

A SENIOR PROJECT BY SAMUEL SHEEN

WRESTLING MYSELF

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**SPONSOR CAROL BANKERD
SECOND READER WARREN LEHRER**

I AM WRESTLING MYSELF.

You can take that anyway you would like. You might imagine me constantly battling every thought that flows through my mind. Or perhaps you think of me as someone who actually defines wrestling in my actions. Both interpretations are valid and carry some truth, but it might be helpful for us to take a step back.

At the age of eight years old, I would religiously gaze at the television screen as men and woman would dance around in extravagant outfits, engage in over the top drama against one another, and perform magnificent feats that defied the world that I lived in. I was watching wrestling. It wasn't wrestling that took place in a high school gymnasium, but the wrestling that existed within the four-sided, three-rope ring under the brightest lights and surrounded by the most passionate audience in the world. I was in love. I loved the spectacle, the outrageousness, the drama, and the athleticism. To me, wrestling served as an escape from the real world. I began to look forward each week as to what might happen next in this absurd soap opera. Unlike many other children, my love for wrestling never met its demise. It only grew stronger as I got older. I couldn't even fathom not being invested in this art form. I loved wrestling so much that I felt the need to get involved. It was an itch that just had to be scratched. I researched training facilities that would teach one to become a professional wrestler, and at the ripe age of 17-years-old, I traveled long distances on a regular basis to live my dream.

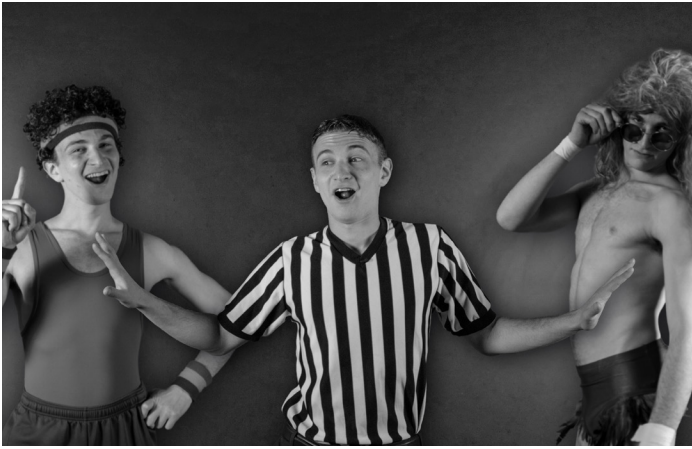
"Standing at 5'8" tall and weighing in at 132lbs"...ok maybe I was in a little over my head. I soon began performing as a referee due to my smaller stature. I was actually quite good at it! I quickly realized, however, that this was not the life I really want-

ed. It was not nearly as glamorous as I once imagined, and it wouldn't allow me to easily pursue my other passions in the arts. Walking away from wrestling was an incredibly challenging decision to make. I still loved it as an outsider, but being on the inside was a very different experience that I was really not cut out for.

I came to the realization that I am wrestling, myself. I am the essence of professional wrestling. As a matter of fact, we all are! We all have these wonderful and sometimes not so wonderful personas that we put on like a mask, a costume, or perhaps even wear as a championship. Some of us strut down the aisle and parade our greatness; others keep their demons bottled up and allow them to come out to play when the time is right. Some of us are not much of a character at all, for we feel weak and helpless, yet we still play an important role in the show. Some of us are strong and heroic and live to help others. Most of us fall somewhere in the middle. That middle character plays a very important role, as they hold back the extreme ends of the spectrum.

In addition to being wrestling, myself; I am also wrestling myself. What a difference a comma can make! It is true, for I sometimes feel an internal turmoil of personas that try to break free from my control. I wouldn't say that my inner feelings are legitimately fighting one another, but they are all performing very differently. Professional wrestling is predetermined. Therefore there is no legitimate competition even when there seems to be one. However, my various alter egos sometimes seem to take over in the appropriate situations. In other words there are different parts of me that I present to different parts of the world I live in. Occasionally I'll feel overly confident, sometimes insecure, sometimes weak, sometimes strong, and sometimes





I'm just me. There is no real winner or loser.

My senior project explores the different ways in which I present myself through the tropes of professional wrestling. Much like wrestling, these variations of presentation are heavily exaggerated and dramatized to give the audience the most interesting and dynamic taste into my life as possible. The medium I am using to introduce these fictional characters is silkscreened posters. These posters are in the vernacular of conventional-broadside-style wrestling and boxing posters. Traditionally, these said posters were not celebrated pieces of design. In fact, they were usually not even done by designers! The posters were considered naïve and perhaps lowbrow. I personally was much more interested in celebrating the positive qualities of the fight posters rather than the negatives. I began to notice the hierarchy and loose grid structure were often quite stunning, and I wanted to bring those well-designed aspects into my work.

I decided to heavily alter the traditional wording and context of the posters. They were no longer promoting a public event or exhibition, but instead referring to something much more intimate and personal. My posters began to turn into quotes that these performers would say about themselves. They served as visual portraits of each character. I felt that it was important to leave room for interpretation, since each character is not really living the life of that character but instead is performing as it. It was also important to me to set the scene in the whimsical world of wrestling and not in the "real world." It didn't seem necessary to talk about the disenchanting qualities of wrestling, but instead refer to the enchanting qualities that made me fall in love with it in the first place.

As for the characters themselves, I did my best to give each of them a metaphorical and/or symbolic element(s) that resonated with the person I am and the way in which I present myself. It was also important to me to make these characters relatable as they refer to the human condition as a whole. In order to make the project truly about me, it was necessary to include one character that played the role of the real me, and that was the referee. I felt a relationship with the referee not only due to my personal experiences as a referee but also because of the role the referee plays in wrestling. The referee is one of the only constant variables in professional wrestling history. Of course, the person who plays the role has changed numerous times, but the purpose of the referee has never drastically changed. The longevity and genuine nature of the referee really resonated with me. The service that is done is also relatable as both the referee and myself are in charge of controlling the most wacky and unbelievable characters.

The photographs were beautifully shot by Lilly Steers. Lilly and I planned personal photo shoots throughout the semester, and I would show up in a different costume each time. Each of these costumes were intentionally representative of wrestling gear and costumes, but more importantly, relevant to what the characters would wear if they existed. The poses were similar. Sometimes they were a nod to wrestling's past and other times they were completely about the character being photographed.

Finally, the posters were organized in a grid-like structure. I firstly handled the typography while keeping the insertion of the photograph in mind. Once I began printing, the color choices were often done on the spot. There were actually many instanc-



es where I regretted color choices so I went back and covered up a particular area and re-printed the graphic in a different color.

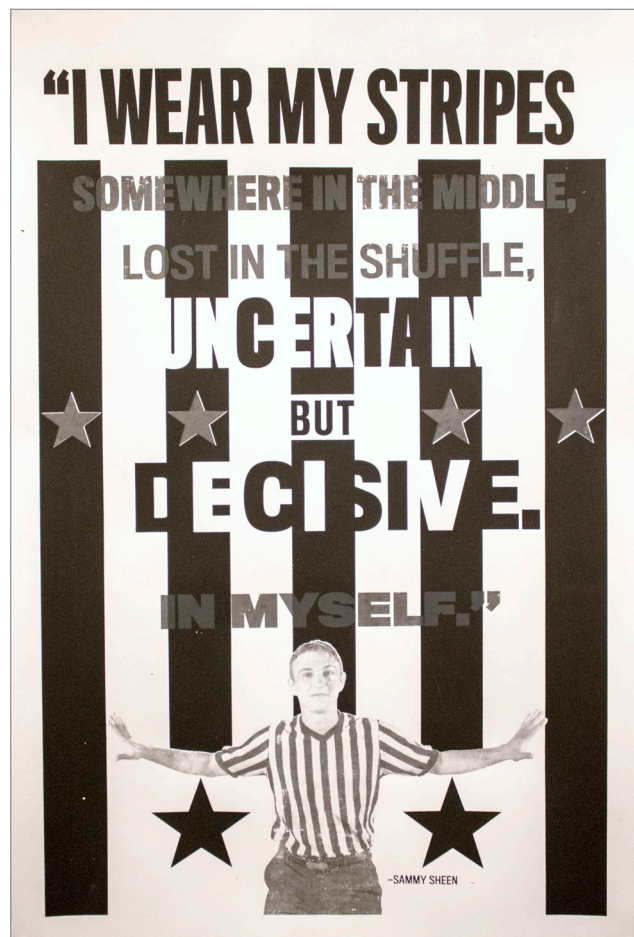
Once all the material was finished, I began to install my work. I was very interested in the presentation and making the exhibition well-designed. It seemed perfectly fitting to introduce the three wrestling ropes to the display underneath the posters.

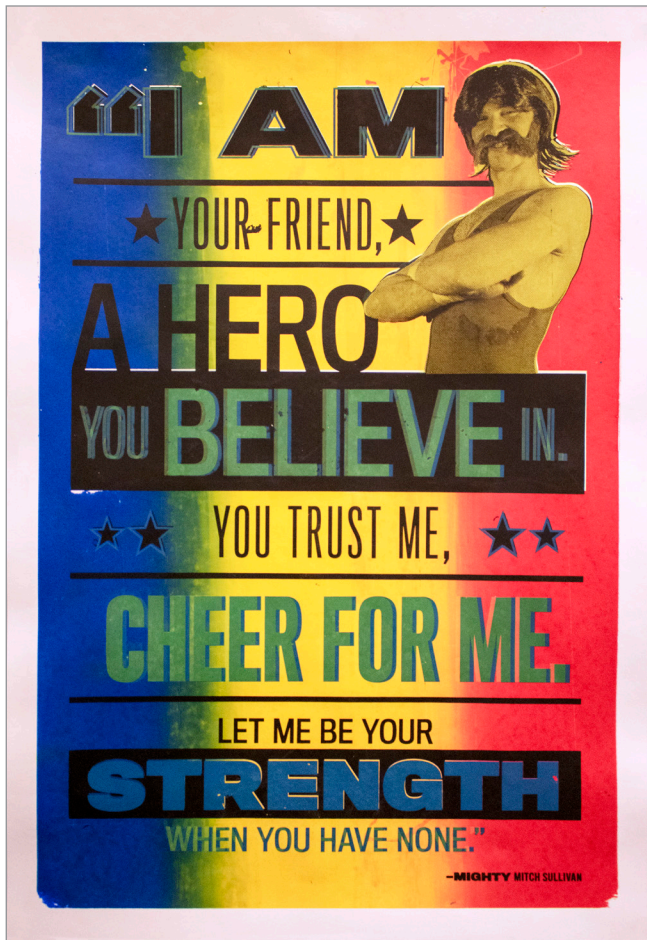
Parallel to the posters was a display case filled with informational event programs and signed & framed 8x10" photos of each character.

To conclude, wrestling was my childhood dream. To me, it represents chance, freedom, and escape. My story didn't go quite as planned. I didn't go on to the big leagues to defy all of the odds and hold a shining championship over my head. I was never able to prove to everyone who doubted me that they were wrong. I can say, however, that I tried. Not only did I try, but I learned about myself. I learned about my abilities, my values, and my passions. Most importantly, I learned that I am wrestling myself.



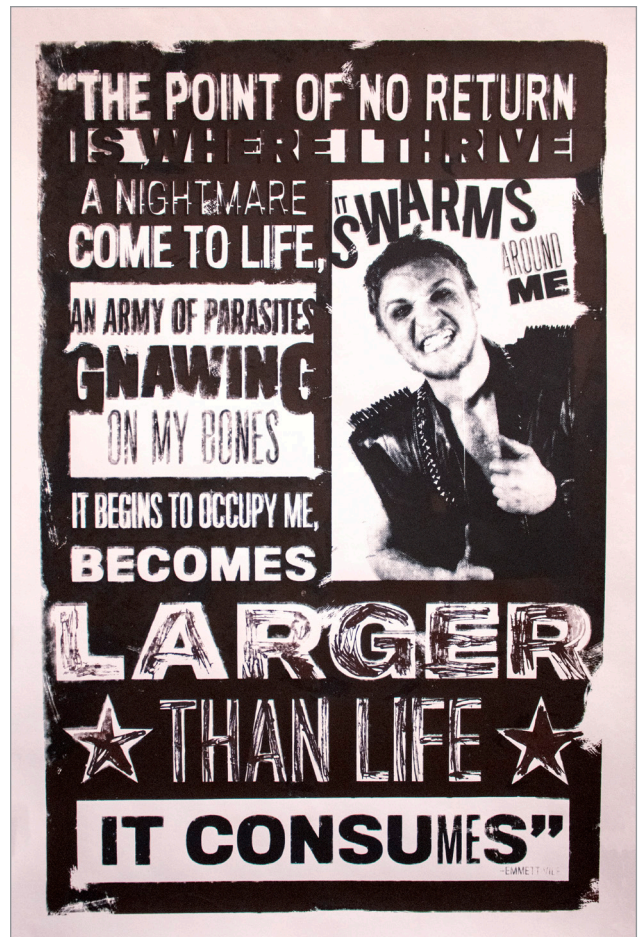
Referee Sammy Sheen Poster





Mighty Mitch Sullivan Poster

Emmett Vile Poster





Lenny D. Luxe Poster



Pippy Smeltz Poster

Display case filled with souvenir programs and signed photos

