



Joshua Calderon: From Student to Teacher, a Venice Arts Alum story

Joshua Calderon began his creative career journey at Venice Arts, a community-based media arts education center, as a student over 10 years ago. He participated in multiple film classes that he credits for introducing him to the world of film, production, and editing. After completing the Venice Arts program, he enrolled at Santa Monica College (SMC), where he took his passion for film to another level.

When he first joined Venice Arts, he experienced some challenges. Joshua identifies as neurodivergent and because of this, like we all do, he had to identify what learning and educational strategies worked best for him. One of the toughest things for him to learn at the time was editing, something he had to put a lot of work into and practice patience.

“When you are neurodivergent, specifically when you’re on the spectrum, you tend to pick up different skills at different at a different pace - and it all depends on what that skill is. There’s no clear set of what skills can be learned fast and what skills will take time because, for every individual that’s on the spectrum, all of that is figured out through trial and error. For me, editing took longer to figure out and once I did figure out how to edit, it became easier.”

Josh, didn’t self-disclose being neurodivergent at the time because he wanted to be seen as an individual and be recognized for his work and projects.

“When I first started Venice Arts, I didn’t necessarily openly disclose that. Simply because growing up, I always wanted people to know who I was as an individual before opening up to individuals that I’m on the spectrum, because I was afraid of the assumptions that people would make of me if that was the first thing that they learned about me.”

There is a lot that still can be done for the neurodiverse and disabled community when it comes to opportunities, but one message that Josh highlighted was to be prepared for opportunities and let your work speak for itself. He feels strongly that regardless of your situation, you should always put your best foot forward.

“From my own limited experience, I can tell you that once you set a precedent and you put your best foot forward into presenting who you are you just sort of accepted. Sometimes you are better understood, but that is only through being able to present what kind of skill set you have.”

His love and passion for film shone through at the end of the interview when he spoke at great lengths about his dream of becoming a freelance editor for one of the major animation studios. He wants to be a part of the team that creates animation films designed specifically for IMAX screens.

“My ultimate-dream is to see an animated film specifically designed for IMAX screens. Just like how Christopher Nolan loves his movies to be filmed and shot in IMAX, I would love for any animation studio to take up the challenge to see what would happen if you made an animated film for IMAX screens.”

Today Josh works seasonally at Venice Arts as a Teacher’s Assistant for film and photography classes. One of the things he pushes his students to do is to make sure their work is honest and true to them. While helping students at Venice Arts hone their skills, he is also developing his own abilities and building his portfolio in pursuit of his long-term career goals. He has started his own YouTube channel where he is uploading his own personal edits. He hopes his work will soon grab the attention of A24, Paramount, or DreamWorks. He also attributes Paramount to rejuvenating his creativity, largely because of the *Star Trek* franchise. *Star Trek* taught him that there are different ways to tell stories, something he aims to pass on to his students as well.

Josh is an extremely talented, knowledgeable, and passionate young man who I know has a lot to offer to this industry. One day soon, I know we'll see his name in the credits of an animation film on our local IMAX screens.

Josh wanted to leave the neurodiverse community one final message of encouragement as they look for opportunity and employment in entertainment:

“Don't give up, don't let what you are stop you, and in your own unique way, put your best foot forward. As long as you present yourself for who you are more than anything else, then you'll have people that will come to you because you put your best foot forward”

We're excited to highlight an alumnus of Venice Arts, an arts-focused organization based in Los Angeles, CA, whose mission is to ignite, expand, and transform the lives of Los Angeles' low-income youth through photography and film education, and use participatory storytelling practices to amplify the voices of underrepresented communities around the world.