

Monika Overholt & her Artwork Speak Out on the Mental Healthcare System

Originally from Holland, MI, 24-year-old Monika Overholt is an artist who is glad to be at MTSU where she is creating inspiring artworks reflective of her experiences with mental health.

Art and Design (AAD): Hello Monika, thanks for your time. Tell me a bit about yourself and what brings you here to study art.

Monika: I would describe myself as an eccentric, eclectic collector and savant for the strange and unusual. I moved to Murfreesboro during high school, and after I graduated, I began studying computer science because of my family's insistence. Through unforeseen personal circumstances, I was forced to take a three year break from school; at that time, I didn't really feel like I had a purpose. But once I decided to go back to school on my own terms, I gained my purpose back, and things are getting better all the time. MTSU was where I was meant to be.

AAD: Well, we're happy you're here! What inspires your work?

Monika: My work concepts include mental health/suicidal ideation/psychosis, exploring one's own identity (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.), and trauma recovery. I'm not good with words, so speaking through images is the best way I feel I can communicate. I couldn't imagine doing anything else. I never thought I would be here this long, so this is me trying to relearn how to live my life.

I want to make pieces that comfort others and can be related to on any level, whether perceived or not. I want to help people cope in a world that struggles with the mentally ill: a world that doesn't like us to exist and is continually trying to kill us. If you know, you know.

AAD: I think I understand what you mean, but do you mind to elaborate a bit more?

Monika: From my own mental health experience, it feels like the American Healthcare and related emergency services are a system with a cold, uncaring approach to a growing societal crisis. For example, I'll describe an event that forever changed my outlook on reaching out for help:

At the height of my initial mental health decline, I was a suicidal 16-year-old. My best friend at the time called 911 on me. Police officers arrived and behaved more aggressively in dealing with me, in hindsight, than I now deem appropriate. I was handcuffed and placed in the back of a squad car, as if I was guilty of some sort of crime, to be taken to the hospital for an evaluation. Later that day, I was sent back home because my insurance would not cover my hospital visit. Being only 16 with 7 years of experience dealing with hospitals, doctors, and therapists, it was the farthest thing from what I expected from law enforcement!

AAD: Wow, that sounds like it had a significant impact on you and your creative expressions. How would you like to see the system changed in the future?

Monika: I believe that the system being screwed up has its roots in oppression, bias, neglect, and indifference. Addressing and reforming our healthcare system's shortcomings would be the first step towards action to reform the injustices and lack of equity in treatment. It feels to me there is an indifference; that the healthcare industry would rather those struggling with more pronounced mental conditions just go away. In our society, this has led to a proliferation of the mentally ill homeless population.

On the other hand, I wholeheartedly believe that many of our first responders and law enforcement officials do not have adequate training or mentality to de-escalate their encounters with mentally ill patients. We've seen the results time and again. Many see it as a job and not like they are actually dealing with peoples' lives.

If people can't properly take care of themselves, they can't do much to fight the system or create a better solution for themselves, so it is up to us to be the change for the better.

AAD: How touching and inspiring. Thank you for sharing your story with us, Monika!

Monika: Thank you for having me.