



I Qualify (2018)

2024

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Self-portrait footage, colour, 3 mins

*Shot with an Android phone, vertical aspect ratio of 9:16,
with resolutions of 1080p (1920 x 1080 pixels)*

Research, Reflection, and Reiteration

This critical analysis serves as research, reflection and reiteration of my 2018 video work which I have retitled '*I Qualify*'. Initially produced during my time at the National College of Art and Design while undergoing my studies on my international Erasmus year in Poznań, Poland, at the University of Arts Poznań (UAP), this piece captures a snapshot of the emotional and intellectual journey I undertook in accessing higher education. It seeks to unpack the complexities of navigating an educational landscape marked by both opportunities and systemic barriers, offering a lens through which to examine inclusivity in art education.

Background Information

Inclusive Education Focus

Reflecting on my experience at NCAD, “inclusive education” was more than just an open door. It involved navigating spaces that welcomed diversity, where “inclusivity” had to be actively engaged and sometimes even redefined. Art education became my medium to question and reshape narratives around who belongs in these spaces. During my BA programme, my understanding of inclusion expanded as I met other students whose paths mirrored mine—coming from non-traditional routes, working-class backgrounds, or facing complex social barriers. These connections informed my creative practice, highlighting the importance of spaces that truly embrace varied voices. I wanted to create art that echoed these experiences and demanded the inclusion of voices outside the mainstream.

Pathways and Support Frameworks

My educational path was marked by varied learning experiences as I oscillated on the National Framework for Qualifications. Progressing through PLC courses and stepping-stone qualifications taught me about self-education and the transformative power of persistence. Each



course, qualification, and certificate became a chapter in my journey, each bearing witness to different stages of my development. The transition to a BA wasn't a final destination; it was an

affirmation of resilience, adaptability, and the determination to pursue art. Entering NCAD (National College of Art and Design, Dublin) through its Access Programme was a pivotal step in my academic journey, supported by a range of educational frameworks designed to promote inclusivity for underrepresented students. NCAD Access caters to students from diverse, non-traditional backgrounds, offering resources such as portfolio preparation, student shadowing, and direct community outreach initiatives. These initiatives aim to dismantle barriers to higher education by actively providing support to applicants from backgrounds that might otherwise limit their chances of entry.

This pathway connected me with other national programmes, such as the PATH (Programme for Access to Higher Education) and support grants from SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). Administered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), these programmes play a crucial role in making higher education more accessible to students from underrepresented groups. Specifically, PATH offers a range of access initiatives that foster inclusivity by directly supporting underrepresented students, while SUSI provides grants based on financial need.

Other significant frameworks include the HEAR (Higher Education Access Route) and DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) schemes. The HEAR scheme is designed to support students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, while DARE provides support for those with disabilities, each offering tailored pathways to admission and support throughout university. The resources these schemes provided led to opportunities for funding like the 1916 Bursary, which specifically supports students facing financial hardship due to historical or social inequalities.

Navigating these programmes involved confronting systems that are designed to support yet also scrutinise. Applying for the 1916 Bursary, for instance, meant recounting my personal hardships to justify eligibility—a process that carried an emotional toll. Choosing to submit a series of short videos in response to reapplication questions instead of written answers was both an effort to preserve my energy and a statement on the exhaustion of constantly revisiting personal adversities, both historical and persistent, to meet educational benchmarks.

This performance artwork—an extended video documenting the effort of repeated takes—encapsulates that emotional labour. As the footage progresses, subtle shifts in expression highlight the strain of revisiting past traumas to "qualify" for support. Each segment is both a testament to resilience and a critique of systems requiring ongoing justification from those seeking access. Through this work, I question what it truly means for educational spaces to be accessible and inclusive.



Analysis of Video Work

The video project I am re-releasing, originally shot in Poznań during my International Erasmus year, represents these shifts in my identity. Filmed in an Airbnb while my visiting partner waited, the sequential cuts in the video reflect the cumulative effect of these experiences. For me, reapplying for funding such as the 1916 'Leaders and Learners' Bursary meant recounting past challenges and positing lofty promises of expenditure in order to prove that I qualify. The result formed new evidence of my journey. Each segment of the video mirrors this process—a rhythmic, sometimes exhausting exercise in documenting the demands of proving oneself again and again. Each take and visible moment of depletion is a testament to the effort, resilience, and focus behind my academic journey.

I included the 'bloopers' because they speak volumes in themselves and connect strongly to the film and performance coursework I was engaged in under Izabella Gustowska at UAP. This work was first released as a performance art, self-shot video piece in 2022. A single session, approximately three hours long, was recorded and edited as a performance piece specifically for screen viewing. I Qualify was the sixth of a series of 26 spontaneous performances involving interaction with space, voice, sound, and objects/artworks running through December 2021 and January 2022 in alphabetical order. Many of the works were new, while some were created using found or existing footage, with this piece falling into the latter category. Released during the pandemic, it was initially titled Performance F. The entire project was carried out during my IMMA/DAS (Irish Museum of Modern Art/Dean Art Studio) residency.

Performance Art Perspectives

Much of my artistic practice navigates the intersections of performance and sculpture, drawing on the historical foundations of performance art, notably the "Happenings" initiated by Allan Kaprow. In this contemporary moment, I engage with the self-shot video format, exemplifying how social media platforms encourage a performative identity. This particular work, shot with an Android phone in a 9:16 aspect ratio, reflects this shift, where I become not only the subject and actor but also the director, camera operator, and editor.

This autonomy in creating my work echoes the principles of self-performance prevalent in today's digital culture. While traditional performance art often emphasises live consumption, my self-shot video invites viewers to experience my narrative through a lens steeped in personal experience. The social media context adds a layer of complexity, as it encourages both authenticity and self-exploitation.

In my exploration of endurance in performance, I draw from my experiences studying under Janusz Bałdyga and Marta Bosowska at the UAP in Poznań, where I was part of the School of



Performance and the Intermedia Department. It was in the latter that I first engaged in durational works that probe the limits of physical and emotional boundaries. My project, “Stamina,” involved the dual task of skipping rope while orating revealing the spontaneous verbal articulations that arise from physical exertion. This interplay of physical activity and narrative serves as a microcosm for the struggles and triumphs of my lived experiences, from the pressures of applying for educational bursaries to grappling with societal judgments. “Stamina” has been presented in various forms, including live exhibitions and video installations, further exploring the themes of endurance and engagement.

The endurance theme is further emphasised by my collaboration with John Court, a performance artist whose practice involves the physical force of objects in durational contexts. Through his influence, I have explored repeated actions, themes of humiliation and physical labour. My earlier works, such as the use of stocks for public denunciation, reflect the idea of humiliation and a deep engagement with the dynamics of power and subservience, both imposed on others and self-inflicted.

Additionally, my self-shot application video, which took three hours to film yet resulted in a concise three-minute response, highlights the tension between authenticity and the performative aspects of self-presentation. The ambiguity, severity and frustration contained within each utterance resonates with Bruce Nauman's concept of “clown torture,” where repetitive actions blur the line between sincerity and absurdity, monotony and futility.

Moreover, my background in the entertainment industry, particularly through a self-shot reality TV series featuring six women over six months, informs my artistic approach. This experience allows me to weave elements of performance, duration and narrative into my work.

Echoing the themes of playfulness and spontaneity that my mentor Jef Johnson emphasises in his practice. His focus on shame, humanity, and connection align curiously with my exploration of the physicality of labour, including the notion of sweat, saliva and effort as integral to the artistic process.

As I continue to navigate these themes in my practice, I invite my audience to engage with the complex nature of identity formation within the educational framework, reflecting on how our personal histories and societal constraints shape our narratives.

Artwork Link:

https://youtu.be/_ha3d3Pm23Q?feature=shared