

## **ACS Mellon Foundation Faculty Renewal Grant: Final Report.**

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### ***Initiative for Fine Arts Collaborations at Millsaps College***

September 2010 – May 2011

Awarded \$8,000

Our original objectives for this initiative were to unify the three fine arts areas at Millsaps College, to increase the overall presence of fine arts in our Core Curriculum, to enrich the campus and community with cutting edge works and to encourage more of our students to think of themselves as active participants rather than passive audience members. This initiative was intended to strengthen the fine arts at Millsaps College through collaboration within the performing and visual arts departments. With the assistance of this Mellon Grant, the fine arts at Millsaps College would be enhanced through contemporary collaborative performances and experimental exhibitions which would otherwise not be possible on our campus because of restricted resources. Additionally, it was our intention to enhance our college students' understanding of such contemporary formats as Performance Art, Installation, Sound Art or collaborations in general. Our ultimate goal was to establish an ongoing annual thematic approach to the fine arts.

The more immediate goals were met, while progress toward the more ambitious and long term goals was less tangible. The total success of this project was not as great as we would have hoped for two primary reasons: the unexpected turnover and unavailability of fine arts faculty and the fact that the theatre department was in a time of significant upheaval with the loss of the primary theatre space. My tenure-track studio art colleague left Millsaps College abruptly last May and was replaced with a one-year appointment, Colleen Keough, for the past year. Additionally, the Music Department has suffered from personnel decisions which have affected the whole music department. Suffice it to say that this was an exceptionally off year for all three departments to be planning for such long term goals. While there was a lot of enthusiasm for the collaborative initiative at the outset, practical and unforeseen circumstances limited the involvement on the part of several faculty members.

Creating an ambitious project as a way of connecting and building three already vulnerable departments leads to unpredictable results. Of course, there was no way of knowing just how many faculty members were going to either leave or prove to be unavailable for various reasons as we started this project with a seemingly genuine collective spirit. Shorter term goals were clearly more effectual with so few faculty members to work with on this project.

For a more detailed understanding of what was accomplished with this grant funding, please see the summary of the project which is intended to be posted on the ACS website below. But I would like to highlight here four major areas of this year's fine arts initiative having to do with visiting artists, the Core course, the Emerging Space and experimental multidisciplinary events.

We brought internationally exhibiting artists to campus this year with the support of this grant. The co-founders for the large artist collective known as MART came in the fall semester and worked closely with our students and faculty members, installed a group show from the MART collective in the Lewis Art Gallery, and gave a public gallery talk and performance. Bert Rodriguez, an artist who has shown in the Whitney Biennial, came in the spring to also talk with our students informally, offer critiques and give a public slide talk. These visiting artists all work in an interdisciplinary manner, combining elements of sound, movement and visual stimuli for a comprehensive aesthetic. Our visiting artists were a crucial component to the year long discussion with our students about moving one's work into a more contemporary realm.

The Core course that was co-taught by Dr. Lynn Raley, myself (Prof. Sandra Murchison) and assisted by Ford Fellow Daniel Johnson delved deeply into the history of collaborations as seen at such places as the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. Course content emphasized reasons why contemporary artists have a desire to engage their audience in an active exchange rather than merely relegate the audience into the position as passive observer. Prior to this initiative, there was virtually no conversation between the music and art faculty about such topics as how experimental music and performance artists relate. Especially within the context of this course, we asked each other and our students basic, yet key questions such as "What is art?" and "How can that be art?"

With this grant we created our new video screening and installation gallery which is now known as the "Emerging Space". We maintained a monthly rotation of videos this year, exhibiting both regional and national artists' work. This is an entirely new addition to what is offered for the public on our campus (it is located in a separate gallery just off of the Lewis Art Gallery which is also open to the public) and will remain from here on out. This was one long term goal that was achieved. This space will allow for the regular presentation of a wide range of collaborative, video-based art forms on campus.

There were additional collaborative events that happened which did not require the financial support of the grant, but certainly were tied into this initiative. Daniel Johnson organized a series of multidisciplinary performances in the Lewis Art Gallery as a component to the Jackson based Mississippi Improv Alliance. Faculty and students alike were invited to cross over the barrier between audience and participant as the amateur became the improve performer. Likewise, Dr. Lynn Raley organized several group performances for the event in the Lewis Art Gallery known as GONE (experi)MENTAL in which many students and faculty performed.

These endeavors proved to be fruitful in many aspects, although we did not collect formal evaluations directly related to the grant. However, there are a number of informal and indirect measures of the grant's impact and successes. We certainly did receive favorable comments from the students and faculty who attended the visiting artists' lectures, video screenings, performances and from those students in the Core course and Intermediate Studio Art courses. We averaged about 70 people in attendance at the artist lectures (we normally have about 40), most likely 200 at the group performance that MART organized with our students and a regular stream of visitors to the Emerging Space as the gallery was open throughout each day. The Core course had 20 students and there were a total of 15 students in the Intermediate Studio art sections (a good size for each unique course).

Four fine arts faculty members were particularly impacted by this grant, they were Colleen Keough (Visiting Assistant Professor of Studio Art), Sandra Murchison (Professor of Studio Art & Chair of the

Art Dept.), H. Lynn Raley (Associate Professor of Music in the Performing Arts Dept.) and Abigail Susik (Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow).

Colleen helped to host the artist collective MART. She folded their visit into her coursework for both her Beginning Sculpture and Beginning Digital Arts courses. She had her classes Skyping with these artists in preparation of their arrival so that they could plan their end of the semester group installation and performance together. Once Matthew and Ciara (from MART) arrived, they met regularly with these classes and gave critical feedback to Colleen's students about their own work. Additionally, Colleen co-taught a series of six lessons having to do with performance artists who utilize a wide spectrum of art, music and theatrical practices in their work. This series was co-taught with myself (Sandra Murchison) as a part of the spring Intermediate Studio Art courses.

I was fortunate enough to attend the Black Mountain College Conference where I met colleagues with similar interests in experimental processes and gained a great amount of insight into the advantages of working in a collaborative manner, all of which I passed along directly to my courses back at Millsaps College. I co-taught the Core course entitled "Is it Art? Is it Theater? Is it Music? Historical Collaborations" with Dr. Lynn Raley. Additionally, Lynn organized the GONE (experi)MENTAL musical performance in the Lewis Art Gallery. I worked with Daniel Johnson to design and update the website for the initiative and create the Emerging Space. I was the coordinator for the visiting artists. In total, I thought quite a bit about this initiative and I continue to strategize about ways to improve and expand on the fine arts at Millsaps College in the future.

Abigail made it possible for us to bring Bert Rodriguez to campus as our spring visiting artist. During Bert's visit, he did a casual Q& A session with Abigail's art history course and the co-taught Core course. Abigail facilitated this explanatory and open conversation by serving as an interviewer during the Q&A as needed.

Across campus, the fine arts were able to have a more obvious presence at Millsaps College, as people began to recognize that we were focusing more on contemporary artists and trying to create more experimental opportunities. We will have a new Core Director this coming fall, and he has taken notice of the initiative and has a genuine interest in finding ways to emphasize the fine arts more in what may become a newly developing Core.

The most impact we had on students college wide was through our freshmen interdisciplinary course known as Heritage. We had about 25 Heritage students in attendance at each of the visiting artist talks and a great number of them at other special events. This is exactly the population that we aimed to target the most, as these are the students who are just beginning their college careers and will hopefully be more inclined to take advantage of fine arts opportunities for the rest of their time at Millsaps and after graduation. Our studio art students all had direct access to our visiting artists and our advanced students had the chance to get their work critiqued by these artists with international acclaim. Sophomores had the opportunity to take the Core course, while Communication majors, English majors and Studio Art majors were in the Intermediate Studio Art sections. Students in the fall Beginning Sculpture and Beginning Digital Arts courses practically had Matthew Nevin and Ciara Scanlon from MART as their secondary professors. Ford Fellow Daniel Johnson was clearly impacted the most by this initiative as he helped greatly to with the website, organizing the video screenings in the Emerging Space, attended the Black Mountain College Conference and assisted teaching the Core course.

Happily, our Millsaps web team has agreed to transfer the website that we created at [www.millsapsfineartsinitiative.com](http://www.millsapsfineartsinitiative.com) to the regular [www.millsaps.edu](http://www.millsaps.edu) site for the future. This site will continue as an active site to be added to as we continue to strive to enhance the fine arts at Millsaps with experimental, collaborative and contemporary works. Likewise, this site will be linked to the ACS website for easier access to all of the ACS institutions. We will continue to try and showcase events through the website. We hope that in time the fine arts at Millsaps will become a more solidified collective of small departments, functioning with a unified mission on campus and in the community. With new faculty members coming to Millsaps this fall and in the next few years, this long term goal may still be realized. Additionally, I am beginning to work with our new Core Director as we try to engage the fine arts in a more active manner within our Core.

Although there were several faculty members involved with this grant who had initially intended to pursue an opportunity to present the successes of our thematic year at the fall 2011 Southeastern College Art Conference, these faculty members have since left Millsaps.

#### **ANTICIPATED EXPENSES AND ACTUAL EXPENSES FOR THIS PROJECT:**

a.) Attend the 2010 Black Mountain College conference in Asheville, North Carolina.  
(<http://www.blackmountaincollege.org>)

Daniel Johnson attended the Black Mountain College Conference: \$151.66 (He had supplementary funding from his Ford Fellow account.)

Sandra Murchison attended the Black Mountain College Conference: \$682.52 (The flight and hotel were far less expensive than we had originally estimated.)

**Anticipated expense for the Black Mountain Conference = \$2,040**

**Actual expense for the Black Mountain Conference = \$834.18**

b.) Printing costs for posters and flyers which showcase the year's thematic activities.

Poster printed for the Emerging Space fall schedule: \$53.50

Cost to publish the Fine Arts Initiative website on wix.com: \$99

Poster printed for the Emerging Space spring schedule: \$41.94

Reception for the Emerging Space: \$29.88

**Anticipated expense for advertising costs = \$500**

**Actual expense for advertising costs = \$224.32**

c.) Host two visiting performance artists, one each semester.

\$1,500 per visiting artist. Two visiting artists for the year = \$3,000

Visiting Artist: MART – Matthew Nevin: \$1,500

Visiting Artist: Norberto Rodriguez: \$1,500

**Anticipated expense for our visiting artists = \$3,000**

**Actual expense for our visiting artists = \$3,000**

d.) Video equipment for the installation space attached to the Lewis Art Gallery, now known as the Emerging Space, for use by video artists.

Mac Mini: \$848

Go Air desktop- keyboard/mouse: \$147.43

Speakers: \$169.37

Epson Power Lite Home Cinema 8100 (digital projector): \$ 1,322.72

Shipping for the digital projector: \$15.94

Ceiling mount for the digital projector: \$118.87

Lock and cable to secure the equipment: \$64.22

**Anticipated expense to create the Emerging Space = \$2,460**

**Actual expense to create the Emerging Space = \$2,686.55**

**Total anticipated budget for the grant = \$8,000**

**Actual budget spent from the grant = \$6,745.05**

**A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT THAT MAY BE INCLUDED ON THE ACS FACULTY RENEWAL WEBSITE:**

There were numerous events, classes, visiting artists and fine arts opportunities related to this grant (see detailed list below). One of the most obvious benefits of this grant was the enhanced ability to bring internationally exhibiting and acclaimed artists to campus this year. The co-founders for the large artist collective known as MART came in the fall semester and worked closely with our students and faculty members, installed a group show from the MART collective in the Lewis Art Gallery and gave a public gallery talk and performance. Bert Rodriguez, an artist who has shown in the Whitney Biennial, came in the spring to talk with our students informally, offer critiques and give a public slide talk. With helpful insights from the Black Mountain College Conference, the Core course – “Is It Art? Is It Theater? Is It

Music?" -- was co-taught by Dr. Lynn Raley, Prof. Sandra Murchison and assisted by Ford Fellow Daniel Johnson. The course delved deeply into the history of collaborations as seen at such places as the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College and examined reasons why contemporary artists have a desire to engage their audience in an active exchange rather than merely relegate the audience into the position as passive observer. With this grant we also created our new video screening and installation gallery which is now known as the "Emerging Space". We maintained a monthly rotation of videos this year, exhibiting both regional and national artists work. We have listed further information about these fine arts activities on the website we made for this initiative at <http://millsapsfineartsinitiative.com>.

**Our Fine Arts Initiative included the following:**

a.) **October 8-10, 2010: Professor of Studio Art Sandra Murchison, and Ford Fellow Daniel Johnson attended the Black Mountain College conference, which identifies the history of collaborations and explores further contemporary options.** (<http://www.blackmountaincollege.org>)

Beginning at this conference, Daniel and I were able to strategize about how to best plan our Core 5 spring course (taught by Sandra Murchison and Lynn Raley, with Daniel Johnson's assistance) having to do with historic collaborations in the fine arts. We obtained a DVD and text for our course at the conference; but even more than that, we were provided the time and space to hash out ideas together about the opportunities that can only occur when more than one area of the fine arts are in the mix. This conference provided the type of foundational information and creative ideas that we had hoped it would for our co-taught Core Curriculum course which explored historical and contemporary practices in creative collaborations.

b.) **August-September 2010: Sandra Murchison and Daniel Johnson created a website to showcase the year's thematic activities.** This site is located at <http://millsapsfineartsinitiative.com> and is linked to all three fine arts areas at Millsaps and should be accessible through the ACS website. It is our hope that this site functions as an example for other institutions. The website was updated throughout the whole year. This site will be folded into the regular Millsaps College website located at [www.millsaps.edu](http://www.millsaps.edu) beginning this fall.

c.) **Fall 2010 international performance artist: We hosted the co-founders (Matthew Nevin and Ciara Scanlon) of an international collective of artists known as MART at Millsaps for a month.** Having them stay for an extended period of time far surpassed our expectations for our fall visiting performance artist, and this gave our students considerable opportunities to work alongside these international performance artists. MART gave a public performance which emphasized collaborative methods that they use as they work together to coordinate a much larger international collective of emerging artists. With additional funding from the Art Department's own visiting artist endowment, we were able to exhibit a group exhibition by a dozen artists that MART sponsors. Our visiting assistant professor for this past year, Colleen Keough, is one of MART's artists. Colleen arranged to have them work closely with both her Beginning Sculpture and her Beginning Digital Arts classes to create an end of the semester group installation and performance at one of our old dorms.

d.) **October 2010-May 2011: With funding from this grant, we were able to create a video screening room by purchasing a computer and digital projector with speakers to install in what has otherwise been a simple small gallery space.** This newly upgraded video screening and installation gallery has now become the "Emerging Space". One of Daniel Johnson's responsibilities as a Ford Fellow was to coordinate monthly video screenings for this gallery all year long. This has already proven to be a huge asset to the art department and will continue to be an essential component to our campus wide Film Studies Concentration and undoubtedly to our Communications major.

e.) **Spring 2011 international performance artist:** We brought our second internationally known visiting performance artist, Bert Rodriguez, to Millsaps. During his visit, Bert gave a public slide talk about his work, held a less formal Q& A session with two of our fine arts classes, and critiqued advanced studio art students work.

f.) **March 2011: Dr. Lynn Raley organized a collaborative series of performances entitled GONE (experi)MENTAL in the Lewis Art Gallery.** Lynn enlisted a majority of the students from the Core course, local musicians, and music students to perform historical experimental music. It was a way for the students especially to experience the work first hand of early modern music.

g.) **January 2011-May 2011: Lynn Raley and Sandra Murchison and Ford Fellow Daniel Johnson co-taught a Core Curriculum course which surveyed the history of artistic collaborations and explores contemporary practices.**

h.) **January 2011-May 2011: Colleen Keough and Sandra Murchison co-taught a series of lessons about performance art within their regular Intermediate Studio Art courses.**