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My Spring 2023 Honors Thesis

By

Callie Madison Honaker

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the  
Fine & Performing Arts Scholars Program  
Honors College  
East Tennessee State University  
and the  
Honors-in Studio Art Program  
College of Art and Design  
East Tennessee State University

05/05/23

*Callie M. Honaker*

Date

Callie M. Honaker

05/06/23



Date

John W. Hilton

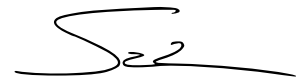
05/07/23



Date

Dr. Andrew Scott Ross

05/06/23



Date

Dr. Scott Contreras-Koterbay

## Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank my mom, Denise Honaker, and dad, Gary Honaker for their continuous love and support throughout both my thesis and my college experience. You are the reason for me being able to keep my sanity throughout the growing stress of each semester leading to graduation. I love you so much.

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Last, but definitely not least, I want to thank my partner, William Logan Childress, for not only being by my side every step of the way since we met, but also helping me to set up my thesis show. You have assured me every chance that you have gotten that I am doing great, and I love you very much.

## Table of Contents

Title Page	.....	1
Acknowledgements	.....	2
Table of Contents	.....	3
Abstract	.....	4-5
Introduction	.....	6-7
Thesis	.....	7-10
Conclusion	.....	11-12
Illustrations	.....	13-15
Bibliography	.....	16



## Abstract

For my thesis project, I displayed fifteen printed photographs of self-portraits that I have made outside of class. In these self-portraits, I have applied special effects makeup to my face to create different portrayals of myself. These range from more abstracted makeup to characters. The majority of these makeups are from the chest up and created with face paint and self-made prosthetics. In this imagery, I have also chosen accessories and the background to coincide with the makeup and the mood that I am conveying. Minor adjustments have been made digitally in order to enhance how the image comes across. For example, I have upped the contrast and dimmed the exposure, etc. I have taken most of my own photographs on my phone or Canon Rebel Xi camera while there are a few that a family member has taken for me. I printed these portraits at a larger than life scale and I chose to display them at a place that has become close to home, *O'mainnin's Pub and Grill*. This pub is where I held my show. My art was displayed in the casual environment with loud music and dim colorful lights. The exhibit stayed up for three days and was available to the public. Alongside my photographs, I also chose a handful of traditional hand-drawn classwork to display as well. This work is very similar in theme and compliments the self-portraits. Below are images of the show!

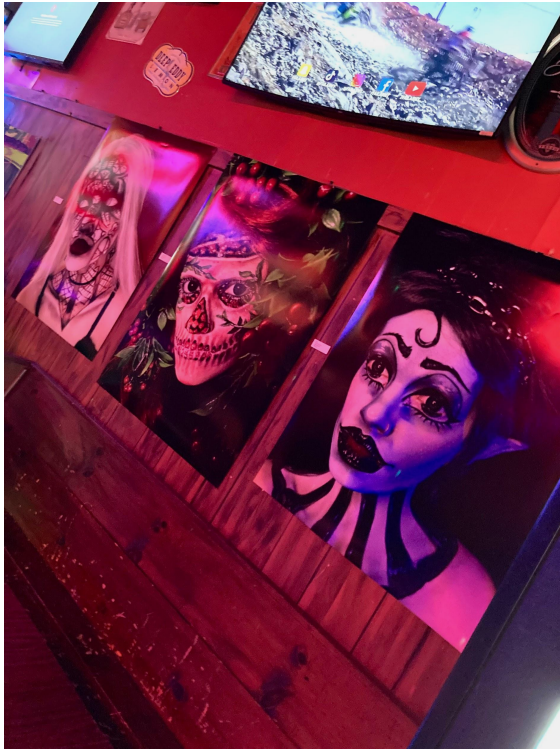


Figure 1

*My show displayed in O'mainnin's Pub & Grill*

## Introduction

For four years now, I have been trying to find myself in my artwork. I have, I haven't, and I have lost myself a few times too. College, especially growing more towards graduation, has been much like an art bootcamp for me. While some of it is a learning process and some of it isn't, it is a test and it is extremely draining. Do you keep pushing through, or do you get trampled by those late night thoughts that have a tendency to pick your brain for the worst? That is the test. Clearly, I am still here, and I feel a lot like a survivor who is clinging to the safety that is graduation. The ups and downs are inevitable, and the difficult journey is reflected in my art. These pieces are very much a documentation of my emotions and turmoil throughout each semester as well as a mental health battle to the very end. While I write this still in the midst of struggle, I want to look back on the works presented as stepping stones to a brighter, more successful future. However, I also want to be transparent and truthful because a lot of this work represents the darker mentality that I have worked so hard to beat. It is impossible for me to overlook, so I want my audience to understand too.

Even before college life, art has always been my form of communication. I am a very emotionally driven person and my art is representative of that because emotions can be very difficult to vocalize. Although, for some reason, throwing them at a canvas is easy for me. Many times in the past, when I have been able to vocalize how I'm feeling, I have been ignored, run over, or even abused for showing vulnerability. For that, I have come to associate having human emotion with being weak and exposed. It is subconscious thinking most of the time, but having analyzed it now, I think that is why I gravitate toward graphic expressive work. It draws people in and makes them listen to you. It makes me feel powerful, even if I like to wear my heart on my sleeve.

When the idea of my honors thesis was first introduced around freshman year, I was definitely stumped on what kind of work would be the perfect embodiment of me as an artist. Of course, I wanted it to be perfect and the summary of my best work through my four years in college. However, it has become more like a documentary of different college experiences embodied in a timeline of work.

Each event that happened, every disagreement, every dip of depression– the emotional weight would build up until it was relieved through a personal project. The portraits in my show are what became of that. They were my emotions during the time that I made them. Quite literally, they were my emotions worn on my sleeve– or on my face in this case. Due to this, it is really hard for me to recall the entirety of why I made certain pieces. I remember certain events that were tied to some of them, but not all. Sometimes, they start out as concepts such as



*Figure 2*

“Strawberry Clown” (*Fig.2*). This was originally for a small contest run by a haunt up North. I had free reign on a clown makeup of my choosing, so I started sketching ideas for this piece. It went through a few altercations before it became what it is now. For instance, the original fruit I was interested in crossing a clown with was a pomegranate, but I thought that idea could be conveyed in a lot more complex makeup, so I saved it for my later on piece “Pomegranate” (*Fig.3*).

There are also a lot of pieces that have been strictly intuitive and off the top of my head. While both types have an emotional connection with me, the unplanned are the most raw when it comes to expressing my mood because they have to come



from what I'm feeling at that moment. These are the majority of what I do and prefer to do. It allows me to have a direct emotional outlet which is healthy. "Pomegranate" is actually one of



those pieces. While I had known that I wanted to do a piece based off of this fruit, this idea had not been thought out until I sat down in my makeup chair. It was then that I decided that I wanted to go back to my roots with one of the first ever makeups that I had done as a kid, a skull. This is what became of a pomegranate mixed with a skull (*Fig.3*) It developed as I worked. I decided that just the red color scheme wasn't enough to make this mesh of two simple things pop. I happened to look at my dresser and see the fake

*Figure 3*

ball-like plants that are pictured sticking out of my

hair. The red orbs looked like the bits of pomegranate, and the green would make a nice complementary color scheme in which I painted into the makeup as well. It was a match, and entirely pulled from my head in the moment.

Most of the time, the materials used are even on the spot. I like to raid the garage and my craft stock for objects that might give me inspiration to create a look. Either that, or I will keep in mind objects that I have seen before around the house. "Heart Sippin'" (*Fig.4*) is an example of that. The concept was created ahead of time with a certain material in mind. My mom had given me a few old tubes from her CPAP machine, and they reminded me a lot of the texture on heart arteries which I was familiar with from a recent commission where I drew a realistic heart for an album cover. With this in mind, I

made my accessory, one of the rare times that I actually created part of a piece ahead of time (which I would like to do more.) It was an intuitive makeup, but more controlled than starting from scratch on the same day.



*Figure 4*

Truthfully, I had not been thinking about my thesis when I was creating these. Each of these was made outside of classes and from the span of sophomore to senior year. I had not really been thinking about my thesis until the Fall 2022 semester which was probably beneficial for me. Thinking about art as an assignment has a tendency to cause me to overthink and ultimately not be as connected with the artwork. All of these works genuinely sparked enjoyment for me in creating them, even if I did criticize every single one of them after they were complete. I'm a perfectionist at heart.

I was originally planning on doing a thesis based around drawing and character design, but I think that the makeups are stronger, especially considering it is not just a drawing of a person, but the artist themselves. It took me a while before realizing that. There was so much talk around the thesis that I thought that I had to come up with an entirely new body of work within the span of a semester. I am glad that I didn't rush to get new work done because the works that I chose do a much better job of showing the timeline of college. They are more meaningful in that sense, especially to see them all hung up on the wall next to each other.

This is part of why I chose to get them printed so big, this and with the suggestion from my advisor. They are much like cinematic scenes from a movie, and I wanted to display them big like movie posters. There is a sort of prestige in the portraits this way. It requires those viewing them to get closer, to see the details, and to view them in a godlier light than they would at life size. The impact is less significant if they are looking at something smaller or the same size as them. The large size definitely has proven to grab attention much faster than something small too. I got to sit back and watch passersby stop to take a look at my exhibit after first setting it up. Even people in the cars passing the bar would turn heads. It is a faster way of getting to subject matter across which is initially what pulls people in.

## Conclusion

I am really proud of the work that I have accomplished this semester, of course despite how critical I am of myself. This Spring has been my busiest semester on top of creating my thesis. It has pushed me to the brink and back mentally and physically which is why I say college has been like a bootcamp. As of right now, I am just trying to keep my head above water and continue surviving until graduation. Having said that, I think that this having been the lowest low I have felt throughout my life in college, the organization and way that I describe my work is at the most passionate it can be. It is the most raw and most vulnerable that it can be. That is important for me. This kind of vulnerability displays the emotional growth that I have had through the creation of each of these art pieces, all leading up to completion of my thesis, and the conclusion of my college semesters. I want to share that with people without the fear that I am weak or that I will be ignored. Seeing the gathering of all of these portraits has really solidified that sharing these emotions with people through my artwork is powerful, and that I am powerful too.

I chose to display my work at *O'mainnin's Pub & Grill* because it is a place that I have repeatedly found comfort in throughout my last two stressful semesters. Personally, I find that museums can be tense and flat out uncomfortable to be in, so I wanted to do something non-traditional such as displaying my exhibit at a bar like this one. I chose to leave my art up during the least busy time of the week in order to protect it to the best of my ability. The show was up from Monday to Thursday. It provided a more relaxed environment where people were not forced to confront the art, rather find their way to it on their own time. It was also more dimly lit than your typical exhibition. Loud music from every genre played in the background, and the colored lights faded in and out. All of this added to the casual aura that I was going for,



not to mention the mood was constantly changing from every light and song change. It allowed viewers to see my pieces in, quite literally, different lights. It allowed me to do the same. Below, in addition to the figures above, are the portraits from my honors thesis exhibit.



*Figure 5*  
*Images displayed at O'mainnin's Pub & Grill for the Honors Thesis Exhibit.*



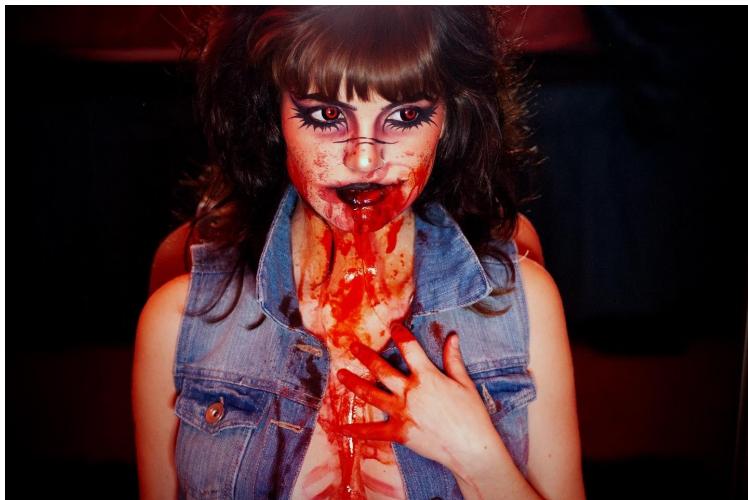


Figure 6





*Figure 7  
Images displayed at O'mainnin's Pub & Grill for the Honors Thesis Exhibit.*

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