

Michelle Miles

Miller Art Scholars Mini-Grant Outcome Report

In my project proposal, I outlined an idea for a larger project through which I hoped to expand the frame of my work's composition to include subject matter that I had never addressed before – particularly, my experiences growing up as a person who uses a wheelchair. This is subject matter that I previously hadn't addressed, because, for me, it was my "normal," and didn't feel interesting or relevant to others. I also described how I found it difficult to approach this topic through film, because I found it challenging to label my work with a genre like "narrative," "documentary," or even "experimental." Emboldened Terence Nance's HBO show, which freed me from feeling as though I must categorize my creations within a genre (as the experience I intended to explore is itself one that is hard to categorize, and is experienced in a range of ways.), I set out to shoot an episode of my own that accentuates the experience of being a disabled person in America right now.

I applied for a Miller Art Scholars Mini-Grant to fund a film that would act as a segment of this project, which I detailed in my project proposal. With the funding, I was able to purchase materials to create two films (though, they were not the single segment I originally had in mind). I initially wanted to shoot a series of interviews with two of my childhood friends, who were the only people I grew up around that also use wheelchairs, but unfortunately, the health conditions of my friends have not yet permitted for a shoot to happen, (though I intend to pursue that project by the end of this semester). Instead, I used my funding to buy materials to create two other segments for this larger project, which I've detailed below.



a still from *Hand Model*

Hand Model was inspired by the frequency that I have been told that I should pursue hand modeling due to my long, slim fingers. Each time I hear it, this comment perplexes me, as my hands are unable to make many common gestures, thus I use my fingers to hold objects in strange ways, and they are thin due to my atrophied muscles. There is a lack of representation of disabled people in the modeling industry, so from my perspective, someone suggesting that I model with a part of my body that I view as marked with disability was quite surprising. I decided to attempt hand modeling on camera and record the process, which became my first film produced with this grant. The cost of materials for the colored backdrops and items featured totaled \$110.



still from *Ballet*

The title of the second film is still in progress, but the working title for now is *Ballet*. This film explored the progression of my background in dance alongside the progression of my disease. I sourced visuals from archived tapes and photos from my family, as well as shot original content and recorded sound. The audio comes from an interview with my mother, which I used to frame the story, and from a spinning ballerina music box that I purchased with my funding for \$50.



still from *Ballet*

I filmed both of these projects with LED lights, which I've used another \$80 of my funding to purchase. The remaining half of my budget has been spent on film, which is currently loaded in my camera awaiting the shoot with my dear childhood friends!