process. I had to test many prints before I generally understood what was going on. The first print I ever made was just white with an indistinguishable black shape making its way into the center from the edge of the photo. This led me to conclude that the way the enlarger was built (specifically the magnifying glass in it) was off kilter. I went to investigate and found that it was slightly covered by the cardboard. I made some adjustments and proceeded. The two prints following my corrections were blank. I decided to change my exposure times and adjust the print positioning in the enlarger. Finally, I figured out the perfect place where an image could show up. After this I found the images were completely blown up, thus the photos just appeared as a faint blobs of the zoomed in image it was meant to project. I ended up testing the enlarger just on plain pieces of paper in the dark and concluded that I needed a brighter light. For the brighter light I decided to tape my phone camera to the top of the makeshift lens adjuster. The prints ended up darker but still too zoomed in. After taking it apart a few times I realized the final issue was the magnifying glass which had a poor focal range.

Overall what I appreciated most about this project was understanding art as a science. Originally, I entered this wanting to appreciate the nitty gritty of creating pictures, but I ended up also discovering how much science is in artistic creation. As an artist this was particularly crucial to me because it allowed me to understand why I like art so much and why I make it. It also helped me come to terms with the part of art that I often struggle with, which is the trial and error. Sometimes it does not succeed the first time you make it and art is never finished, but that does not mean you don't appreciate the process and discover something in those drafts and mistakes. I am currently in the process of building a better version of the original enlarger design (with a better-quality magnifying glass).



Photo of dark room beakers, tub for developer and fixer.



Negative examples.



Cardboard enlarger from the bottom view up, the hole is where the magnifying glass is. The red sheet was slid into a little space made at the top to make the LED light less harsh.