

UC San Diego Filmmaker and Grad Student Receives Prestigious Princess Grace Foundation -- USA Award

September 10, 2007

Christine Clark

UC San Diego filmmaker and graduate student Elyse Montague.

UC San Diego filmmaker and graduate student Elyse Montague, who has earned critical acclaim for making cutting-edge films about gender identity, has received the prestigious Princess Grace Award for outstanding work in the area of experimental and narrative filmmaking. The award, given to emerging talent in the fields of film, theatre and dance, will fund Montague's thesis film.

Montague will be presented the award by the Princess Grace Foundation -- USA on Oct. 25 in New York City, at an award ceremony that will also honor filmmaker George Lucas.

Montague follows an impressive group of artists who have won the Princess Grace award, which is based on merit, not financial need. Past winners include playwright Tony Kushner ("Angels in America") and writer and producer Kate Robin ("Six Feet Under").

Currently a third-year MFA student at UCSD, Montague's film and video work explores representations of the transgender body within social, medical and personal spaces.

"Most of my work has taken the form of the experimental and documentary," Montague said. "This award will allow me to fund my first fictional narrative. I see this project as a seminal work that will give me the experience and passion to ignite my career as a director."

From an early age, Montague, who is transgender, felt different from his peers. He was born female, but identifies as being androgynous.

"I remember the pressure of looking and behaving more 'like a girl,'" Montague said. "This caused a lot of disassociation with myself. This confusion and frustration manifested in emotional turmoil at a very young age."

The alienation Montague felt from growing up in a gender-ambiguous body was chronicled in his first film, "Through the Skin."

The film, which Montague made during his senior year as an undergraduate at Hampshire College, was an experimental, autobiographical short which earned a great deal of critical acclaim.

In the film, Montague jarringly disclosed the conflicts with his changing female body. Montague incorporated home movies with vintage health public service announcements and his own performance.

"It was such a personal film," Montague said. "I didn't work with actors, I didn't have a script -- I worked alone. It was therapeutic and it was a personal film, yet it very much became its own work."

The film was distributed through Women Make Movies in New York and it was featured in the Media Arts Festival in Osnabruck, Germany, The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Paris Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival, the Anthology Film Archives in NY, and The Dashanzi Arts Festival in Beijing, China.

Montague is currently in New York preparing to film his MFA project, "Maine, AZ." It will be a short, fictional, experimental narrative about a young transgender person dealing with the death of his partner.

He said he learned the experimental aspects of filmmaking at Hampshire College, but has been concentrating on learning the craft of fictional narrative filmmaking since enrolling in the Visual Arts graduate program at UCSD, which is ranked sixth nationally for the multimedia/visual communications specialty by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Montague first became interested in filmmaking in high school. At Hampshire College he began studying and making independent films.

Montague said that he learned a lot from working with the film faculty, such as Jean Pierre Gorin and Babette Mangolte at UCSD. Those professors helped change Montague's perceptions about film.

Gorin and Mangolte were both influenced the French New Wave of cinema and have been recognized as seminal filmmakers.

"Jean Pierre has been wonderful," I really have learned an incredible amount from him," Montague said. He added that working with Mangolte has also been a rewarding experience.

"I've taught for Babette and JP before," Montague said. "And I have learned an incredible amount through teaching. At UCSD, you get to be the mediator between the students and the professors."

"Film has helped me articulate my experiences on a more direct level to a large number of people simultaneously (but on a very personal level)," Montague said. "There's something very powerful that happens when sensory elements in film come together."

The Princess Grace Foundation is a public charity formed after the death of Princess Grace in 1982. It awards grants, scholarships, apprenticeships and fellowships to assist artists with their training. Over the years, more than \$5 million in awards have been given to emerging talent who represent the best and the brightest in their fields.

Media Contact: Christine Clark, (858) 534-7618

