

Michelle Miles
October 3rd, 2018
Miller Art Scholars Mini-Grant Proposal

“Don’t Get My Chair In It”

Since I picked up a camera for the first time, I’ve struggled with defining myself under the word “filmmaker.” I haven’t felt that any of the genres available for me to define my work within fully represented the ideas and experiences that I’ve wanted to share and explore. My storytelling inclinations never aligned with the traditional Hollywood-style narrative structure, nor have I felt that the documentary genre presented the right stage for my stories. While the word “experimental” feels the most accurate, it also feels broad, and isolating, and has left me struggling to understand what I’m making and where it belongs. My interests range from staging and shooting beautiful and quirky live-action scenes, to warping my tools and perspectives to create abstract moving forms, to cutting together found and archived footage. None of these avenues seemed to meet beneath a single genre definition, and for a while I had begun to question my work and feel that it lacked cohesion.

The moment that transformed my relationship with my own ideas was when I discovered Terence Nance’s show “Random Acts of Flyness,” described by a NYTimes article as a “nearly unclassifiable variety show that accentuates the experience of being young and black in America right now... [exploring] an array of modern social and political fault lines... in short segments that are brought to life using an even broader medley of cinematic techniques.” Watching this show was a breath of fresh air for me – it exemplified how a range of styles, genres, and cinematic approaches could converge into one powerful viewing experience. Short narrative scenes, animation, found footage, and interview profiles come together to create a moving and charged piece that communicates through rhythm and emotion, and doesn’t need to be classified any further.

Emboldened by HBO’s choice to air Nance’s show, I intend to shoot an episode of my own that accentuates the experience of being a disabled person in America right now. The title, “Don’t Get My Chair In It,” refers to a line of dialogue that I’ve uttered numerous times throughout my life, when I’ve had my photo taken and asked to have it composed such that my wheelchair is not visible. The desire to hide this aspect of my identity is a desire I’ve recently had the courage to reject, after Nance’s work helped lead me to a revelation that my experiences, thoughts, and dialogues, kaleidoscopic as they may be, are valid as fodder for creating art.

While ultimately I intend for this idea to culminate as a larger endeavour, I am applying for this grant to fund a segment of the project: a series of interviews with childhood friends of mine who are also wheelchair users. These girls served as my only form of representation growing up, my only source of viewing and interacting with people who looked like and faced many of the same challenges as

me. Together, we went through every step of transitioning from the expectations of an able-bodied life, to developing needs that our society and environment is not inclined to consider or sustain. These stories are so normalized to me that I hadn't considered them ones worthy of telling, and I now feel inspired and equipped to do so through a medium that I've come to feel less restricted by.

With this project, I hope to expand the frame of my work's composition to include subject matter that I have never addressed before. With the funds from this grant, I would gain the opportunity to revisit voices from my childhood to capture and share stories through my medium, 16mm film, that I've gained a newfound confidence to work in.

Projected Timeline:

October: prep for interviews/develop questions, contact interviewees, schedule shoot dates

November: shoot/conduct interviews, ship film to lab

December digitize and edit film

Beyond: I hope to assemble these films into a larger piece for my fourth year thesis show.

Budget:

I am requesting the full \$500 from the Miller Art Scholars Mini-Grant. My budget is detailed below.

Item	Unit Cost	Quantity	Total
16mm color Kodak film, 100ft roll	\$45	10 rolls	\$450
Film Processing at Cinelab	\$0.21/foot	1000 feet	\$210
		Total:	\$660