

Al Dahya  
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## Burned Out

Burned out serves as a description of how I sometimes feel as an MIT student. The piece itself is a 15 minute video of wax copies of my fingers slowly melting away into puddles. For this piece I made a plaster mould of my right hand and then poured beeswax into the mould to create replicas of my fingers. In addition to this process I also added two other features to facilitate conveying my message. The first was to string the candle wick down through the back of each finger instead of through the center. The second was to add tiny amounts of clay to the top of certain fingers to impede their lighting.

The choice of wax fingers was to highlight what I consider to be the tool I use for my work as a student. The notion of hands being the driver of work is a notion that has been reinforced time and again in literary, visual, and other works. The most pertinent reference to hands being a tool for work would be the MIT motto “Mens et Manus”, literally translated “mind and hand”. While my mind controls my actions, my work – be it the creation of the candle itself or the typing of this paper – is always carried out by my hands. I wanted to capture this reality and the nature of the fatigue that sets in as the term progresses at MIT. As class work starts to pile up, my ability to work is melted away and I am left hollow and fatigued. The rate of my “burning out” is not constant nor does it all come from the same direction or class. Instead it is unevenly spaced and often furthered by very different activities.

To play out this caricature of myself, I used to film to capture the images I mentioned above. I start my film with a straightforward shot of the wax fingers. This is simply to establish their identity and set the stage for the process that is yet to occur. The lights are dimmed. This corresponds directly with my association between work and night time (I often work until very late at night). Darkness also describes the sense one has when they are overworked – one’s mind becomes dull and it is hard to focus on or appreciate the things around us. After dimming the lights, I start lighting each finger one by one. A different match lights each finger to signify the different activities that can wear me down. The fingers are also not lit simultaneously in order to better describe how my fatigue is a process which is slowly builds over time. As I light each candle, one can note that they do not burn with even intensity – again calling up the various degrees my different commitments affect me. Also noticeable is that not all candles light on the first try. I made the candle in this form in order to show the continuous pressure one faces from work, even if they are able to handle it for a period of time.

Sooner or later, everyone can be worn down. This notion, I hope, can be seen in the persistent abuse of fire against the wax fingers. While the fingers initially hold shape, slowly they give way. As the wick burns down the back of the candles, they seem to hollow out, leaving but a shell of their former selves. The process goes on, slowly but inexorably until there is little or nothing left. In the end, the camera surveys for the final time the damage that was done by the fire that left the fingers all burned out.