

Miller Arts Scholars Rising Fourth-Year Award Application
Micah Watson, Spring 2017

Art is an articulation of the soul. It is a way to reinterpret the things that we have words to describe and to translate the things that words cannot explain. Often, creation is cathartic—it is cleansing, nourishing, and freeing for the body, mind and spirit. For many people, including myself art is a method of practicing self-care. I think that it is important to practice art in this way; art for the sake of the artist is a completely valid and sometimes necessary practice. However, as an African-American artist, I do not have the luxury of creating selfishly. As a participant in the ongoing Liberation Struggle, as a result of the political condition of Blackness assigned to me at birth, I must use the tools that I have been gifted with to work towards Freedom. It is my duty.

In his critical essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Langston Hughes articulates this sentiment: "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves."

My “liberation tools” exist in the realm of art. As a playwright, director, actor, singer, and filmmaker, I have a wide-ranging toolkit that I have actively been sharpening during my time at UVA. While all of these mediums are important on their own and on Grounds, I hope to widen my sphere of influence. As such, I am pursuing a career in the film and television industry as a screenwriter, director, and producer. I want to be able to bring my artist practice of combining African-American Studies, experimental filmmaking, and theatre techniques to a mainstream audience.

In order to achieve this goal, it is important that I gain a thorough understanding of the film and television industry. As such I plan to intern with TV One, during the summer of 2017. TV One is a leading cable television network, primarily geared towards African-American female audiences ranging from a get 18-45. As an intern in the Original Programming and Production department, I would have the opportunity to learn about the process of network production, script selection, casting, and editing. Additionally, I would be under the tutelage of Tia Smith, an award winning director, producer, and executive of TV One, with whom I have formed a mentoring relationship.

This internship will take place in Silver Spring, Maryland, just outside of Washington DC. This location is particularly important as Washington, DC, a predominately Black city is a space that makes its way into many of my original plays. As such, I would be able to engage with art in both structured and unstructured settings.

Because TV One will not cover the costs of housing and living, I will need

assistance in order to take part in this internship. The Miller Arts Scholars Rising Third-Year Award would be extremely helpful with housing, travel, and food expenses. Additionally, not having to work another job while also interning would provide me more time to work on personal projects including a web series that I am writing and pre-production work for my thesis film. In order to cover or offset my living expenses and to be able to concentrate more fully on this learning opportunity, I am requesting a Rising Third-Year Arts Award

Budget:

- Housing
George Washington University summer housing: \$385/week x 9 weeks = **\$3,465**
- Travel costs to and from Wichita, Kansas (hometown) = **\$800**
- DC Metro Monthly Pass (for travel to and from internship): \$237/month x 2 months = **\$474**
- Food expenses = \$80/week x 9 weeks = **\$720**
- Total living costs = **\$5,459**

Timeline:

- March 2017: Receive confirmation and specific logistical information about internship
- June 2017-August 2017: Participate in internship with TV One
- Fall 2017: Maintain working relationship with contacts at Black Entertainment Television Networks
- Spring 2018: Present Awards Outcome Presentation for the University community

Evidence of participation in the arts:

I have been the founding producer and director for both iterations of The Black Monologues, a play that has established itself as a UVA institution. The Black Monologues is a theatrical production that explores the diversity, complexities, joys, and struggles of Blackness at UVA and beyond. As producer, I am responsible for logistical organization including liaising with the Drama Department, conducting student outreach, and leading the publicity and program committees. As director, I establish and work to actualize the creative vision of the show by writing monologues, working with actors, and leading the Artistic Staff.

I was recently selected to participate in the Drama Departments inaugural New Works

Festival, which will produce new plays and foster the development of playwrights. My original play “Wake Up Music” explores the emotional trauma associated with police brutality through West African storytelling traditions and hip-hop. My play will be performed in April and will be brought to life with the professional support of Drama Department faculty.

I am able to exercise my musical talents through OneWay InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. This year, I serve as the Co Worship Leader. In this role, I help to lead a team of singers and musicians by choosing, arranging, and teaching songs for our weekly worship gatherings.

In the fall of my second year I began leading the second revival of the Paul Robeson Players. The Paul Robeson Players is a CIO that is committed to making theatre by, for, and about peoples of the African Diaspora. I have helped to build a thriving community of Black artists of all kinds who passionately use our talents to create theatre that actively brings about thought and social change. As president, I help to keep our mission of making impactful theatre at the forefront, represent PRP in the Black Presidents’ Council, and serve on teams that manage our budget and pursue performance opportunities. This semester, I have the opportunity to perform as an actor in PRP’s production of “for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf.”

This semester, I have had the opportunity to work for the American Black Film Festival. I am a judge for their original screenplay competition. In this role, I read, evaluate, and critique screenplays for consideration. The chosen screenplay will be produced within the year.

In addition to the many artistic courses that I have taken during my time at UVA, during my third year I have taken the following arts related courses: Lighting Technology, Sound Design, The Black Monologues, Advanced Playwriting, Intermediate Cinematography I, Intermediate Cinematography II, London: The Theatrical City (a study abroad J-Term), and The Films of Spike Lee.

In the spring of 2016, I applied for and received a Miller Arts Scholars Minigrant to participate in a dance performance in Charleston, South Carolina with my national dance team Send Judah First. This was a wonderfully enriching experience that would not have been possible without the support of this program. Last semester, I acted as the Drama Representative on the Miller Arts Scholars Executive Board. My organization, Paul Robeson Players, had an interest meeting and recruiting effort for new Arts Scholars. One of my personal goals is to make this program more racially and culturally diverse, as new perspectives will only enhance the learning experience. I work with Arts Scholars on a daily basis, in my course work, on personal projects, and in student organizations.

Example of work:

I attach two short films: “Edges”, shot on 16mm film explores Black hair as an art form

and is told through a hip-hop-esq editing style. “Molasses” also explores Black hair and love and was shot digitally.