



## DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE, FILM, AND MEDIA ARTS GRADUATE STUDENTS TO DISCUSS UPCOMING PROJECT AND PANDEMIC SETBACKS IN VIRTUAL PANEL

November 30, 2020 Denise Cameron



Graduate students in the Department of Theatre, Film, and Media Arts pose with set pieces from their upcoming production about the opioid epidemic. Credit: Courtesy of Tom Dugdale

In a time when live theater has been lost, graduate students in the Department of Theatre, Film, and Media Arts are pushing their creative boundaries and promoting their new work in a panel discussion.

"Buckeyes Making Theatre: COVID-19 and the Opioid Epidemic" will be streaming live virtually on Zoom Thursday with a panel of graduate students in the Department of Theatre, Film, and Media Arts and Tom Dugdale, an assistant professor in the department and director of the project.

To spread the word about the project, Dugdale said he spoke with Clara Davison, an engagement officer for the College of Arts and Sciences, and the two decided on a panel discussing what the department has been working on and any challenges the pandemic has presented in the process.

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Erin Alys, a third-year master of fine arts student in acting, said the graduate students talked to patients at the Maryhaven Addiction Stabilization Center who were at the beginning of their recovery in the fall of 2019. Alys said that after they did their research, they began the project in the spring of 2020. The project consists of 10 films that are connected, and each film tells a different story about opioid addiction, Alys said.

"There's a lot of different ways to look at this disease, so there's a lot of variation and how we're telling stories," Alys said.

Rina Hajra, a third-year MFA student in acting, said that even though all of the films are connected, everyone had the opportunity to spotlight an issue that they cared about.

"In my short film — it's called 'Sisters' — I focus on the relationship of sisters and how they try to get out of this small town," Hajra said. "The town is just rampant with opioid abuse, and it's a poor town. Instead of getting out of the town, they end up addicted to opioids."

Jessica Hughes, a third-year MFA student in acting, said the film is still in the process of being put together.

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"It's been like a waterfall effect with each piece where we'll maybe grasp on to a prop or a story or a character from a previous piece and bring them into our own world that we're creating," Hughes said. "We're exploring this from a bunch of different angles, and we're also exploring this with movement. There's a dance in this piece, there's music, we've been writing scripts and songs."

Hughes said that due to COVID-19, the students have had to adapt and create new ideas.

"A part of what this moment required us to do is, you know, we can't really show connection on screen because we have to be 6 to 9 feet apart, and so we've really been abstracting a lot of things in order to explore this semester," Hughes said.

Alys said the film was initially supposed to be a live project and the department worked with designers in the summer to create a set, costumes and soundscape, but COVID-19 changed everything.

"Perhaps naively for a while, we kept planning on it being a live project. And so there was a lot of change right before the semester began when we decided we have to actually use film, and then navigating how to do that was an ever-changing process," Alys said.

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Hughes said the students had to scrap a 40-page script, which was a challenge that ended up being somewhat refreshing; it allowed them to respond to whatever was happening at the moment, whether it was something happening in a person's piece or in their own lives.

Dugdale said COVID-19 has made communication more difficult but it's allowed students to push the boundaries of their creative abilities.

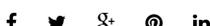
"I think what's been really cool about this project in this moment is us trying to figure out how to still accomplish that mission with the tools that we have right now and as theater people, that can feel really scary because we can't get an audience in front of us like we usually do," Dugdale said. "I think that these limitations have actually been opportunities to innovate, and we've discovered little things like, well, when you make video and film you can actually share it with maybe a potentially larger audience than you could in a theater."

Dugdale said the word "destigmatization" has been around the film project since the beginning, and Hajra said the term has led her to some realizations while creating her piece.

"My breakthrough in this piece has just been to be more understanding and compassionate towards addiction and what I've learned the most and what I want to share with the audience, and this is something that a nurse taught us, is that addiction is not a choice, it's a disease," Hajra said. "I'm hoping that, through our films, we can bring some awareness and maybe a greater understanding to this."

"Buckeyes Making Theatre: COVID-19 and the Opioid Epidemic" will take place online Thursday at 4 p.m. The event is free and registration for the event link can be found on the department's [website](#).

*Correction: A previous version of this story identified the theater department as the Department of Theatre. The story has been updated to reflect the full name of the department as the "Department of Theatre, Film, and Media Arts."*



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