In Bad Taste: A student’s experiences shared in art

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A&E Editor

Eds: Story includes vulgarity.

One Western Michigan University art student saw the realities of prejudgment when a controversial piece within her senior art exhibition, In Bad Taste, was vandalized for being offensive.

The artist, Kate Kolean, 22, pulled inspiration from her sexual experiences to create her senior exhibition thesis for Lee Hon­or College through the Froctic School of Art. Kolean jokingly admitted the idea for her thesis was sparked over cocktails.

“These are all true events about me, which you know may have been made off of margarita night, but I fine-tuned everything,” Kolean said.

A Facebook statement posted on Senior BA Exhibition: In Bad Taste page by Kolean explained how her art will be presented. “Instead of being presented by a female body I am presenting my journey within a male pseudo-identity.” Kolean wrote.

However, Kolean’s exhibition was cut early due to safety issues along with student concerns.

“I was informed I have to take it down Friday after my reception because of prospective students and worry about the safety of the space,” Kolean said. “I also wasn’t allowed to have the main doors open and was told to cover the windows to not offend anyone.”

Her work is displayed in a humorous manner, but each piece has its unique backstory with a deeper message.

My favorite piece, Listening to Your Head, was a ceramic penis with headphones placed on it.

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Student leadership in WSA

Kate Kolean with President Dunn, at “In Bad Taste”
While humorous, the piece was skillfully crafted and was detail oriented.

WMU junior Carla Zorrilla, 20, studying graphic design, wasn’t a fan of Kolean’s artwork, but believed she has the right to express herself.

“I personally didn’t enjoy it very much. I feel that this type of art just tries too hard to make a statement, and I feel like there are better ways,” Zorrilla said. “There have been artists that have tried to do this before, like [Marcel] Duchamp, who she mentions in her artist statement. People like Duchamp have done it because no else had done it before them. They were the first people to present artwork that looked like that.”

The vandalized piece, “Coming Undone”, featured a penis made out of cigarette buds ejaculating on her transcripts and a photo of WMU President John Dunn. The vandal cut a part of Dunn’s face so that it was no longer identifiable.

Kolean explained she chose this particular medium because “you don’t know whose lips have been on it.” The piece was shocking, but after it was explained I was able to see the deeper meaning. The cigarette buds represent addiction and how WMU is a positive addiction. She used a photo of Dunn because he is the highest form of representing WMU.

On her Facebook page, Kolean wrote a message for the vandal, saying if the destruction continued she would keep adding Dunn’s photo, but each time making it larger.

What was most astonishing about the exhibition was the personal experiences that inspired the work. When looking over her pieces, I did not instinctively judge Kolean for her past and openness, but rather thought about the process of making art out of memories.

One particular positive memory came from Freedom of Choice, which was displaced in a window with blinds covering it which allowed viewers to look at their discretion.

Dunn, who was present at 

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the art exhibition, commended Kolean for her courageousness.

“Obviously, the college of Fine Arts and particularly the art programs have just outstanding students,” Dunn said. “It’s very impressive to me to see Kate and her presentation and her openness about a topic that is very difficult for most people to talk about sexuality and she kind of puts it all out there. Probably for some people that might be a little bit offensive, but I think it’s very instructive and educational.”

Dunn and his wife, Linda both believe Kolean was voicing her past experiences, from losing her virginity to being in an abusive relationship, in a confident manner.

“It’s brave, it’s honest, it’s raw, but that’s her story, and she’s entitled to tell it,” Linda Dunn said.

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