

BIRCH WATHEN LENOX STUDENT PROFILE



Melissa Horowitz '22

Melissa Horowitz has an artist's spirit and a deep interest in the work. In her time at Birch Wathen Lenox, the support of the faculty and administration, and her friends, instilled in her the belief that anything is possible.

Current college/university:

Tufts

Academic concentration/major:

Dual degree: Studio Arts and Psychology

Academic/professional plans:

The art world and/or psychology

An Impassioned Artist and A Giving Community Member

ACADEMICS: AN ARTIST FLOURISHES AT BWL

Melissa Horowitz's face lights up a lot when she talks about her time at Birch Wathen Lenox. You get the sense immediately that the school had a profound and positive impact on who she is today. In particular, she loves to talk about her academic life at BWL. Her AP English class was an eye-opening experience, not only for the rigorous writing curriculum ("it definitely prepared me for college writing. I took a really challenging theology class this semester, and I don't think I could have done it without AP English.") but for introducing her to her favorite book, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. That she received a 5 on the AP English exam is a point of extreme pride.

So too is she proud of the advanced independent study she pursued in her senior year at BWL. "Birch really helped me focus on [photography] through classes, and they let me put my own touch on the curriculum." With the guidance of Ms. Kaufman, Melissa embarked on a photography project called "Identity, Gender, and Photography" with a foundation in feminist literature. "We created a curriculum that worked for my interests, which for me, was bridging my interest in art history, photography, and feminism. Her work circulates around feminist artwork as well. The year before, I'd taken an intro to analog photography class, and I really loved it. I wanted to continue the next year, but I didn't just want to take another dark room class. We discussed what the class could consist of, and it was really easy, and played to my strengths and what I like to do. It was one of my favorite things at Birch. It really grew my artwork. I produced a lot of artwork that I'm still proud of and show people today. It really helped grow my thinking."

As far as the college admissions process, Melissa felt seen and held in an otherwise stressful time. "I feel like Birch is really hands-on with the admissions process. No one was left behind." Tufts was her first-choice school for the unique dual degree program she is currently enrolled in, and she credits the tireless work of the faculty — from application particulars to nailing down college essays, and beyond — with helping her get there.

Melissa's extracurricular life at BWL further showcases her passion for the arts. In eighth grade, after being encouraged to do so by Ms. King, she joined the BWL school magazine, *Range*, and just one year later, began a four-year tenure as its editor-in-chief. Melissa relished the opportunity to immerse herself in the work of her peers and help elevate all around her. "Immediately, I knew I needed to be a part of this club. It got passed down to me because I was so pas-



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sionate about it. It was a lovely experience, working with the student body to produce three editions a year. I loved doing layout, I loved looking over people’s work. Having a lot of creative outlets was really helpful for me throughout my high school experience, and I think that would have only been possible at Birch. I had all these opportunities, and the faculty really guided me on what was right for me.”

Leaving on a high note, Melissa was the first student in her memory to read an original work — a poem — at graduation. “Birch really fostered my love for poetry. They knew that I loved poetry, and they asked me to do an original poem at graduation. Which scared me at first. For me, poetry is very vulnerable. But I trusted my teachers; they were just trying to push me. And it was the best poem I’d ever written.”

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GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

In addition to her work as editor-in-chief, Melissa found many ways to give back to her community. As a member of the Student Prefect program, Melissa was able to mentor younger students in a range of areas. She found the Gender and Consent training she received as part of the program to be particularly instructive in her mentorship efforts. “I loved being a peer leader at Birch. There’s something about working with your peers, and teaching them things they might not know, or guiding them through tough situations, especially around gender and consent. Best experience. Having the trained students teaching the younger students was such a lovely idea and a great program.” Melissa hopes to continue her mentorship efforts at Tufts as part of their Writing Fellowship program, which helps fellow students — especially international students — with their essays.

Outside of school, Melissa was and continues to be a Junior Ambassador for Hearts of Gold, which serves women and their children living in transitional housing. Her efforts with Hearts of Gold have been rewarding, and she notes that BWL was especially supportive of them, offering resources as needed. “Birch has always been really supportive of my efforts. They’ve let me raise money, have assemblies. It really helped the community at Hearts of Gold.”

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SOCIAL LIFE: BWL FOSTERS FRIENDSHIP

When thinking about college, Melissa knew she didn’t want to attend a big school. She sees BWL’s small size as a benefit

in myriad ways. “I like knowing everyone and seeing familiar faces every day. Birch is such a tight-knit community. Even if you don’t know someone, I felt comfortable talking to people. I knew everyone past acquaintance. And, I consider some of the teachers my friends, staying after class and just conversating. I know some of them very well. There are so many ways to be friends with people at Birch.” As a matter of fact, Melissa is still in touch with Ms. Kaufman, and sees her during school breaks. Likewise, she points to her friend and fellow student Natalie as a ballast at BWL and beyond. “I feel like if you ask anyone, we were inseparable senior year.”

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THE FUTURE: WITH AND BEYOND ART

Melissa is enrolled in a five-year dual degree BFA and BA/BS program at Tufts. While she is still figuring out her second degree — she is leaning towards psychology or English — her BFA will be in Studio Arts. “I was an artist coming in only with photography, but I did experiment this semester with paper-making, which was really great. In my photo class this semester, I created these really tall — six-foot — pieces. I could only do that with the basis of being able to construct a project, which I learned through [my independent study] with Ms. Kaufman.”

In terms of her professional plans, though she may not have yet honed in on exactly where she wants to go, the shape of her life is coming into focus. “I know I don’t really want to be an artist, as my profession. It helps me ground and express myself, but I was thinking more of a curatorial route or a psychologist route with art therapy. There has to be an art component to whatever I do.”

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IN HER TEACHER’S WORDS

Melissa is the kind of student who makes teaching fun. She likes learning for learning’s sake — she doesn’t balk, for example, when handed college-level reading, or shy away from intellectual or creative challenges. She takes criticism well and engages honestly and unguardedly in open dialogue when her work presents problems — then looks for ways to solve them. She is ambitious, but appreciates that she’s still a kid; and she’s confident where it counts, in that she trusts her curiosity to lead the way.

— Ms. Kaufman, photography teacher