

# Transcript

(Intro music)

**Ally:** Welcome to the Digital Creator Podcast, the show where we spotlight students working on cool digital projects. I'm Ally, a consultant at the Digital Knowledge Center, where we empower students to be digital creators. Today's guest explored the works and history of queer and trans performance artists through an interview style video essay.

**Andrew:** My name is Andrew Lee. I use he/him pronouns. My graduation year is 2025. My major is geography.

**Ally:** Can you just give us a sort of brief overview about what your project is, what you're doing here with your fellowship with the DKC?

**Andrew:** Yeah. So, I was involved in theater until I switched my major to geography. So, this is basically a video essay project about different types of queer theatre throughout history. So from like 1960s to today.

**Ally:** And so where are you in the process of sort of making this and how have you found your creative process through this project?

**Andrew:** Honestly, I've had some setbacks because there's this big thing called the Internet Archive.

**Ally:** Yes, I read about this in your post!

**Andrew:** Yeah, the Internet archive had a DDoS attack and it went down for like a few weeks. And I couldn't access anything, so I'm playing catch up right now. But I'm on the road again to - I've interviewed multiple people, I've written a script for this, and I'm very excited to see where it goes. And my creative process throughout this has definitely changed. Before this, I did photography and writing. I never really delved into like video format, so creating this all in a video totally new to me.

**Ally:** Right.

**Andrew:** So getting in like my mind that this is a video, not a photo, not writing. That I can actively help the person perceive what they like, what I want them to perceive.

**Ally:** Right.

**Andrew:** That has been a total change for me.

**Ally:** With video, there's a lot more sort of license for what you are showing the audience. You know? it's a lot less interpretive. Like especially compared to like a photo where you know you really do have sort of an influence on what the audience is seeing, I think that's really interesting too. And on the topic of, you know, video essays where it is informational, it is sort of showing a new perspective on something, you know, talking about someone else's art, someone else's experience, your own experience. All of these things kind of adding together. You know, it's a major, major thing with perspective. So, what is the ultimate goal for you with this project? Like, where do you hope it goes?

**Andrew:** My ultimate goal is that this video comes out, I fully edit it, and I can put out a trailer to show people in the future. And then I have this like fully edited thing that will probably go on YouTube because that is like the number one video sharing platform.

**Ally:** Right. So, is this also your first experience with like video editing?

**Andrew:** This is not my first experience with video editing, but it is definitely kind of the longest. This idea came to me like from the pandemic days where we were like, I don't know about you, but I was watching video essays all the time.

**Ally:** All the time. Yes.

**Andrew:** And I kind of miss watching those video essays.

**Ally:** Yeah.

**Andrew:** I realized like none of my favorite creators were kind of like uploading video essays since we've been back to work, back to school. And I really wanted to fill the void with something that I would appreciate. And if no one's going to put it out there, I'm going to put it out there.

**Ally:** Right, taking that initiative. I think YouTube as a goal and as a platform is so vast, right? That you kind of do have this opportunity to extend, you know, all of these things that you're sort of compiling to, you know, a wider audience. Could you speak a little more about like the content of the video essays?

**Andrew:** I can run through it really quickly. So, I was very inspired when I was a theater major. I took theater history with a professor who is no longer here, and she taught us about very much performance art. She taught us like what Yoko Ono actually did was performance art instead of like the life of John Lennon. And to put that into perspective that we have been performing art for like thousands of years. And this one person who I think is just drowned in like misogyny was actually creating very progressive art for 1960s. It was kind of like an eye opening, awakening moment. So, I kind of like continued on this

research hole went down the Wikipedia rabbit hole. And I discovered so many great things, so many great pieces of art. And I noticed it was with a lot of like queer and trans people. I happen to be trans, so I wanted to eventually showcase the art of a lot of people who experience the same things that I do. In other art classes, I never got the chance to really like show content from queer and trans creators because we're so stuck in like white male guy.

**Ally:** Right. Like the cannon.

**Andrew:** Like the cannon. Yeah, like we learn about all these like old white guys. And I really wanted to show it from the other perspective. What would queer people do? Would trans people do? instead of like, what would this old white man do?

**Ally:** Right. You know so much of art is, you know, queer art that really does get, you know, overshadowed. Growing up, I only knew Yoko Ono for her connection to The Beatles, but then as I got older, you know, learning all these things about, you know, her actual art and like her performance art, I think has been really interesting for me as well. And I think also, culturally, we're sort of deconstructing this idea of these common narratives of like, you know, Yoko Ono broke up The Beatles. That's kind of like everyone now knows that's not true, you know things like that. And I think there really is this opportunity for a great shift in talking about art and talking about art in these ways. I remember reading in one of your posts, you were talking about the Basquiat Banksy exhibit. And you know, a lot of that, a lot of art that has connection to street art as well that is still in the more traditional form of like being, you know, painted or using a more like physical medium still was so, you know, controversial, new, and progressive. And how people have sort of taken that and ran with it. And I feel like in performance art circles, it's probably similar.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I don't know if you've come across these like TikTok videos, but I've come across these TikTok videos where it's like white guys in college art school are just trying to copy Basquiat. So, we've come like full circle with him. I don't think we've come full circle with our queer and trans artists. I got the lovely chance to interview a trans sound artist and she was wonderful. It was art that like was about being trans. And, you know, I don't think in 40 years there will be white guys copying her art. It really opened my eyes into like some things are going to become in the cannon that were created by marginalized people. But some things are just not going to be in the cannon. They're going to be avant-garde for the rest of their lives. So, this is me diving into avant-garde art and showing like the real creators behind this.

**Ally:** I think it's really great that you were inspired to do this even in a class that was, you know, about theater, which in itself holds so much with performance. With the connection

of, you know, theater and performance art, do you find that the crossover makes them, you know, more similar or in your interviews have you found a lot of differences between the two mediums?

**Andrew:** I am from a very theater heavy background. I started theater when I was 8 and I continued it until the college level. Coming off of that and seeing more performing art, some of them do follow the same paths, but some of them, you just have to say it's performing art or it's theater. There's a great example in orchestra, like music, where it's 4 minutes and 33 seconds, this famous piece by John Cage, and it's performed in orchestras. And what it is essentially is he turns on a timer, he shuts the little flap on a piano, and it's just all the sounds of the theater. That is performance art, but it's not theater. But you can also create performance art that is inside theater.

**Ally:** I know that I personally have been served a lot of performance art things on TikTok. Like I know you were mentioning the copying Basquiat TikToks, but like I'll get like a dramatic song and then it's like a TikTok slideshow about a specific performance art piece and the history behind it. And what makes it so impactful, you know? Because so many rely on, you know, personal experience. So, do you find that that's something you've noticed as well?

**Andrew:** Yeah. I've noticed a lot in social media that there's a new generation of art goers who - This is specific to like installation art. So, they're in museums and they're still performance art, but these just are housed in museums. There is many famous pieces from definitely the AIDS crisis. So, we're going back into that queer theory. And a lot of people - I think my favorite example is Portrait of Ross. For those who don't know Portrait of Ross, it's a kind of essentially like a candy pile and people are like they were encouraged to take from the pile and it was dedicated to a man who died from AIDS. And one day there will not be candy there anymore. And I saw multiple posts being like "haha silly time". People just not respecting the art in front of them. And I feel like with this work that I'm producing, I want to create more art literacy.

**Ally:** Yes.

**Andrew:** I feel like we, as people, should be literate about art going into the future. We should enjoy museums. We should enjoy performances because they are things that you will see once and like in the mindset you were in and never see it again. And if you come to it a second time, you'll have a whole different perspective. This is kind of like my secret goal of the project is to like create art literacy. Especially for queer and trans art out there.

**Ally:** There's a piece by the same artist that did Portrait of Ross at the Glenstone Museum in I think it's in Maryland. I was able to go this summer and I didn't know it was there. But I

was familiar with, I think the other one's in Chicago. So, I was familiar with that one and when we went I was with my family. And everyone was so hesitant to take from the pile because it feels like something you shouldn't be able to do in a museum, right? Because it is pushing that limit of like interactive art. And I know that they do replenish the pile at the Glenstone. I don't know if they do other places, but we kept the taffy, but no one ate theirs. Like it's sitting on a shelf in my home now because after we saw the piece, you know, I was able to sort of explain to my family and show them articles about this piece. And the emotional impact of that for them was, you know, where they were like, they didn't want to eat the candy because they're now thinking of it as part of a person rather than this is a food or this art experience. I think really this push for artistic literacy is a really great goal that, you know, hopefully your video essays will help people achieve and sort of open their eyes to these other methods and mediums. Obviously, we talked a little bit about like learning digital skills or like changing your viewpoint on artistic skills for this project, but is there something that you've learned during your process with making these that has you know really stuck with you most? Like what is the top thing that you've learned from this?

**Andrew:** The top thing I learned is that there is not a great back catalogue of performance art especially in minority communities. There is not a great backlog of just art from minority communities. And there was a certain period of time which was the AIDS crisis where there was no art from creative queer communities. And seeing this information and having to go to not like the library we have here at UMW but the Internet Archive for this art was really - I lost like a little bit of hope because I want my history to be recorded. And not that like, not for me specifically, but for generations to come. We're in this period of uncertainty right now where I don't know if my history will be recorded anymore. So, just having to dig through websites and having to, using like the inter library loan system to find art from these Ivy League schools because we don't have the resources and the Ivy League schools like, barely have the resources. It's kind of sad. Today is actually trans day of remembrance and I always go into this day pretty unoptimistic because it's just one of those days. But we're on the precipice of a huge change. And it has changed my entire outlook on this project, on every project I have done in the past, and every project I will do in the future.

**Ally:** And you know so much of art is activism. When you think of art from the AIDS crisis, you know, from that period from periods following it, really so much of it that I think of, you know, is political. is, you know, a form of activism, a form of expression. Again, back to being able to provide a perspective to the audience that they might not have otherwise seen or known or thought to seek out in any way. I think that's really important. I think that's a great thing that you're doing. What has been the most rewarding thing for you?

**Andrew:** The most rewarding thing was the first interview I did which was with a woman named Loreli. She is currently a professor at Michigan State. She is the one who does sound art. And going into that interview I was very nervous because we currently do not have any trans professors here at UMW. There are less resources for trans people just all around, and to be talking to someone that does the same art as I do just from a very different perspective it, I didn't sleep the night before. I was very nervous. But having that interview, I came out of it with so much confidence about this project and everything I do in the future because we understood the current crisis we are going through as a nation and both of us having that very intimate understanding of that made that interview that much better. It sucks that it has to come from like a horrible place, but it's somehow just like a great connection.

**Ally:** Would you recommend someone reaching out to the DKC to do a fellowship like this?

**Andrew:** Absolutely. I came into this project in May of last year, and I was like, I do not know how I'm going to do this at all. And I've worked with the DKC over all of my years of being at Mary Washington. And I went on their site. I was like, do they have any video editing things for me to look at? And I saw the fellowship button, and I was like, maybe I could do a fellowship. Maybe that'll fit into my schedule. And you can do it for class credit or for like a payment. And suddenly I'm able to talk to all these great people and going to all these like great performances and able to feel good while doing art which in my current major geography is not a thing I can do often. So, this is, like I talk about this as my guilty pleasure. But really it is like my place to go to after, like when I'm done with classes, I come to this and I'm still very happy to come to this.

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**Ally:** This has been the Digital Creator Podcast. You can find a transcript of our conversation and more about this project below. This podcast was produced by me, Ally Hamilton, and edited by Angela Payne with help from the resources at the Digital Knowledge Center. Are you interested in becoming a digital creator? Do you have a cool project you want to share? Go to [dkc.umw.edu](http://dkc.umw.edu) for information on how to get started. Thank you for listening.

(Outro music fades back in)